

Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena  
Philosophische Fakultät  
Institut für Kaukasiologie

**Narratives of a Neighborhood in Old Tbilisi**

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Joseph Sparsbrod  
geboren am 30.09.1984  
in Lutherstadt Wittenberg

Erstgutachter: PD Dr. Florian Mühlfried  
Zweitgutachter: Prof. Dr. Kevin Tuite

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## German Conclusion

In der vorliegenden Arbeit zeige ich, welche Narrative über das Tifliser Altstadtviertel Kharpukhi unter seinen BewohnerInnen verbreitet sind und in welchem Zusammenhang sie zu öffentlich zugänglichen Diskursen der letzten 60 Jahre stehen. Ich analysiere eine Vielzahl solcher Diskurse und setze sie in Beziehung zu den Geschichten der BewohnerInnen Kharpukhis, insbesondere mit der einer georgischen Frau, die in dem Viertel seit etwa 60 Jahren lebt. Öffentliche Diskurse verstehe ich als „narrative tools“ an die sich die eigenen Erinnerungen anlehnen, in größere Zusammenhänge eingepasst und der eigenen Gruppe verständlich werden.

Beginnend mit der Analyse der Erzählungen über die „typischen“ Tifliser Balkone, zeige ich, dass sie zu einem kulturellen Mythos, oder, im Anschluss an Svetlana Boym, einem „common place“ wurden, dem eine Vielzahl von Bedeutungen zugeschrieben wurde. Ein anderer „common place“ ist Alt-Tiflis selbst. Ich zeige, dass dieses Konzept von Joseph Grischaschwili eingeführt und von den Behörden in der frühen Sowjetzeit übernommen wurde, um als Kontrastbild zur sozialistischen Stadt zu dienen. Nach dem 2. Weltkrieg wurde die Altstadt ideologisch aufgewertet und repräsentierte jetzt die georgische Kultur. Symbolisiert wurde dieses neue Selbstverständnis durch die Häuser mit ihren Balkonen. Seit dieser Zeit liegt der Fokus auf dem Schutz des nationalen, kulturellen und gebauten Erbes in der Stadt sowie in Georgien allgemein. Das zeigte sich unter anderem auch in den baulichen Veränderungen, die mit der neuen offiziellen Darstellung der Stadt einher gingen. Hauptakteur in dieser Bedeutungsverschiebung war die georgische „Intelligentsia“.

Der Einfluss dieser ideologischen Aufwertung der Altstadt auf die Erzählungen ihrer BewohnerInnen ist begrenzt, da Alt-Tiflis und die Balkone vor allem Orte sind, wo das tägliche Leben stattfindet. Die Geschichten der BewohnerInnen sind eher von ihrer sozialen Situation beeinflusst. Die Lebensbedingungen in den „typischen“ Alstadthäusern mit ihren Balkonen, in denen es manchmal nicht einmal ein Bad oder eine Heizung gibt, sind viel häufiger Gegenstand der Erzählungen. Dennoch sind sich die BewohnerInnen des Altstadtviertels Kharpukhi bewusst, dass sie im „authentischen“ Teil der georgischen Hauptstadt wohnen. Das wird von Seiten der EinwohnerInnen häufig mit dem Bezug zu Vertretern der Elite untermauert. So stehen die Bilder der Malerin Elene Akhvlediani für das authentische Alt-Tiflis, während die Renovierungen und der Bau von Häusern im alten Stil sowie die modernen Bauten für ein nicht authentisches Tiflis stehen. Letztere seien „Eindringlinge“ in das auf eine lange Geschichte zurückblickende Georgien, sie seien amerikanisch und somit geschichtslos, da die USA ein neu entstandenes Land seien, so die Erzählung der georgischen BewohnerInnen Kharpukhis.

Der Diskurs über das Eindringen eines „nicht authentischen“ Elements in die Stadtlandschaft setzt sich in der Wahrnehmung der eigenen Nachbarn fort. Die aserischen NachbarInnen seien eigentlich „Tataren“ und hätten keine Heimat. Aserbajdschan sei ein neugegründetes Land, analog zu Amerika. Diese ausgrenzende Sichtweise hat ihren Ursprung in der Annahme einer in verschiedene präexistente Ethnien unterteilten Menschheit (eine Sichtweise die u.a. Stalin propagierte). Diese Vorstellung kulminierte in den 1950er Jahren in der Deportation der iranischen NachbarInnen, die nicht zum „Sowjetvolk“ gehörten; erst recht nicht nachdem Ende der 1940er Jahre alle Versuche gescheitert waren, den Iran oder zumindest Teile davon unter den Einfluss der Sowjetunion zu bringen.

Dieser ausgrenzende Diskurs, der von den georgischen BewohnerInnen des Viertels gegenüber ihren nicht-georgischen NachbarInnen gepflegt wird, ist für den Umgang der Menschen im Quartier überraschend unbedeutend: hier dominiert eine Praxis die als indifferent gegenüber religiösen und ethnischen Unterschieden beschrieben werden kann. Das zeigt sich unter anderem auf dem muslimischen Friedhof, wo teilweise Christen und Muslime gemeinsam begraben liegen, die Inschriften auf den Grabsteinen auf verschiedene nationale und ethnische Identitäten hinweisen (georgische, kyrillische, lateinische und arabische Schrift sind teilweise auf ein und demselben Grabstein zu finden) und georgisch orthodoxe sowie muslimische Traditionen nebeneinander bestehen.

Generell sind die Erzählungen der BewohnerInnen von deren alltäglichen Erfahrungen und ihrer sozialen Situation geprägt und knüpfen an die Diskurse an, die die eigene Person oder Gruppe aufwerten. Auch wenn dies eher unbewusst geschieht, sind es gerade diese Geschichten, die für das Leben in der Altstadt und die Wahrnehmung von Veränderungen dort charakteristisch sind. Darum muss jede weitere Untersuchung zum Leben in der Altstadt diese Erzählungen mit einbeziehen.

## 1 Introduction

“Old Tbilisi was more nice, more different on Elene Akhvlediani's pictures. Now more is destroyed and built, very much superfluity was added [...] [dzveli tbilisi upro lamazi, upro skhvanairi iq'o elene akhvledianis dakhat'uli. akhla mere upro daangries da ashenes, dzalian bevri zedmet'oba miamat'es],”<sup>1</sup>

stated a Georgian lady, who lives in the old center of Tbilisi to illustrate the change of the cityscape of the Georgian capital. She referred to the paintings of the famous “Georgian Folk Painter” Elene Akhvlediani (1898–1975), who painted especially motifs of Old Tbilisi [dzveli tbilisi]. Throughout my work I will show which narratives about this South Caucasian city are spread among the neighbors and what has influenced them. This provides information about the resident's perception of their habitat and its transformation. And it refers to them an active role in shaping their neighborhood instead of treating them as supplements which have nothing to contribute to their environment.

The core of my research is the narrative of my main informant, a 72 year old Georgian lady who spent almost all of her life in her house on Mirza Shapi Street. I will present her neighborhood as she presented it to me, sitting on the balcony and telling stories about everyday life, the buildings and the neighbors. From my host's point of view (in a double sense), I will analyze the narratives of a resident of an Old Tbilisian, multi-ethnic neighborhood, in its political, historical and sociocultural context.

The woman was born in 1943 and lives almost 60 years in one of the last two buildings in the 2008 almost entirely razed Mirza Shapi Street in Old Tbilisi. Her father and her brother died when she was a child. She is unmarried and lived together with her mother in two rooms and shared a balcony with other (mostly Azeri)<sup>2</sup> neighbors. Today she shares the flat with two relatives. She worked in an electricity company until the collapse of the Soviet Union. She did never belong to the Georgian

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1 Interview 15211, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2013.

2 I call people Azeri when I refer to their ethnicity and Azerbaijani when I refer to their citizenship. In Georgian language this distinction is not possible since the word “azerbajaneli” means Azeri and Azerbaijani as well, in my opinion people make no difference between Azerbaijani citizenship and Azeri ethnicity, that is why I translate “azerbajaneli” with Azerbaijani. In general I use my informant's self designations, to stress (1) that official naming of groups does not correspond to the name used by the group members themselves or their neighbors and (2) that the “real” ethnic belonging of people remained unclear for me during my research.

As Thomas De Waal points it: “Before the twentieth century, outsiders tended to call Azerbaijanis either 'Shirvanis' (from around Baku and Shemakha), 'Caucasian Tatars', 'Turks', or just 'Muslims.' Their own self-identification was flexible.”

See, Thomas De Waal: *The Caucasus. An Introduction*, Oxford 2010, p. 27.

This can be found also in the censuses for Georgia: In 1897 it shows only language groups. Referring to this data different “Turkish-Tatar” dialects (among others also the “Tatar” dialect) are registered in Tbilisi. Azerbaijanis are not mentioned – they might be included into the “Tatar” group. The census of 1939 shows nationalities, the name Azerbaijani and “Tatar” are registered separately. Further censuses are for the whole Georgian SSR, here from 1970 on the category “Tatar” disappears (except of “Crimean Tatars”), see

[http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/emp\\_lan\\_97\\_uezd.php?reg=522](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/emp_lan_97_uezd.php?reg=522), 24<sup>th</sup> March 2014;

[http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/ussr\\_nac\\_39\\_ra.php?reg=771](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/ussr_nac_39_ra.php?reg=771), 24<sup>th</sup> March 2014;

[http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_70.php?reg=6](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_70.php?reg=6), 24<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

intellectual or economic elite. I met her in October 2013, when I, together with a colleague, was looking for interviewees for a seminar. We wanted to know why exactly Mirza Shapi Street was destroyed. We climbed up a staircase and knocked on a small door in a building full of nooks and crannies. The lady appeared and invited us into her flat next door and answered our questions eagerly. We were talking about different topics. She showed me the neighborhood and important sites in the city and she introduced me to her neighbors and friends. I learned a lot about their perception of their neighborhood, the city and the country.

The street in which the Georgian lady lives, is located in the very center of Tbilisi, at the sulfur baths, hillside of Tabor Mountain. Until fall 2008 the main type of dwelling in her street along the hillside were terrace houses. Most of them were destroyed to make place for new residential and commercial buildings. This neighborhood between the sulfur bathes and Ortachala is called Kharpukhi (Armenian for cold), Seydabad (after the Seyed people from Iran which settled there) or Abanotubani (Georgian for bath-district). I use the name Kharpukhi, because it is spread on old city maps and refers exactly to the area I am dealing with, while the other names include also today's Gorgasali Square and its surrounding. The neighborhood was (and still is) considered to be poor, the housing stock to be in bad conditions and the neighbors mostly Azeri and therefore Muslim people.<sup>3</sup> In fact, it is a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional site in Tbilisi. Georgians, Azeris, Iranians, Armenians, Jews, Yezidis, Germans, Ukrainians and some other groups (it is not always clear to which group people belong) lived and most of them are still living here. Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Muslim cemetery was located at the end of Mirza Shapi Street. Nowadays this graveyard is included into the botanical garden. In Grishashvili Street, the main street of the neighborhood, was the Armenian holy Sarkis Church which was destroyed in the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> Nearby is the Mirzoeva Bath which is still working, and at the end of this street was the Georgian cemetery, where today is a school. As often in Soviet times, city planning focused on the building of new socialist neighborhoods or even whole cities. The elites and Soviet intelligentsia<sup>5</sup> in Tbilisi preferred

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3 Maia Mania: Tbilisi Architectural Heritage to be Preserved, in: Goethe Institute (ed.), Gentle Urban Regeneration and the Civil Society Symposium at the Goethe-Institut Georgien on 9 June, 2009 Symposium Proceedings and Exhibition Materials, Tbilisi 2010, pp. 6-15, p. 11.

Know Your City's Past. Kharpukhi [itsode sheni kalakis ts'arsuli. kharpukhi ], in: tbilisi 101 (29<sup>th</sup> April 1969).

4 Aleksandre Elisashvili: How Tbilisi Changed [rogor sheitsvala tbilisi], Tbilisi 2013, p. 15.

5 In this paper I use the term intelligentsia more general to refer to the cultural, scientific and educated elite of the society. This group is far from homogeneous, neither in economical nor cultural realms. For this reason I also use specific terms and speak of "red intelligentsia" or "Soviet intelligentsia" to refer to the elite in Soviet times. They were and still are engaged in "preserving" the national (mainly immaterial) heritage. I speak of "Georgian intelligentsia" if I refer to post-socialist Georgia. For the western oriented elite the term "grant eaters" is spread, because they have access to grants from western NGOs or other Institutions. They are often engaged in (mainly material) heritage protection as well (that is why I call them "heritage protectors") but they place their statements within in a western discourse (they speak western languages, and use western concepts of science), they as well as their predecessors were part of the Soviet elite but also of the national opposition, this makes it difficult to make a clear distinction between the "red" and western oriented intelligentsia.

For this two groups and their perception of national culture, see Florian Mühlfried: Postsowjetische Feiern. Das Georgische Bankett im Wandel, Stuttgart 2006, pp. 136f.

For Tbilisi in particular see,

prestigious neighborhoods like Vera or Vake.<sup>6</sup> The infrastructure in the old town was neglected. That is the reason why this area faced less restructuring programs in this time (except the building of a balneology clinic and the construction of some new houses).

My setting consists of a multitude of different languages and narratives and Svetlana Boym claims that “they never point to one single, straightforward script of events.”<sup>7</sup> It is interesting how such narratives and languages are used by the Kharpukhi dwellers. This will provide an alternative view on what Boym calls “cultural myths”.<sup>8</sup> Similar to the demand of Mikhail Bakhtin for the analysis of verbal arts, not to ignore the “discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations and epochs”,<sup>9</sup> the diversity of discourses must be recognized. Not “one single language and a single authorial individuality expressing itself directly”<sup>10</sup> has to be analyzed, but the variety of discourses. Since such a multitude of different languages and narratives are spread in Tbilisi, one has to consider the mutual relations of the narratives analyzed in this paper because “the national imagination, [...] did not always correspond to actual everyday practices and people's preoccupations.”<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, one can find such myths in people's narratives which are in a mutual relationship with their social situation (it is the economic base), their biography and their memories. They are included in the narratives to organize their memory. Elene Sideri claims that material culture become part of peoples biographies,<sup>12</sup> this includes also houses or whole neighborhoods, this is places. Such narratives emerge from the socio-cultural environment in the past and present. The way a story is told tells us much more about the perception of this environment than “objective facts”. Not only the discursive environment, but also the characteristic of memory from which narratives derive has to be taken into account.

James Wertsch shows three characteristics of memories:<sup>13</sup> (1) People use “narrative tools”, which means that they refer to existing stories, which are available for their audience. Boym introduces the concept of “common place” which includes “the multiple historical significations and poetic allusion of the word, from public architecture to topography of memory,” and “commonplace” as “the modern derogative use of the term in reference to a worn-out banality, or cliché.” Both

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Paul Manning: *The City of Balconies. Elite Politics and the Changing Semiotics of the Post-Socialist Landscape*, in: van Assche, Kristof; Salukvadze, Joseph; Shavishvili, Nick (eds.), *City Culture and City Planning. Where Europe and Asia Meet*, New York 2009, pp. 71-102.

6 Interview with Marina Khavlashvili, 22<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

Interview with Lado Vardosanidze, 23<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

7 Svetlana Boym: *Common Places. Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, Cambridge; London 1994, p. 10.

8 *Ibidem*, p. 5.

9 Mikhail M. Bakhtin: *Discourse in the Novel*, in: Holquist, Michael (ed.), *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, Austin London 1981, pp. 259-422, p. 259.

10 *Ibidem*, p. 265.

11 *Ibidem*, p. 5.

12 Eleni Sideri: *Pearls are a Girl's Best Friend: Nostalgia and its Discontents in the Life-Stories of two Georgian Women*, in: *IBSUSJ* 3 (2009), No. 1, pp. 97-112, p. 99.

13 James V. Wertsch: *Texts of Memory and Texts of History*, in: *L2 Journal* 4 (2002), pp. 9-20.



concepts serve to analyze place related narratives, the former as it includes the multitude of meanings inscribed in a place to which wide spread narratives refer. The latter as it describes the reference to a concept which is taken for granted. For this reason the context of a narrative is important – the social situation of the speaker and the historical and discursive environment. In my case it means that it is necessary to look at the social situation of the storyteller and her or his surrounding as well as public discourses<sup>14</sup> and historical events which could influence the stories of the neighbors.

(2) Not the whole story is told, because not everything is remembered, due to “cognitive shortcomings” and complex events are pressed into easily understandable narratives. That makes it easier to integrate memories into common experiences. In my case one has to be aware that it is relatively easy to reconstruct the discursive environment of the past, but it is not possible to analyze the ideas, people had in their mind in the past. At least if they don't write self examining and soul-searching diaries. Only their view on this time from today's perspective is available. Even if they are willing to tell about their deep thoughts, one has to take into account that memory is always influenced by social processes and the current situation.<sup>15</sup> (3) There exists an unconscious relation to the own group in the narrative. Referring to Jan Assmann, Wertsch calls it “ethnocentric narcissism”.<sup>16</sup> It means that it is important to which group a speaker belongs, because this influence what and how something is told. Especially if group belonging had an impact on the biography.

Here my concept of identity has to be clarified: Identities, especially ethnic identity, plays an important role in the narratives (i.e. “ethnocentric narcissism”). Certain narratives are referred to certain groups (Georgians as Orthodox Christians, Azerbaijanis as Muslims), even if the practice is much more incoherent. As Roger Brubaker suggests “we should not uncritically adopt categories of ethno-political practice as our categories of social analysis.”<sup>17</sup> Social practice (including narratives on places) do not derive from ethnicity, but ethnicity is constructed through social practices (for example a narrative). Stories are not told a certain way, because people belong to a group, but they prove their belonging by telling a story in a certain way. This might happen unconsciously. Narratives show how a person understands a group and not how the group “really” is. This approach fits much better in a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional neighborhood, settled by different generations and classes, with unclear identity markers. Furthermore the political situation in Georgia has been described as a “permanent revolution' since the mid 1980s” by Stephen Jones

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14 I understand public discourses as an entity of all kind of contributions (printed, visual, audio-visual and actions) to a topic which is accessible for a broader public.

15 Sideri, *Pearls are a Girl's Best Friend*, p. 100.

16 Wertsch, *Texts of Memory and Texts of History*, pp. 10f.

17 Rogers Brubaker: *Ethnicity Without Groups*, in: *Archives européennes de sociologie* 43 (2002), Nr. 2, pp. 163-189, p. 166.

and others<sup>18</sup>. Instead of talking of groups, I follow Brubakers suggestion and speak about categories. This “invites us to focus on processes and relations rather than substances.”<sup>19</sup> I use terms (such as Georgian, Azeri or Azerbaijani, Iranian, Armenian or Russian) as categories in the sense of Brubaker. So I follow his concept of “*groupness* as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable.”<sup>20</sup>

Narratives and social practices are sometimes contradicting and changed in the course of time. This makes it difficult for people to present the actually “valid” narrative. Sometimes their narratives are “out of date”, and do not correlate with the actual political and social situation. Finally we have to recognize that the ideas, presented in the narratives of an individual, do not exactly fit into the national narratives of a country, but it is full of inconsistency, it is not logic nor plausible, it is full of uneven facts, which can come together only in the mind of humans. Even so such narratives provide a deep insight into the ideas of the residents of Kharpukhi neighborhood.

My main source are interviews and the fieldnotes I made during my stay in Tbilisi from fall 2013 until July 2014. My key informant was the aforementioned lady. She introduced me to her personal network, which provided me with additional information. In her network, almost nobody ever went to university (except one young girl). Most of my informants were women older than 50 years, since my host introduced me to her peer group. Many of these women are widows. The neighbors in the area know each other very good, it is rare if a person is unknown, strangers are immediately recognized and people try to gather information about this person.

All interviews are unstructured, even so my questions were centered around the history of the neighborhood, especially about Mirza Shapi Street, on which I focused at the beginning of my research. Apart from one interview I did not record the talks with my host, but took fieldnotes. I conducted (and recorded) another four interviews with my main informant's neighbors, I made further five interviews with different experts and had informal conversations with different, random people in the neighborhood. In the appendix is a description of attributes which I considered important for my interviewees. To any person corresponds a five-digit number. Every position refers to an attribute. The number in the first position shows gender, 2<sup>nd</sup> age, 3<sup>rd</sup> education, 4<sup>th</sup> place of residency and 5<sup>th</sup> ethnicity. To all of this markers refers a number which specify the information. For example: to a female person (1), of 72 years (5), with no academical education (2), living in Old Tbilisi (1) and considering herself Georgian (1) corresponds the number 15211. I give two markers

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18 Stephen F Jones: Georgia. A Political History since Independence, New York 2013, p. 12.

Levan Ramishvili: March of goblins. Permanent revolution in Georgia, in: Jones, Stephen F. (ed.), The Making of Modern Georgia. 1918-2012. The First Georgian Republic and its Successors, New York 2014, pp. 175-201.

19 Brubaker, Ethnicity Without Groups, p. 183.

20 Ibidem, p. 167.

of Gender, since only male and female appear in the neighborhood and women are much more communicative and much older than men, according to my observations. For the age I considered important if one is a schoolchild and which epoch a person witnessed. Education shows if a person belongs to the cultural elite and contributes to public discourses. The place of residency determines a person's daily life experience in Old Tbilisi, which has an impact on the narratives. Ethnicity shows mainly if a person belongs to the Georgian majority or a minority (in this case the designation of ethnic belonging can remain unclear). I use real names only if they appear in other literature as well, these persons are experts and persons of public life in Georgia.

Participant observation was another main method that I used to analyze the behavior of the residents within the neighborhood. I analyzed pictures (photographs and paintings) which I got from informants, books, websites and archives. Maps are another important source for the analysis of place naming. The official position of the city hall is easy to explore by analyzing public campaigns, development plans, heritage legislation and realized projects. Articles in magazines and newspapers show the perspective of the elites and the discourses of the last 60 years respectively.

During my stay in Tbilisi I lived in a shared flat in Saburtalo, a neighborhood newly built in Soviet times. It is less prestigious than the good situated neighborhoods Vake and Vera, but was perceived as comfortable by my informants in Kharbukhi. I visited my field almost every day and spent most of my time on my host's balcony or in a shop, located in Grishashvili Street. There I could observe people passing by and participate in small talks between the saleswoman (an approximately 50 year old Georgian lady) and her clients. The relation to my main informant was first like a guest, she was very hospitable, but there was a certain distance. Later it turned into a friendship and her role as a host, who wants to present a certain image of her country and my role as an anthropologist, who doesn't want to affect his field, was dismantled. As an effect our talks touched more private topics and were less structured than at the beginning. Another effect was that she already knew what kind of information I was looking for and she began to take actively part in my research by presenting me persons, asking them about the neighborhood and guiding me to places which in her eyes were important for my research (for example museums). She became more and more interested and learned, like me, new things about her neighborhood. She was not anymore an average dweller of the neighborhood and her information represents not necessarily a common knowledge. On the other hand I had access to narratives which are not immediately presented to foreigners (for example about deportations).

My own personal network I spent my free time, especially in the evenings, was very different from my informant's. The former are western oriented and critically of Georgian nationalism and

Orthodoxy. I would never have had such an intimate relationship to my field if I had not conducted research there. So I am aware that Georgian society is extremely heterogeneous. My role as a western student, interested in the history of a Tbilisian neighborhood, made most informants feel like representatives of Georgia, so they often showed me the “real” Georgia – an idealized image of culture and history.

With my informants I talked in Georgian, English and even German. The Georgian language was always difficult for me. I cannot offer any precise linguistic analysis and include an extended analysis of the different languages of situations, social groups “‘professional’ and ‘generic’ languages, languages of generations and so forth,”<sup>21</sup> (Bakhtin calls it “heteroglossia”)<sup>22</sup>. Nevertheless, I am aware of the existence of such diverse languages and consider them in my research as far as possible. The common language in the neighborhood is Russian. Due to my poor knowledge of this language I could not profit from this fact. This was a pity, especially when non-Georgians could not, or did not want to communicate in Georgian language (sometimes they felt uncomfortable to speak Georgian when Georgians were present) or when the narratives altered, as soon as they used another language. This happened for example when place names have different meanings in different languages, furthermore the official Soviet narrative was often russified, as the general development plan from 1934 shows.<sup>23</sup>

The literature on Tbilisian history and ethnography is rare. Actual historical research is lacking, besides an article of Ronald Suny.<sup>24</sup> Some papers are dealing with special topics of Tbilisian history mainly of the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century when the tsarist empire was in permanent crisis.<sup>25</sup> Older publications have a highly literary quality or are focused on showing photos. Their publication was often connected to events, such as the 1500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city<sup>26</sup> or the renovations of the old center in the 1970s.<sup>27</sup> Ethnographic publications are seldom. The first and most important work was

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21 Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel*, p. 272.

22 *Ibidem*, p. 263.

23 Tifsovet (ed.): reconstruction project of Tbilisi. Reduced version [proekt rekonstruktsii Tiflis. Sokrashchenoe izdanie], Tbilisi 1934, p. 1, 3. (unpublished), Available in the city's archive of Tbilisi.

24 Ronald Grigor Suny: *The Mother of Cities. Tbilisi/Tiflis in the Twilight of Empire*, in: van Assche; Salukvadze; Shavishvili (eds.), *City Culture and City Planning in Tbilisi*, pp. 17-58.

25 Oliver Reisner: *Ethnos und Demos in Tbilisi (Tiflis) – Armenier, Georgier und Russen in den Stadtdumwahlkämpfen 1890-1897*, in: Hausmann, Guido (ed.), *Gesellschaft als lokale Veranstaltung. Selbstverwaltung, Assoziierung und Geselligkeit in den Städten des ausgehenden Zarenreiches*. Göttingen 2002, pp. 301-329.

Oliver Reisner: *Zwischen kultureller Autonomie und politischer Unabhängigkeit – politische Konzeptionen und interethnische Beziehungen in Tbilisi, 1905-1917*, in: Bonwetsch, Bernd; Fikret, Adanir (eds.), *Osmanismus, Nationalismus und der Kaukasus. Muslime und Christen, Türken und Armenier im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden 2005, pp. 133-151.

26 Jakob Balakhashvili: *Old Tbilisi [dzveli tbilisi]*, Tbilisi 1951.

Guram Gegeshidze: *Socialist Tbilisi [sotsialist'ur tbilisi]*, Tbilisi 1958.

Davit Gvritishvili: *Tbilisi's History [tbilisi ist'oria]*, Tbilisi 1952.

Shota Meskhia: *Tbilisi's History [tbilisi ist'oria]*, Tbilisi 1958.

Tbilisi. Anniversary Collection [tbilisi. sauibileo k'rebuli ], Tbilisi 1946.

27 Teimuraz Beridze: *History of Old Tbilisi's Suburbs [dzveli tbilisi gareubnebis ist'oria]*, Tbilisi 1977.

Teimuraz Beridze: *And Tbilisi Emerged [da aghmotsenda tbilisi]*, Tbilisi 1977.

Teimuraz Beridze: *Old Tbilisi's Pictures [dzveli tbilisi suratebi ]*, Tbilisi 1980.

done by Ioseb Grishashvili. He published his research as a folklorist description of the life of Old Tbilisi.<sup>28</sup> It shows a lost world of a unique city community which even in his time was almost lost. New research was done by Paul Manning and Zaza Shatirishvili on the perception of the city<sup>29</sup> and by Madlen Pilz on the perception of places<sup>30</sup>. Ketevan Khutsishvili and Florian Mühlfried worked on bazaars<sup>31</sup>. Shorena Gabunia worked on gay places in socialist and post-socialist Tbilisi and Irakli Pipia on the perception of the new Sameba Cathedral, just to mention some works.<sup>32</sup> What they all have in common is that they deal with places in socialist and post-socialist Tbilisi. What is missing is an actual study about Tbilisi's history and on the social structure of the city or its neighborhoods. The literature dealing with architecture and city planning is more developed. Starting in Soviet times to gather information for the city's development plans, and due to the interest in (Georgian) heritage protection at the end of the Soviet Union respectively, there has always been huge interest in these subjects. I will refer here just to two newer publications – the collection of Kristof van Assche, Joseph Salukvadze and Nick Shavishvili<sup>33</sup> and the publication of the Goethe Institute after a conference about city protection.<sup>34</sup> The authors in those books were and are still highly involved in the discourses which I will analyze here. Especially the protection of the old center is always subject of emotional debates, like the case of demolishing Mirza Shapi Street showed.<sup>35</sup>

The structure of my work follows the perspective of my main informant. I chose the narratives on places either if she mentioned them (1) very often, if she could provide me (2) with a lot of information on them or if (3) we went there together. I conclude that they have a certain value for my informant. The selection of narratives about her neighbors and her life follow the same

28 Ioseb Grishashvili: *The Literary Bohemia of Old Tbilisi*. [dzveli t'pilisits lit'erat'uruli bohema], Tbilisi 2012.

I refer mostly to the German translation: Iosseb Grischaschwili: *Und niemals hat der Dichter eine Schöner erblickt... Über die alte Stadt Tbilisi, Metropole Georgiens mit ihren Festen, Bädern, Bräuten und Aschugenliedern*, Berlin 2007.

29 Manning, *The City of Balconies*.

Paul Manning; Zaza Shatirishvili: *Why are the Dolls Laughing? Tbilisi Between Intelligentsia Culture and Socialist Labor*, in: Darieva, Tsypylma; Kaschuba, Wolfgang (ed.), *Urban Spaces after Socialism. Ethnographies of Public Places in Eurasian Cities*, 2011, pp. 207-227.

Paul Manning; Zaza Shatirishvili: *The Exoticism and the Eroticism of the City. The "Kinto" and his City*, in: Darieva; Kaschuba (eds.), *Urban Spaces after Socialism*, pp. 261-281.

30 Madlen Pilz: *Tbilisi in City Maps. Symbolic Construction of an Urban Landscape*, in: Darieva; Kaschuba (eds.), *Urban Spaces after Socialism*, pp. 81-106.

Madlen Pilz: *Mann – Frau/Verteidiger – Mutter. Postsojwjetische Re-Interpretationen der Statue Mutter Georgien*, in: Kaschuba, Wolfgang; Krebs, Melanie; Pilz, Madlen (eds.), *Die postsowjetische Stadt. Urbane Aushandlungsprozesse im Südkaukasus*, Berlin 2012, pp. 130-149.

31 Florian Mühlfried: *Der Deserteurs-Markt in Tbilissi im Sommer 1997*, in: Amirani VII (2002), pp. 57-63.

Ketevan Khutsishvili: *Bazaar Culture in Georgia. The Case of Tbilisi*, in: Kaschuba; Krebs; Pilz (eds.), *Die postsowjetische Stadt*, pp. 41-53.

32 Shorena Gabunia: *Gay Culture and Public Places in Tbilisi*, in: Darieva; Kaschuba (eds.), *Urban Spaces after Socialism*, pp 247-260.

Irakli Pipia: *Tsimanda Sameba – The Cathedral of Holy Trinity. The Construction of a new National Symbol*, in: Kaschuba; Krebs; Pilz (eds.), *Die postsowjetische Stadt*, pp 113-128.

33 van Assche, Salukvadze, Shavishvili (eds.), *City Culture and City Planning in Tbilisi*.

34 Goethe-Institut Georgien (ed.): *Gentle Urban Regeneration and the Civil Society Symposium at the Goethe-Institut Georgien on 9 June, 2009 Symposium Proceedings and Exhibition Materials*, Tbilisi 2010.

35 Natia Akhalashvili: *Illegal Razing on Mirza Shapi Street. Mirza Shapi Street Demolished Illegally, its Future is until Today uncertain* [uk'anono ngeva mirza shapis kuchaze. mirza shapis kucha uk'anonod daingra, misi momavali k'i dghemde gaurk'vevelia], in: *liberali* 10 (October 2009), pp. 32-37.

principles.

The first chapter deals with housing in Old Tbilisi. The focus here is on narratives about the living space of my main informant, that is Old Tbilisi and her balcony. Both concepts are “common places”, in reference to Boym. Old Tbilisi as well as the balconies are not just part of the city, but part of different discourses. The balcony is of special interest for me because it was the place where I spent most of the time during my research and it is a “common place” as well. I present my host's flat and show how it is connected to changes in the city and the region. This demonstrates how the social situation shapes the narratives, since the flat is the place where everyday life takes place most of the time.

In the following chapter I have a look from my main informant's balcony into the old city, and show which changes took place there. Not only the perception of the built environment will be analyzed, but also how the social structure changed or if that was the case. I show how the national elite's discursive contributions influenced the transformation of the cityscape (it is the imagination of the city including built environment, symbolized landmarks as well as people and the culture connected to them) and shaped the narratives on these changes and the neighbor's perception of their environment.

In a last chapter I will show how the neighbors, as the most important part of the city, perceive and place themselves in the neighborhood and the city and history. Thereby I will show how identity influences the presentation of the neighborhood and if there is any transformation of this perception. I will also show to what extent these narratives influence the social interaction among the neighbors.

For the transcription of the Georgian alphabet I use the “Georgian national system of romanization”. Though for some Georgian letters it is necessary to write two Latin ones, it is more comfortable for the reader than the use of special characters. For the Russian transcription I use the “modified Library of Congress” system. If there exists a common English translation of words or names, then I use them. I write the first letter of all names in capitals, nevertheless they are unknown in Georgian language. I give the Georgian original if a word contains multiple meanings, any translation becomes inexact or if it is necessary for understanding.

## **2 Housing in Old Tbilisi**

### *Balconies and Old Tbilisi*

My host has a huge terrace in her flat on the second floor. From this balcony the view reaches from the botanical garden, over Narikala Fortress, the mosque and the baths, to the newly built Peace

Bridge and to Metekhi Church. This area is considered to be one of the oldest in Tbilisi. Here located the historian Tinatin Chichua the eastern entrance into the city – Ganja Gate, that is the gate to the road that leads to the city Ganja in today's Azerbaijan. In this street, she assumes, must have been markets, caravansaries and trade houses.<sup>36</sup> This area was part of “‘Tiflis' proper [sak'utriv 't'pilisil]”<sup>37</sup>, as she calls it. The studies about my informant's neighborhood are already part of a discursive practice on Old Tbilisi. By naming the neighborhood “Tbilisi proper” it is upgraded in contrast to an “improper” Tbilisi. Already Ioseb Grishashvili, called the “Ganja Door” the main entrance into the city.<sup>38</sup> Occasionally he, like Chichua, were residents of this neighborhood. Such kind of narratives are used by other residents as well.

The houses in these areas were built after 1795. In this year almost the entire city was destroyed by the Persian Shah Aqa Muhamad Khan<sup>39</sup>, but their fundamentals can be much older. They are, due to their location on the hill, built like terraces. The roof of the story below serves as the balcony of the one above. Such a terrace, serves as the living room for my host. This type of house and the balcony is an eye-catching architectural feature in the historic center.

Maia Mania describes the houses in the old city, as a mixture of European and Oriental architecture.<sup>40</sup> This architecture represents until today the old center. The old baths are another peculiarity of the city and are located in the very center of Tbilisi. Today they are mainly touristic explored, although they still serve as a meeting point and bathhouse for the body hygiene of the residents. Grishashvili Street is the main street there and is less frequented by tourists. It was planned to reconstruct the area (that is why Mirza Shapi Street was destroyed in 2008), but nothing has happened ever since. The name of this reconstruction project is “King's Garden”, because it refers to the botanical garden.

The balconies or terraces, are places of social life and connect the flats and the residents in a house with each other and the city. That makes them liminal places between private and public spaces. They are a “common place” or “commonplace”, because they served as the meeting point of the communal apartment, which “was a Soviet common place par excellence.”<sup>41</sup> For Boym

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36 Tinatin Chichua: Old Ganja Road – Oldest Street in Tbilisi [dzveli ganjis gza - udzvelesi kucha tbilisshi], in: *sabchota khelovneba* 11 (1985), pp. 88-95, p. 90f.

37 Tinatin Chichua: Urban Characteristics of a City Quarter in Central Tbilisi, Formed at the Beginning of the XX-th Century [translation by the editor], in: Georgia's Technical University (ed.): *Questions of Georgian Architectural Theory and History*, Tbilisi 2005, p. 39-44, p. 39. [XIX-XX sauk'uneebis [sic] mijnaze chamoq'alibebuli erti tbilisuri ubnis kalaktmshneblobiti [sic] taviseburebani, in: *sakartvelos teknik'uri universit'et'i* (ed.), *kartuli arkit'ekt'uris teoriis da ist'oriis sak'itkhebi*] In 1936 the official name of Tbilisi was changed from Tiflis (t'pilisil) to Tbilisi (tbilisi), Vakht'ang Jaoshvili: *Tbilisi. Economic-Geographic Research* [tbilisi. ek'onomik'ur-geograpiuli gamok'vleva], Tbilisi 1989, p. 88.

38 Grischaschwili, Und niemals hat der Dichter eine Schönerer erblickt, p. 13.

39 Maia Mania: *Tbilisi – a Unique System of Houses with Courtyards*, in: Goethe Institute (ed.), *Urban Heritage Preservation. Identity and Spirit of Old Tbilisi*, Tbilisi 2010, pp. 9-15, p. 10.

40 *Ibidem*, p. 11.

41 Boym, *Common Place*, 124.

“mythologies are cultural common places, recurrent narratives that are perceived as natural in a given culture but in fact were naturalized and their historical, political, or literary origins forgotten or disguised.”<sup>42</sup> Her intention is to show how such narratives “might have obscured a cultural tradition that is in truth diverse and hybrid”, and she states that this myths do „not always correspond [...] to actual everyday practices and people's preoccupations.“<sup>43</sup> They are a way to organize speech and space and can also have a vulgar connotation, as they can represent kitsch and become part of ideological struggles.<sup>44</sup> The balconies, the baths and Old Tbilisi fit perfectly in this characterization, since they are connected to a variety of myths, as well as to people's every day life.

Discourses are placed around the historic center which have their roots in Soviet times and became crucial again after the Rose Revolution when the old center was ideologically upgraded and a struggle for authenticity started. The balcony as a characteristic architectural feature of the old city has received special attention in this discourse. As Manning says, the balcony represents the historic city and is characteristic for Georgia in the current discourse of Georgian intellectuals and it presents the openness of the new Georgian society after the Rose Revolution. As he says this idea is the result of a reinterpretation which started at the end of the Soviet times in a struggle between the old intelligentsia and the new rich. It is the architectural representation of the “national form”.<sup>45</sup> The balcony serves as a “common place” to describe the capital of Georgia. Such topoi are adopted by the city hall, historians, monument protectors and residents. But each group has a different intention. The discourse on the historic center shows how the balcony became a “common place”, which meanings were inscribed to it and how the residents themselves dealt with it. Such balcony related narratives appeared throughout the conversations with my main informant rather indirectly, but still showed her perception of the old center. The narratives of different informants referred to very different concepts of the city, its characteristics and most important their personal experience. After all, the balcony is not an abstract concept for my main informant as she has lived there almost all her life. It is merely connected with her experience than with conceptual struggles. Although such struggles could effect her daily life, for example the disappearance of her neighbors, when their houses were demolished to be rebuilt in the “typical” Tbilisian style.

Through the narratives of people and public discourses different meanings were inscribed into Old Tbilisi. The concept of Old Tbilisi was established by Ioseb Grishashvili (1889-1965). Manning explains the “process of idealization of Old Tbilisi on the ground of high culture, as a result of

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42 Ibidem, p. 4.

43 Ibidem, p. 5.

44 Ibidem, p. 15.

45 Manning, *The City of Balconies*, p. 96f.



which Grishashvili's book [Old Tbilisi Literary Bohemia, J.S.] became a 'cult' classic.”<sup>46</sup> Speaking of Old Tbilisi and giving it its own character, means that there exists also the other. Manning points out that the kinto<sup>47</sup> as a representation of Old Tbilisi stood for an “urban alter ego” of the Georgian aristocracy and intelligentsia. It was a result of the Orientalization of the Caucasus by Russia.<sup>48</sup> One can find a similar contradiction in postcards from the beginning 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the one side they show pictures of Old Tbilisi street scenes (representing the Orient), on the other side they present new Russian buildings such as the opera house (representing western culture).<sup>49</sup> In Soviet literature Old Tbilisi is contrasted by the bourgeois as well as the socialist city. In Post-socialism the old center is presented to tourists as the authentic city. It includes also contrasts to the new modernist houses of the new rich after the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>50</sup> In one epoch Old Tbilisi became the other (Oriental vs. western, socialist vs. bourgeois or even feudal city) and in the next one it served as the normal (Georgian) which contrasted the deviation (modernist architecture of the new rich). This shows how different meanings were written into this place.

From beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on, Grishashvili conducted research on the life in the area which he called “Old Tbilisi”. In his view, Old Tbilisi had its own culture, different from that of other regions of Georgia. People here saw themselves as Tbilisians, a folk consisting of different ethnic background. By publishing a Tbilisian-Georgian dictionary<sup>51</sup> he assigned a unique language to the capital of Georgia. He put stress on the peaceful mixture of different people who understood themselves as part of one big community – Tbilisi.<sup>52</sup> This is important since all narratives that followed him refer to this concept in either a positive or negative way.

Also the first general plan for Tbilisi of 1934, relates indirectly to this narrative, when it focus on the erection of the socialist city, the somehow extreme counterpart of Old Tbilisi. After World War II, this goal was pursued. Describing the old city meant showing the “unparalleled changes in the boundaries of Old Tbilisi”<sup>53</sup>, such as a new highway, at Mtkvari river. If the old style houses with their balconies or terraces were mentioned, they served to contrast the innovations of the Soviet city:

“At the hill the balcony-bani [i.e. flat roof, J.S.] houses, shanty-like [khukhulebivit] interlaced are stuck at

46 Manning; Shatirishvili, *The Exoticism and the Eroticism of the City*, p. 266.

47 The kinto were petty traders in Old Tbilisi, some characteristics, like special clothes are referred to them, see kinto, in: *tbilisi entsik'lop'edia*, Tbilisi 2002, p. 597.

He is a good example for a peculiarity of Old Tbilisi given in folklorist descriptions of the city, for example in Grishashvili's book “Old Tbilisi Literary Bohemia”. Also the lexicon article above refers to Grishashvili's book. This shows how strong his narratives on Old Tbilisi are.

48 Manning; Shatirishvili, *The Exoticism and the Eroticism of the City*, p. 262.

49 In Grishashvili City Museum, is a huge collection of such postcards.

50 Manning describes this contradiction in his article “the City of Balconies”, see Manning, *The City of Balconies*.

51 Ioseb Grishashvili: *Urban Dictionary [kalakuri leksik'oni]*, Tbilisi 1997.

52 Grischaschwili, *Und niemals hat der Dichter eine Schönerer erblickt*, p. 10.

53 In the *Boundaries of Old Tbilisi [dzveli tbilisis parglebshi]*, in: *k'omunist'i* (16<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1950).

the rocks like the nests of the swallows. The yard of one house is used as the bani for the one below, between the houses are narrow streets. The round arched windows are looking down on the heads of the by passing people. Nearby, some ten meters away, sprawl the comfortable streets of the Soviet city, illuminated with electric lights, with monumental residential houses.”<sup>54</sup>

This characterization of the houses at the hill give a clear description of the living conditions in former Mirza Shapi Street and the houses nearby, since it refers to the Kirowi district, which includes also Kharpukhi. It describes a certain notion of Old Tbilisi, as uncomfortable dark area. The balcony does not appear as a beautiful or at least kitsch element of a historic Tbilisian house, but it is rather the poor living conditions that are in the focus of this Old Tbilisi perception. The buildings are rather shanties than real houses. Such an image is also presented by the residents of Kharpukhi, since they describe their neighborhood as poor.

The interest in the old center was once more raised due to the 1500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tbilisi. An exhibition took place on this which dealt with the history, geography, architecture and ethnography of Old Tbilisi.<sup>55</sup> Shota Meskhia in his book about Tbilisis history (it was published for the same reason and was part of the mentioned exhibition) contrasts the “mud, filth, impassable lanes, pathlessness and more [that] characterized generally feudalistic Tbilisi”<sup>56</sup>, with the bourgeois city. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century where

“the 2 or 3 floor houses of the citizens, wore features of national, folk architecture. They were characterized by arched balconies with carved balustrades and brackets [k’ronsht’einebit]. In this time the folk architecture included Georgian, Iranian and Russian elements.”<sup>57</sup>

The bourgeois city, as it was described by Meskhia, is rather represented by the districts of Vera and Vake than by the proper historic center. Nevertheless, the importance of the balconied houses which are characteristic for the old city are underlined as a Tbilisian peculiarity weather they are in Old Tbilisi or in the new bourgeois districts. In Meskhias account this characteristics were not presented as particularly Georgian, but as a mix of different cultures which could be found in the capital. The balcony is connected to the bourgeois city, it is somehow better than feudalism, but still not socialistic and therefore not that developed. The dominating paradigm is still socialism. But the strengthening of the national movement, which found its expression among others in the demands

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54 [perdobze aivnian-baniani sakhlebi, khukhulebivit ertimeores mitq’upebulni mertskhlis budeebivit mistsebebian k’lides. erti sakhlis ezod kvemo sakhlis bania gamoq’enebuli. sakhlebs shoris vitsro shuk’ebia. gamvlels q’oveli mkhridan tavs dastskerian p’at’ara taghiani panjrebi. ikve, ramdenime ati met’ris dashorebit, gadach’imulia tanamedrove sabch’ota kalakis k’etilmotsq’obili kuchebebi - elekt’roshukit gachiraghdnebuli, monument’uri satskhovrebeli sakhlebit.], dzveli tbilisis parglebshi, in: k’omunist’i 206 (16<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1950).

55 Exhibition “Old Tbilisi” [gamopena “dzveli tbilisi”], in: k’omunist’i 155 (8<sup>th</sup> July 1958).

56 Meskhia, tbilisis ist’oria, p. 397.

According to the author Tbilisi was transformed into a “real bourgeois [namdvil burzhuaziul]” city in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Ibidem, p. 422.

57 [mokalaketa 2 da 3 sartuliani sakhlebi erovnuli, khalkhuri khurotmodzghvrebis khasiats at’arebdenen. mat akhasiatebdat taghebiani aivani mochukurtmebuli moajirebita da k’ronsht’einebit. im drois khalkhuri khurotmodzghvrebaba sheitsavda kartul, iranul da rusul element’ebis.], Ibidem, p. 423.

for heritage protection, was on its way. One effect was that the Georgian authorities took these demands into account, to offer the youth an alternative to the new national movement and prevent its consolidation. So Old Tbilisi experienced a revival under the guise of the protection of the national heritage. In 1975 the old center of Georgia's capital was declared a “national protected zone”.<sup>58</sup> In the 1970s the renovation of this zone started.<sup>59</sup> This neighborhood gained not only more and more attention from the architects dealing with the city's development, but also from the “ordinary” inhabitants of the city. This is what seems to have been intended by the authorities. The idea was enforced by articles in the press dealing with topics like: “Our Pride. For the Conservation of the Appearance of Old Tbilisi”,<sup>60</sup> or “Motifs of Old Tbilisi” referring to the restoration of Baratashvili Street in the old center<sup>61</sup>.

In a description of the architecture of Tbilisi from the 1960s, closed, wooden balconies are described as typical Tbilisian, but were later replaced by facades with an “eclectic” style, which adopted European elements or imitated historic, mostly Islamic or Gothic, styles. This was not the proper Tbilisian style<sup>62</sup> meaning it was seen as not authentic, but as kitsch.

In the 1970s the renovation of the old center was tackled by the government. One project which was realized was the renovation of Pushkin Street. This was the point when Old Tbilisi gained importance by Soviet authorities and the renovations which took place in this time included balconied houses. They served as positive benchmarks in describing the old center. Recognizing Tbilisi's history now meant recognizing residential houses architecture, that is balconies, since it is stated in book about Tbilisi from the late 1980s.

“In the first half of the 19th century the characteristic appearance of the Tbilisian residential houses were formed: In this houses the local, century-old traditions were enriched with classicist elements from Russia. Big balconies, glass galleries, whose surface dominate from time to time also the surface of the rooms themselves, roofed staircases and passages, dictated and originated in the climatic circumstances of Tbilisi.”<sup>63</sup>

This quote originates from the time Manning refers to, when “real” Tbilisi was represented by its

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58 This time Pushkin Street [amjerad p'ushk'inis kucha], in: *tbilisi* (9<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1989).

Lado Vardosanidze: Socio-Cultural Rehabilitation of Old Tbilisi. How to make an Omelet of an Egg, in: Goethe Institute (ed.), *Gentle Urban Regeneration and the Civil Society Symposium at the Goethe-Institut Georgien on 9 June, 2009 Symposium Proceedings and Exhibition Materials, Tbilisi 2010*, pp. 49-61, p. 51.

59 Motifs of Old Tbilisi [dzveli tbilisis mot'ivebi], in: *tbilisi* (1<sup>st</sup> March 1979).

60 Our Pride. For the Conservation of the Appearance of Old Tbilisi [chveni siamaq'e. dzveli tbilisis iersakhis shenarchunebisatvis], in: *tbilisi* (16<sup>th</sup> March 1979).

61 Motifs of Old Tbilisi [dzveli tbilisis mot'ivebi], in: *tbilisi* (1<sup>st</sup> March 1979).

62 Vakhtang Beridze: *Architecture of Tbilisi the years 1801-1917* [tbilisis khurotomdzhvrebba 1801-1917 ts'lebi], Tbilisi 1963, p. 112.

63 [XIX s-is I nakhevarshi chamoq'alibda tbilisuri satskhovrebeli sakhlis damakhasiatebeli sakhe: am sakhlebshi adgilobrivi mravalsaukunovani traditsiebi gamdidrebulia rusetidan shemosuli k'lasitsizmis element'ebit. didi aivnebi, t'erasebi da shushabandebi, romelta partobi zogjer tvit otakhebis partobsats k'i sch'arbobs, gadakhuruli kvibeebi da gadasavlelebi. tbilisis k'limat'uri p'irobebitaa nak'arnakhevi da tsarmoshobili.] Jaoshvili, Tbilisi, p. 369.

balconies. Since then the balcony reoccurs as a characterization of Old Tbilisi in almost all literature on the capital as well as in official projects and campaigns of government and non-governmental organizations. Referring to Boym, it can be seen as a “common place”, a naturalized feature of Tbilisi, connected to the “climatic circumstances” and “century-old traditions”. To proof to be specially bond to Georgia's capital was showing the fondness for loggias. Even gravestones have the shape of balconied houses.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless the formation of this housing type is recognized, as it is said :

“In the 1830s a new type of dwelling was finally established – the so called “Tbilisi house“, behind the facades of which local features were hidden: lacy wooden balconies overlooking courtyard, terraced roofing, and loggias with stained glass.”<sup>65</sup>

Criticism of the way the renovation of the old center was executed, already raised in the 1980s, when the site was still under construction. In Baratashvili Street the old city wall was erected again and houses on its top renovated. To give them a more uniform appearance, they were made “more Tbilisian” as Tamas Gersamia laments, “they got an additional balcony, this inseparable part of a characteristic Tbilisian house.”<sup>66</sup> Balconies were established on a newly built house, and this he criticizes as “eclecticism”, the same attribute which was referred to the facades of the “bourgeois city” in the 1960s. But still the Balcony is “inseparably” connected to Tbilisi.

This idea has to some extent an influence on the narratives of some residents (interestingly less in my main informant's). One lady suggested I should make a photo of her house because it is listed as a monument. The reason therefore would be, as she told that the balcony is very high, this would be a particularity of her house. She said that she had been very surprised when she found her house on the list of architectural heritage. I followed her suggestion and made a photo. I also included her shop next to her house, in the picture, because I considered it to be an important aspect of the social life in the area. When I showed her the picture (one could see partly her house and partly her shop) she told me “it's wrong, you have to photograph the balcony” because it would be the most important element of the hous as she said.<sup>67</sup> The fact that she was surprised that her house (it really looks like a cliché of a Tbilisian house) was listed as a monument, shows that people are not aware that they live in houses which are supposed to present a whole city and to a wider extent even the whole nation. Only when the house is officially declared a monument, they recognize that their balcony somehow represents Old Tbilisi, but it is still more connected to daily life than with an

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64 At Didube Pantheon one can find Elene Akhvledianis (1898-1975) grave, the stone shows her face surrounded by balconied houses. She was honored as “Folk Painter” and one of her favored motifs were balconies, see Akhvlediani, Elene, in: *tbilisi entsik'lop'edia*, p. 315.

65 Marina Bulia; Mzia Janjalia: *Tbilisi*, Tbilisi 2002, p. 92.

66 Tamas Gersamia: *Zur Frage der Regeneration alter Stadtviertel von Tbilissi*, in: *Symposium international sur l'art Géorgien*, Tbilisi 1983, p. 2.

67 Interview 14211, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

abstract concept of nation. Instead it seems to be more a project of the elites. All statements above which try to implement a character on Old Tbilisi, are coming from the intelligentsia and not from the “average” people, which do not belong to the cultural elite. They are even surprised that their old, imperfect buildings are listed as monuments. My host's placing of her own balcony into the city's history is strongly connected to a famous Georgian painter, rather than her own life. This shows the strong link of the balcony to its “supporters” – the Georgian intelligentsia.

New reports for mainly European organizations which are involved in the preservation of the cultural heritage highlight the local features of architecture. In Tbilisi an original style of houses had been formed after the Persian invasion of 1795. “Islamic and European architecture blend with local features, such as wooden and iron balconies and passages.”<sup>68</sup> The recent destruction of parts of the old center, especially such “typical” Tbilisian houses, provoke sharp criticism. These houses should be preserved and not destroyed. Such demolitions also evoked the protests of “Tiflis Hamqari” – an NGO protesting for the protection of the “cultural and historic heritage” of Tbilisi.<sup>69</sup> This shows that explaining the city is still an elite project.

The city hall has a different perception of the old center and its balcony houses, than the cultural elite has today. The buildings are part of an image campaign which enhance the status of old neighborhoods while they remain connected with a glory past.<sup>70</sup> Such a campaign was named “Old Tbilisi's New Life”.<sup>71</sup> A similar campaign was launched already in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>72</sup> When the “socio-cultural” vitalization of the historic center was intended, as Vardosanidze claims, flats in the area were given to “prominent representatives of the cultural elite of the country” in order to change the social composition of the neighborhood. His statement refers to Abanotubani, hillside Mirza Shapi Street.<sup>73</sup>

The pictures of the newspaper articles of the 1970s show the balconies in Baratashvili Street, of which Gersamia said that they were added to the houses to make them “more Tbilisian”. Throughout the campaign of the last ten years the balconied houses have been a central element of the posters as well.<sup>74</sup> Another aim of this campaign was to renovate “typical” Tbilisian residential houses. The way this was done provoked harsh protests of city protectors, such as the aforementioned “Tiflis Hamqari”. One example was the “renovation” of the houses in Botanical

68 Mania, Tbilisi Architectural Heritage to be Preserved, p. 8.

69 Tiflis Hamqari, <https://www.facebook.com/TiflisHamkari?fref=ts>, 25.09.2014.

70 Wolfgang Kaschuba; Madlen Pilz: Laborraum Haptstadt. Identitätspolitik und Zivilgesellschaft im Südkaukasus, in: Kaschuba; Krebs; Pilz (eds.), Die postsowjetische Stadt, pp. 7-17, p. 12.

71 Zviad Archuadze: New Life for Old Tbilisi, in: International Conference Community and Historic Environment 20-22 September, 2011 Proceedings, pp. 21-22.

72 Old Tbilisi New Life [dzveli tbilisis akhali sitsotskhle], in: akhlagazrda k'omunist'i (27<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1977).

Old Tbilisi New Life [dzveli tbilisis akhali sitsotskhle], in: soplis tskhovroba (27<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1984).

73 Vardosanidze, Socio-Cultural Rehabilitation of Old Tbilisi, p. 51.

74 <http://new.tbilisi.gov.ge/news/249>, 01/02/2015.

Garden Street, which were demolished and then rebuilt. The facades look “typical” Tbilisian, but the monument and its archaeological value as such is lost. Another example for such a “renovation” was the almost entire razing of Mirza Shapi Street in 2008, where my informant lives. The aim of the new focus on the old center was to attract it for tourism by providing an exotic, Oriental atmosphere. It is represented in the balcony as the symbol of Tbilisi. For the locals this might be the continuation of the renovation of Old Tbilisi, which referred to a new national consciousness, expressed in terms of heritage protection. Additionally, an entirely new architecture appeared, which was addressed to the local residents, to provide the sensation of change after the Rose Revolution.

Whatever the perception of the balcony may be, it is intrinsically tied to Old Tbilisi. This applies for the new Soviet districts as well, since the presentation of the “kamikaze loggia”—[as a] characteristic of Tbilisi” at the “Pavilion of Georgia at the 55<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia”<sup>75</sup>, suggests.

The neighbors' narratives contain elements of all the accounts of Old Tbilisi and the balcony – the poor living conditions, stressed in the 1950s, the raise of interest for the old center in the late 1960s (represented by the paintings of Elene Akhvlediani), the renovations in the 1970s (which my informant could observe from her balcony) and the destruction of parts of the old housing stock since the Rose Revolution (as she lives in one of the almost entirely destroyed streets). All this accounts are part of the experience and memory of my main informant, since she could observe and undergo them all. Especially the living conditions of the residents are of interest since they represent the everyday and not abstract discourses.

### *“Shanty-Like” Houses*

My host is living alone in her flat. Her balcony is the roof of the flat below, in a house that is stuck on the rock “like the nest of the swallows”. Footside the houses is a street (Mirza Shapi Street) and above another corridor-like passage (part of Gertsel Baazovis Street). The two streets are connected by my informant's house, and a staircase leads from one floor to another. Before the demolishing of the street, the other houses in the area were built in the same manner. In the first or second floor one could find a small path leading to the next level. Further up the hill houses were built. These houses fit into the characterization of Old Tbilisi provided in the newspaper article from the 1950s.<sup>76</sup> The living conditions are quite poor. The houses are often renovated or even rebuilt by the residents

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75 The Kamikaze loggia is a name for the mostly illegally built extensions on housing blocks to gain extra space in a house. Kamikaze refers to the fact that they are often neither approved by authorities nor architects, see Kamikaze Loggia Pavilion of Georgia at the 55th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia, <http://www.georgian-pavilion.org/>, 02/01/2015.

76 In the Boundaries of Old Tbilisi [dzveli tbilisis parglebshi], in: k'omunist'i (16<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1950).

themselves, “of any type and without a plan.”<sup>77</sup> Her balcony for example used to be open, but in the 1990s a friend of hers closed it with glass windows. She now uses it as a living room. In fact, this construction “without a plan”, is seen as a characteristic of any city by heritage protectors: “every city is a living organism, and this organism, of course, changes its character”.<sup>78</sup> What were shanty-like houses in early Soviet times, becomes now part of a “living organism”.

For my host the balcony and her neighborhood, is the place of daily life. Here she is preparing her meals (the oven is standing there), eating, cleaning her clothes and welcoming her guests (like me or the “Georgian Folk Painter” Elene Akhvlediani). She moved in with her mother in the 1950s. Before they lived in another part of the city in the periphery.<sup>79</sup> As she guesses, before they came the Azerbaijani (or Persian) family, living in the rooms before, were deported.<sup>80</sup> Three families shared the balcony and each family was living in one room. There was another Georgian family and two Azerbaijani families, as she says. Only one of the two families appears in her narratives and she still is in contact with them.

Some relatives recently moved in, so she does not live alone anymore, and can once again share the balcony. All communication, between me and my informants, usually took place on a balcony or terrace. The narrative concerning her neighbors is arranged around the balcony as well. It was the place where they met and passed their daily life together. It is only natural that the knowledge about the own neighbors was gathered on the balcony. This has an impact on my research: All observations are connected to this semi public space that connects people with each other. My informant in particular is always looking for a chat with other people. The house she is living in, has three floors, her flat is on the second. She does not talk about her neighbors below, and I have never seen them, so I have no information. On the third floor lives a Georgian family. With which she has a good relation. She says that they help her from time to time, especially in repairing her flat, or the facilities, like the toilet or the stove. This type of work is usually done by the residents themselves. Electricity, water, gas and telephone was reinstalled in her flat in the 1990s. After the collapse of the Soviet union there were no facilities, until the neighbors repaired them on their own. For the Georgian lady it was too expensive to get a gas connection at this time, since she said, it costs more

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77 Meskhia, *Tbilisis istoria*, p. 95.

78 Elisashvili, *rogor sheitsvala tbilisi*, p. 7.  
the author was one of the founder of „Tiflis Hamqari“, the NGO involved in heritage protection, see Tiflis Hamqari, <https://www.facebook.com/TiflisHamqari?fref=ts>, 25.09.2014.

79 Interview 15211, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2013.

80 There exist only insufficient information about this topic, further research is necessary. In one article it is stated that the deportation started in August 1951, see *Why Ordered Stalin the Deportation of the Iranians Living in Georgia* [rat'om gadats'q'vit'a st'alinna sakartveloshi mtskhovrebi iranelebis gasakhleba], in: *Tbiliselebi* 19 (2014), [http://www.tbiliselebi.ge/mas\\_id=268441288&year=2014&rubr\\_id=13&jurn\\_id=19](http://www.tbiliselebi.ge/mas_id=268441288&year=2014&rubr_id=13&jurn_id=19) 26.03.2015.

Besides this article my main sources are time witness, according to them the deportations started at the end of 1950, Interview 14212, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

then 2000 Lari<sup>81</sup>. That is why, she got it only recently, some 5 years ago, as she said. The stove on the balcony was left by her Azerbaijani neighbors and installed by her Georgian neighbor from the third floor. This stove also serves as heating in the winter. Recently she got a washing machine.

She has no bathing facilities, that is why she goes to the public sulfur bath in Grishasvili Street (Mirzoeva Bath). Some of her neighbors do not own bathrooms either. They are obliged to visit the bath on the street, if they want to take a shower or bath. The lady says this is okay because the water there is very healthy. Many of her neighbors are not really satisfied with the public baths. Once we visited her Kurdish neighbors which had come back from the bathhouse and my informant begun praising the amenities of the sulfur water, suggesting that I go there. The neighbors were surprised, “don't you have a bathroom at home”, they asked me. “He has” my host told them, “so you don't need to go”, they replied.<sup>82</sup> This illustrates how the social structure shapes the narratives on places. Basically the experience of daily life has the highest impact on the residents perception. But sometimes the situation allows to present additional stories, for example to foreigners.

The bathhouse does not only serve as an external bathroom, but it is also the working place for many Azerbaijani residents, as they, the neighbors and experts say.<sup>83</sup> Also Grishasvili mentions this fact in his narrative, when he refers to Pushkin, who mentioned it as well. But they referred merely to “Tatars” than to the Azeris. According to Grishashvili the bath is a place where people meet and where gossip is spread.<sup>84</sup> The bathhouse can be considered in a similar way as Old Tbilisi and the balconies, that is, as a “common place”. It appears again and again among the narratives of the neighbors and public discourses, but always with a different meaning. My informant was persistent in recommending that I should visit the bathhouses, because there one could get a good treatment for “just 4 Lari”. She said that many Tbilisians would not come to the baths, because “in the new houses in Saburtalo” people had bathtubs with warm and cold water. In her flat were no warm water, as she told me.<sup>85</sup> Many foreigners would go to the bathhouses, Alexander Dumas and Alexander Pushkin had been there. In some of them one could even pay up to “50 Lari” to enjoy the sulfur water, she explained to me.<sup>86</sup>

People in the area are aware that their housing conditions are worse than in many other parts of the city. In Soviet times many of them tried to get a flat in the newly built areas. There was water,

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81 One Lari equals approximately 2,5 € in 24<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

82 Fieldnotes, 23<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

83 Interview 15211 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2013.

Interview 15213, 21<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

Interview with Marina Khatiashvili, 13<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

84 Grishashvili, *Niemals hat der Dichter eine schönere erblickt*, p. 70.

85 Fieldnotes, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

86 Ibidem.



electricity and bathrooms. My host would like to renovate her flat with a bathtub and hot water, so that she can pass it to her relatives. But this is not affordable for her. She said that the houses in the lower part of Grishashvili Street were in very bad conditions. She said that one man's house had been more like a barn, when he was asked to move out he took the offered money with grace. The houses in Mirza Shapi Street, had also been in poor conditions. She claims that people were happy that someone came and offered them money to move out. Now they would live in new houses with good facilities, my host commented on the King's Garden Project in Mirza Shapi Street.<sup>87</sup> Here, the improvement of the living conditions are in focus of the narratives, this is remarkable if one considers the historical value of this site and the attention that was put on Old Tbilisi since Soviet times.

The narrative of poor living conditions was a topic in Soviet times, when new residential buildings were erected. The conditions in the “socialist city” were by far better than in the old neighborhoods – especially in the area around Mirza Shapi Street. My informant is still living in the house, because she and her mother were not considered in getting a new built flat. They were just two persons, different from her Azerbaijani neighbors which had three children, and the father was journalist at the Azerbaijani newspaper “Soviet Georgia [sovet gurjistan]”. The access for living space in the “comfortable streets of the Soviet city, illuminated with electric lights, with monumental residential houses,” must have been easy for the latter, since families with children and members of the Soviet intelligentsia, with good contacts, were favored in achieving new flats.<sup>88</sup> This family moved in the 1970s to Gldani.<sup>89</sup> It shows that the presentation of the socialist city from the authorities was not just pure propaganda, but reflected the poor living conditions in the old center. The living conditions did become better eventually, but are still of no comparison with neighborhoods like Vake or Saburtalo, this is where more prosperous people live, as the neighbors say.<sup>90</sup>

This had created a feeling of marginality. When I told the neighbors that I am interested in the history of their quarter they could not believe it. Some said I should go to Sololaki, because this is where the Bagrationi had lived.<sup>91</sup> Kharpukhi were just a village, and the houses old. In addition, the area was considered to be of less significance because of its ethnic composition. The vicinity had never been particularly prestigious because the Muslim population was living there, an expert told

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87 King's Garden Project was launched by Capital Partner of Georgia (CPG) and its head Giorgi Svanidze. It was planed to build Hotels and Shops and luxury residential houses. The area is bulldozed. The (mostly Azeri) residents got around 1000\$ per square meter, as the building company claims, but the demolishing of the houses were illegal and some families were forced to move out over night. There are still juridical conflicts on the subject, see Akhalashvili, uk'anono ngreva mirza shapis kuchaze, p. 32-37.

88 Joseph Salukvadze: Market Versus Planning? Mechanisms of Spatial Change in Post-Soviet Tbilisi, in: Assche; Salukvadze; Shavishvili (eds.), *City Culture and City Planning in Tbilisi*, pp. 159-187, p. 166.

89 Fieldnotes, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

90 Fieldnotes, 12<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

91 The Georgian royal dynasty, see bagrationebi, in: *tbilisi entsik'lop'edia*, p. 320.

me.<sup>92</sup> As people say, there is no interest in investing in the area since tourists are not coming here.<sup>93</sup> In the 1960s, when Old Tbilisi was ideologically upgraded, Kharpukhi was not renovated, while Baratashvili Street and the bath district were. There the houses were ancient that is why they had been renovated, the woman of whose balcony I took the photo told me. This is a surprising statement, as her own house is listed as a monument, even if the houses of the Kharpukhi neighbors are old, they suggest to go to other parts of the city where the houses are even more old or look better. Manning refers to it when he states that the balcony is an artistic representation where the residents do not want to live in.<sup>94</sup> That is why the lady said that in Baratashvili Street the houses became beautiful<sup>95</sup> (even if one expert lamented the falsification of the renovated houses there, by adding additional balconies)<sup>96</sup> and overall they are in much better conditions than in her own neighborhood.

This shows once more which houses are considered to be of historical interest. The focus of the reconstructions were houses with balconies and if they had none they were added. Furthermore this shows that the residents stress the historical value of their neighborhood, but due to lack of interest or priority for renovations and overall, their living conditions, they experience a feeling of marginality. Due to the disregard of the area, residents take the matter into their own hands. The lady above who lamented the lack of renovations and suggested to photograph her balcony, built her own shop on a small piece of land in that area. Other neighbors extended their living space by closing their balcony (as my host did) or by adding a new one. The result is the aforementioned and in the discourse of the 1950s characterized building style – “of any type and without any plan.” It has to be mentioned that such extensions are not a peculiarity of the Kharpukhi neighborhood.

Even so, the neighborhood has never been that marginal, like some people say. Especially the Muslim population stresses the importance of “their” neighborhood (including the baths, markets and mosques) for Tbilisian history. The area was always part of restructuring programs and there exist a noteworthy number of monuments and outstanding personalities which once lived there, but they were mostly not Georgian. Furthermore the historical relevance of Kharpukhi is stressed, since my informant said, even Dumas and Pushkin went into the bathes. Another example is Grishashvili who lived in Kharpukhi and was well known by the neighbors hence the Grishashvili Library Museum is located here. The visit of Elene Akhvlediani on the balcony of my host to paint Old Tbilisi also shows the way to create significance of the area.

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92 Interview 24121, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

93 Interview 14311, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

94 Manning, *The City of Balconies*, p. 92.

95 Fieldnotes, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

96 Gersamia, *Zur Frage der Regeneration alter Stadtviertel von Tbilissi*, p. 2.

At the end of Grishashvili Street to the east stands the monument for the 300 Aragveli.<sup>97</sup> Mirza Shapi Street is one of the entrances to the botanical garden and in the street was the Nariman Narimanov Museum<sup>98</sup>. At Mtkvari river in Gorgasali street stands Mirza Phatali Akhundov Museum of Azerbaijan Culture<sup>99</sup> and the Spa. In Grishashvili Street is a bath as well. The aforementioned historian, Tinatim Chichua lived here, as one informant proudly told me, while he was showing me the book she donated him.<sup>100</sup> Today intellectuals involved in heritage protection are interested in the area, the above mentioned NGO, “Tiflis Hamqari”, had its office in Grishashvili street for a certain time. The “George Chubinashvili National Research Center for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation“ was commissioned to provide a statement on the side, before the “restructuring” of Mirza Shapi Street in 2008 began.<sup>101</sup> As one can see, there is no lack of significant places and persons which offer the residents the possibility to recognize their personal as well as the neighborhoods value for Tbilisian history.

In the living conditions and their perception one can find “hybrid narratives”<sup>102</sup>: The poor living conditions, for example deprivation of warm water alongside the comfort of the bath house, the self made terrace apartments and their representation of the city and disregard for the area apparent in the lacking renovations while being part of the city's ancient history. The feeling of disregard is most present in the experience of daily life, while the creation of significance is executed through the adaption of public discourses. Such a creation of meaning occurs not only in the discourse about housing, but also in the perception of changes in the cityscape.

### **3 Changed Prospects – Reconstructions in Old Tbilisi**

#### *The Balneological Health Resort*

In the first general plan of Tbilisi from 1934, a big part was dedicated to “Tbilisi as a balneological health resort” and to the “bath and washing resort”.<sup>103</sup> This was one of the reasons for the restructuring activities in the old center. The Spa in today's Gorgasali Street was built 1937.<sup>104</sup> In this plan was already the rebuilding of the Metekhi Bridge and the area around planed, but only in

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97 The monuments remembers the defense of the city against the Persians in 1795, by King Erekle II. and 300 men from Aragvia, see samasi aragveli, in: tbilisi entsik'lop'edia, p. 771.

98 Akhalashvili, uk'anono ngreva mirza shapis kuchaze, p. 35.

99 <http://www.azmuseum.ge/eng/index.html>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Febr. 2015.

100 Interview 24211, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

101 Historical-Architectural Research of the Projects Territory. Tbilisi Mirza Shapi Street [sap'roekt'o t'erit'oriis ist'oriul-arkitekt'uruli k'vleva. tbilisi mirza shapis kucha], Tbilisi 2007 (unpublished).

102 By “hybrid narratives” I refer to hybrid, flexible identities reflected in fluent, composite narratives which contain different, sometimes contradicting elements which reflect the adaption of the social reality as well as politics and ideology, see Easthope, Hazel: Fixed Identities in a Mobile World? The Relationship between Mobility, Place and Identity, in: Global Studies in Culture and Power 16 (2009), No. 1, pp. 61-82, p. 68.

103 Tifsovet (ed.), proekt rekonstruktsii Tiflis. Sokrashchenoe izdanie, p. 1, 3.

104 tbilisi entsik'lop'edia, p. 327.

the 1960s fully finished. The focus lay not on the renovation of the old baths in Abanotubani, but on building a new one. The residents of Kharpukhi told me no stories about this new establishment, even if they worked traditionally in the baths. Adjunct to the new spa was a hospital where different kinds of therapies were, and still are, offered. My informant mentioned once that the father of the former president Saakashvili worked here as a doctor.<sup>105</sup> At the moment a hotel is being built in one part of the buildings, while the other still serves as a health resort. This clinic does not seem to be integrated into the social structure (affecting peoples daily life) of the neighborhood, since people do hardly refer to it.

It has to be mentioned that, different to the 1970s, the early building activities (in the 1930s and 1950s) in the area of Abanotubani were less commented in newspapers. If it was, then the contrast between new socialist and none socialist – old style Tbilisi – structure was stressed. In my main informant's narratives building activities of this time were hardly mentioned, due to the fact that she did not witness them.

#### *The Church of 40 Martyrs of Sebaste*

I once showed her a new book which documented changes in Tbilisi.<sup>106</sup> She looked through the book and found the chapter about the Church of the 40 Martyrs of Sebaste. This church was demolished in the 1920s and later public toilets were built there. She could remember these rest rooms which were on her way to school and how she wrote something on the walls. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the toilets were destroyed and in the ground a fundament for a hotel was dug. But, “what sensation for Tbilisi”, the land was transferred to the Patriarchy and archaeologists and excavations were undertaken.<sup>107</sup> Today there is once more a church which reminds on the former one.

This shows how the perception of space changed. For my informant the toilets were mentioned, because she could remember them, while she has no personal relation to the newly built church or the excavations. The toilet might have been a anticlerical statement, but one has to keep in mind the living conditions in the area (with no bathrooms) and later the touristic exploration of the baths, so that public toilets were necessary. It should be mentioned that the toilets did not directly replace the church, but were built long after its demolishing and aside its location.

The statement of Elisashvili that the excavations in the area were favored before the commercial use, reflects the limited success of the Georgian intelligentsia in heritage protection after the

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105 Fieldnotes, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

106 Elisashvili, rogor sheitsvala tbilisi.

107 Ibidem, p. 25.

collapse of the Soviet Union. Their ideas are not considered, while ideological interests, like in Soviet times, or economical interests (which might be ideological as well, considering the neo-liberal program of Saakashvili) are in the focus of the city development. They were successful only during the time when the old center was renovated – from the 1970s until the end of the 1980s.

### *Gorgasali Square*

My host mentioned often Gorgasali Square, also known as Tatar Square, Shejtan Bazaar or just Meidan. This place is mentioned various times in different sources (residents, newspaper articles, photos) because of its relevance for the city's life as bazaar, caravansary and center of communication. That is also the reason for significant building activities taking place during the 1920s and 1950s. After World War II the building of a new bridge and the demolishing of the mosque were tackled. “One of the most interesting squares and quarters fell victim to these reconstructions,” Elisashvili laments in his book on the change of Tbilisi's cityscape.<sup>108</sup>

The housing situation made renovations in early Soviet times necessary. The living conditions were often really poor and one way to manage the populosity of Old Tbilisi was a better distribution of people in the area,<sup>109</sup> like it happened to my main informant who got two rooms in Old Tbilisi in the 1950s. The more surprising is that despite the need for new flats, buildings in this area were demolished, to make place for a new traffic knot. This is explainable due to the fact that Old Tbilisi did not fit into the image of a socialist city. There were practical and ideological reasons to rebuild “Tbilisi proper” in early Soviet times. Besides the needs for a better infrastructure, this renovations can be understood as a statement for the socialist city as well.

My host refers to this place because there she bought her groceries, and therefore was part of her daily life. When the bazaar disappeared she had to go to the Kolmeurneobi Bazaar (today there is the “Kolmeurneobi Carrefour”), at today's Baratashvili Street, which is much further away from her home.<sup>110</sup>

In front of Gorgasali Square stands Metekhi Church. In an article from 1959, different proposals for a statue of Vakhtang Gorgasali (the founder of Tbilisi) were discussed. This statue was intended to be placed on a platform at Metekhi Church, looking down on the old city. As it is said this competition was “very important for national fine arts” and the place was an important traffic junction.<sup>111</sup> Both notions show that (1) the former Tatar Square became a genuine Georgian project,

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<sup>108</sup> Ibidem, p. 31.

<sup>109</sup> Nino Asatiani: Prinzipien des städtischen Wohnungsbaus in Georgien der 20er und 30er Jahre, in: Symposium international sur l'art Géorgien, Tbilisi 1983, p. 12.

<sup>110</sup> Fieldnotes, 16<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

<sup>111</sup> Nodar Janberidze: Tender for the Vakhtang Gorgasali Monument Project [k'onk'ursi vakht'ang gorgasalis dzeglis p'roek't'ze, in: sabch'ota khelovneba 2 (1959), pp. 22-27, p. 22.

with great significance for the national culture. Another significant event for national culture was the renaming of the square after the founder of the capital and Georgian King – Vakhtang Gorgasali. This meant that it no longer referred to the “non-Georgian” population. It was not by chance that the project took place in the late 1950s. This is closely connected to the 1500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city and that is the official reason for establishing a statue of the city's founder. Even so the statue was erected no earlier than 1967. (2) The importance of the square is no longer defined by its social function as a bazaar or caravansary, but by its function as a traffic junction. Another reference to the image of the new socialist city, defined by its big streets.

These restructurings were also mentioned by an Iranian-Azerbaijani informant<sup>112</sup> and an old lady,<sup>113</sup> who was married to an Iranian man, which means that both are somehow Muslim or personally connected to the Muslim population of the neighborhood. The rebuilding of the Tatar Square and its renaming in the 1950s seems to be an incisive event for them. It intervened directly in the life of these people and erased a big part of their place-related memory from the city, because this area was home to their bazaar and the Shiite mosque. This mosque was called the Beautiful Mosque by the residents and on city maps from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Elisashvili calls it the “Blue Mosque” because of its blue minaret.<sup>114</sup> The lady told me that, when the mosque was destroyed in the 1950s, the roof came down and killed three workers.<sup>115</sup> It seems that in the narratives, the demolishing of this place caused immediate punishment for its desecration.

In the narrative of the Azerbaijani-Iranian neighbor, who showed me the area from his terrace, the whole site was settled by Iranians. The name of the neighborhood, Seydabad, named after the Seyed people brought from Iran to Tbilisi by King Rostam in the 17<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>116</sup> also refer to the Muslim population. While analyzing photos from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, one find a densely built up area, around today's Gorgasali Square and the bath district. All these houses were destroyed. In newspaper articles from the 1930s and 1950s, the ruination of this area was complimented as the “formation of the socialist city.”<sup>117</sup> The streets became really wide now, especially the new bridge, built in the 1940s, was much bigger now. Unfortunately the mosque disturbed its construction. The Iranian population was absent in this time, since they were deported to Kasakhstan a few years before. When they were rehabilitated and came back, their home had changed dramatically. This

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112 Interview 14212, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

113 Interview 15213, 21<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

114 Elisashvili, *rogor sheitsvala tbilisi*, p. 37.

115 Interview 15213, 21<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

116 *seidabadi*, in: *tbilisi entsik'lop'edia*, p. 826;

following another source the Seyeds were settled by Shah Sefi in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, see George Sanikidze: *A Historical Survey of Georgian-Iranian Relations in the Nineteenth Century*, in: *Journal of Persianate Studies* 1 (2008), pp. 148-173, p. 165.

117 *dzveli tbilisis parglebshi*, in: *k'omunist'i* 206 (16<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1950).

*New Tbilisi is Rising, but the Old? [shendeba akhali t'pilisi, magram dzveli?]*, in: *k'omunist'i* 205 (4<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1934).

also concerned the cemetery close to the botanical garden at the end of Mirza Shapi Street. It was shut down in the 1950s and moved to Ortachala.

Today the Azerbaijani government tries to place landmarks of Azeri life into Tbilisi. In Kharpukhi neighborhood and nearby are at least four such places: The garden at the baths is named Heydar Aliyev Park, the old Akhundov Club<sup>118</sup> next to the baths (formerly a theater and cinema) is now also named after Azerbaijan's ex dictator. A Museum of Azerbaijani Culture named after Mirza Fatali Akhundov was established in 2006,<sup>119</sup> and at the old Muslim cemetery are monuments for famous Azeri personalities, like Mirza Shapi Vazeh<sup>120</sup> (the street my informant lives in is named after him) or Mirza Fatali Akhundov. The 2008 demolished Nariman Narimanov<sup>121</sup> House Museum, which was located in Mirza Shapi Street, will be rebuilt according to a treaty signed by the Georgian and Azerbaijani government.<sup>122</sup> For my main informant it is unbearable that places in Georgia are named after Azerbaijani personalities, especially Heydar Aliyev who was just communist, as she said.<sup>123</sup> It seems that these places are not part of the memories of the residents in the neighborhood. When I tried to collect information about the destroyed Nariman Narimanov Museum in Mirza Shapi Street, almost nobody of the residents could even remember that there was such a museum, and if they could they said that it is located in Gorgasali Street now (there is the Museum of Azerbaijani Culture named after Mirza Fatali Akhundov), but this is a different museum. Mixing up the museums of two different Azeri persons might be understandable, but not even the staff in the Akhundov Museum was able to provide information, nor was the director of the museum willing to give me information about the Narimanov Museum. This shows that the memory to this formerly Muslim dominated site was erased and only persons who witnessed the old characteristic of the area around the former Tatar Square include it into their narratives. The new attempts of the Azerbaijani government to place their landmarks in the area are not successful, since the names refer just to their leader and the elites and not the community which lived and is still living their.

### *The Old Baths*

The most significant changes for my informant were the renovations of the bath district, beginning

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118 Named after Mirza Fatali Akhundov (1812-1878), an Azeri writer who lived in Tbilisi, see Akhundovi, Mirza Patali, in: *tbilisi entsik'lop'edia*, p. 317.

119 For information about the museum, see [http://www.georgianmuseums.ge/?lang=eng&id=1\\_1&sec\\_id=1&th\\_id=51](http://www.georgianmuseums.ge/?lang=eng&id=1_1&sec_id=1&th_id=51), 9<sup>th</sup> April 2015. The Website of the museum itself (<http://www.azmuseum.ge/>, 9<sup>th</sup> April 2015) is currently not working. Apart from the exhibition about Mirza Patali Akhundov, Nariman Narimanov and Mamed Kuli Zade the museum shows mainly information about the former Azerbaijani leader Heydar Aliyev.

120 Mirza Shapi Vazeh (1794-1854), an Iranian-Azeri writer who lived in Tbilisi, see Marina Alexidze: *Persians in Georgia (1801-1921)*, in: *Journal of Persianate Studies* 1 (2008), pp. 254-260, p. 258.

121 Nariman Narimanov (1870-1925), an Azeri dramatist, see Audrey L. Altstadt: *The Azerbaijani Turks. Power and Identity under Russian Rule*, Stanford 1992, p. 51.

122 Georgia to restore ruined Nariman Narimanov Museum, <http://en.trend.az/news/society/1389331.html>, 28<sup>th</sup> Febr. 2015.

123 Fieldnotes, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

in the 1970s. They were executed together with the ideological upgrading of Old Tbilisi in this time, and for the stimulation of tourism. A big emphasis was put on the restoration of significant places in the old center. Only places which were considered to be characteristic for Old Tbilisi were chosen for the revitalization project: the old city wall at Baratashvili Street and the baths. For the latter the representative building of the Orbeliani Bath is one example of the big emphasis put on a proper rehabilitation of the site. Experts from Uzbekistan were consulted and material from Samarkand ordered for the renovation of the “extraordinary blue facade.”<sup>124</sup> The upper Kharpukhi neighborhood was not part of such sumptuous renovations. The Mirzoeva Bath, the one which served the local residents for their daily needs, was not renovated by the government. The embellished interior looks more self made, but it is still in use, while the Orbeliani Bath is closed. My host said that in the 1990s the baths did not work even if the sulfur water was still running. This must have been a hard time to the lady, since she does not own a bathroom which means she depends on this bathhouse, as other residents also do. This dependence creates trouble when the bath is not working and one should not forget that the sulfur water is hot, which means it is not that pleasant in summer.

Once my host's Azerbaijani friends went to the bath, it was incredibly hot, as summertime is usually hot in Tbilisi. When they came back, they were complaining about the baths. They told me that there was no cold, but just the hot sulfur water. The Georgian lady commented on it with the words, “in the baths they are cheaters”.<sup>125</sup> Apparently the baths are not only places of amusement and places of bohemian city life, but also the hardship of the daily life. While at the same time these places serve as a tool to place oneself in history and assign significance to her or his own neighborhood. The narrative tool offered for the latter, were improved in the 1980s when the baths were renovated, and objects of folklorist accounts were linked to the new established city festival Tbilisoba. Around these holidays the newspapers printed articles about the places and events from Tbilisi's history.<sup>126</sup> The baths were perfect for such portrayals since they are located at the very center – they are old and a lot of myths are placed around them. Such narratives are provided through a visit of Alexander Pushkin to the baths, to which a plaque at the Orbeliani Bath refers to. Grishashvili assigns to the baths the function of a marriage market and the place for gossip – a narrative which appears often in the stories of the residents of Tbilisi and the neighborhood. As my informant said, the baths were places for gossip and one of her neighbors was married to her husband by matchmaking.

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124 The Bath Changes its “Cloths” [abano “samosels” itsvli], in: *tbilisi* (10<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1984).

125 She used the word “aperisti”, which was sometimes used by the Georgian neighbors when they referred to the Armenians, here she referred to the Azeri workers in the bath. This shows how the narrative does absolutely not fit to the practice, since her guests were Azeris as well, but they suffered from their “cheating” compatriots, *Fieldnotes*, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2014.

126 The Baths of Old Tbilisi [dzveli tbilisis abanoebi], in: *akhalgazrda k'omunist'i* 130 (27<sup>th</sup> Oct 1984);

The sixth Firework of Tbilisis 1500 years [1500 ts'lis tbilisis meekvse peiervk'i], in: *akhalgazrda k'omunist'i* 131 (30<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1984).



In the 1980s renovations of the baths started. From 2010 on this part of Tbilisi was renovated the new and the baths offered again their services to tourists. These establishments present different offers to tourists such as single bathrooms or massages, but for people in the neighborhood, it is not affordable, since the prices can go up to 50 Lari for a single bathroom. While the local bath is adapted to the needs of the residents, the newly renovated ones serve as amusement of tourists or the rich. The commercial use of the baths for foreigners has a long tradition, as shown in the aforementioned narratives about Dumas' and Pushkin's visits to the baths.

### *Recent Renovations*

Looking through photos of the bath district, taken at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one can easily realize the similarities to today. The houses with their balconies are already built at their current places. Also my informant's house looks almost exactly as it does today. From whom and why these photos were made I don't know,<sup>127</sup> but they appear from time to time on internet platforms, in books, newspapers and the national archive, not to mention the city's museum which has a huge collection of them. Altogether these pictures determine the idea of Old Tbilisi until today. The renovations carried out from the 1970s and later on, follow the image of these photos until the last detail. Even when renewed, the cityscape was copied from these old photos. The appearance of Narikala Hill today looks more like the hundred year old photos than those of Soviet times. "Typical" Tbilisian elements such as the balcony were emphasized.

As it happens, my host could observe these changes in the old center from her balcony. Sitting in her flat, she started to tell me what she thinks about the latest "renovations" in the area: All houses had been destroyed and then rebuilt. On this occasion the streets were made wider. But this is not "like it was". The houses "were not made in the old style [dzveleburī st'ilshī]"<sup>128</sup>. What characterized the old city had been the narrow streets. No car were able to drive there, and now more houses would stand on the Narikala Hill. Almost all houses had been destroyed, she told me. They had been in really bad conditions, but not that bad. Her street "was not beautiful," but the one on the other side of the gorge had been, she told me.<sup>129</sup>

Another Georgian neighbor added that down at the baths the houses had been "typical" for the city. They were historic and there they had been regenerated. The houses in Baratashvili Street were also beautifully renovated. These renewals had started already in the 1970s. Shevardnadze had planned to

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127 The photos were taken between the 1870s and 1900s. In the National Archive of Georgia and the Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi Historical Museum – Carvasla are collections of these photos, more photos are provided by "Tiflis Hamqari" and in Elisashvili, rogor sheitsvala tbilisi.

128 Fieldnotes, 3<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

129 Fieldnotes, 3<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

renovate the whole old city. Dependent on financial capacities the renovations had been executed step by step. She lamented that they had not reached Grishashvili Street, but such renovations had also been planned in Kharpukhi, due to financial shortages and the collapse of the SU, the plan had not been executed. And, she continued, “in the 90s nothing happened, it was a dead time.”<sup>130</sup> Then she referred to the last decade, and told me that “Saakashvili and his people”, a businessman,<sup>131</sup> wanted to own the whole neighborhood to build a shopping mall. The government had owned a company which wanted to renovate everything, but the investors drew back. She added that the old government wanted to own everything and had help from America. But on 5<sup>th</sup> of July would be elections, then there will be a new mayor, she presaged.<sup>132</sup> Then she pointed to some houses down the Grishashvili Street, which are visible from her shop. They had been built four years ago, in the style of Old Tbilisi, she said, but they were not old.<sup>133</sup> Referring to the “old style” means referring to this old photos. The woman here has not witnessed all of the houses on the photos, she is too young. Nevertheless, she connects Old Tbilisi with old style houses. These houses have to be in good conditions, not like the ones in her neighborhood, but like the renovated ones in Baratashvili Street and at the baths and she would like that such renovations are carried out in her quarter as well. That means, what really matters for her is the “typical” Tbilisian style, that is the “national form”, and comfort.

It seems that the building activities of the last years intended to erase Soviet benchmarks from the cityscape and substitute them with the “real Tbilisi” – or at least the idea the city planners have of it. I once had an appointment with an architect, involved in the first concept of King's Garden Project in Mirza Shapi Street. As he mentioned, he got the job to build a hotel hillside of Narikala Fortress. On this occasion he tried to show how this building could fit into the area, he took actual photos of the side and old ones (the ones mentioned from end of 19<sup>th</sup> century), combined them in a photo-montage software and got the picture of the area as it would be after the renovation. He called this project “Tbilisi Metafisica – the aura of Old Tbilisi”, because houses were just reconstructions – not really Old Tbilisi – but for him it represented its aura.<sup>134</sup> The renovations were partly carried out in such a manner and the same method he should use for a design of King's Garden Project. These copies of old style houses were shown on postcards from 2007 which advertised this project.<sup>135</sup>

The Georgian lady explained to me that these new houses would look beautiful but something is

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130 Interview 14211, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

131 Maybe she referred to Giorgi Svanidze, owner of Capital Partners of Georgia, whose company planned the King's Garden Project in Mirza Shapi Street and is responsible for the illegal razing of the buildings there.

132 It was election time for the city's parliament and she is a follower of the party “Georgian Dream”, governing Georgia since 2012, with a big party-flag on the roof of her house. She expected a victory of her party.

133 Fieldnotes, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

134 Interview 24121, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

135 *me miq'vars tbilisi [I love Tbilisi]*, 2007.

missing – her neighbors are not living there anymore.<sup>136</sup> The newly built houses are not part of my host's memory, and probably neither of the other residents which were born in the Soviet Union. For her the idea of Old Tbilisi derives not from some hundred year old photos but from her experience. Her memory is connected to the houses and the residents inside. As Sideri points out, material culture becomes the bearer of memory and thereby part of peoples biography.<sup>137</sup> Things are witnesses of history and by this they represent the past which was experienced by people. The old houses are closely connected to my informant's narratives and are witnesses of history in general. Such mediums of memory have disappeared, and therefore a part of her biography along with them. The erasers of memory cannot be honest people for her. These houses had been demolished and built newly, she explained, because the building company involved could gain more money. “1000 Lari were used for the construction and 4000 Lari for themselves.” This had been the case also in her street, she said, but here they had not continued to build because the mountain is slipping down.<sup>138</sup>

Her statements show that she disagrees with the idea of Old Tbilisi provided through the reconstructions. It is something strange which replaced her familiar environment. She said that once up on a time she could walk from her neighborhood to Rustaveli Street and knew almost everybody and could greet all people on her way, now there would be no one.<sup>139</sup> It shows also how memory and material culture are connected. She knew the residents of the houses in the old center, which have now disappeared (for different reasons – some died, some left Georgia, some moved to other neighborhoods) and the new, renovated houses are not connected to her memory and do not represent Old Tbilisi as she knew it.

One can refer to the concept of authenticity or aura introduced by Walter Benjamin. In his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility”<sup>140</sup> he points out that authenticity refers to the witness of history which characterizes the artwork and therefore refer an aura to it. While the reproduced art work is deprived from this feature.<sup>141</sup> For Benjamin “architecture has always offered the prototype of an artwork that is received in a state of distraction and through the collective.”<sup>142</sup> He states that buildings are “perceived in a twofold manner: by use and by perception. Or better: tactilely and optically.” The former “comes about [...] by way of habit,”<sup>143</sup>

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136 Fieldnotes, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

137 Sideri, Pearls are a girl's best friend, p. 99.

138 Fieldnotes, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

139 Fieldnotes, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

140 Walter Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility [Third Version], in: Benjamin, Walter: The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and other Writings on Media, Harvard 2008, pp. 251-283.

141 Ibidem, p. 245.

142 Ibidem, p. 268.

143 Ibidem.

which is the daily life of my informant and her use of her “typical Tbilisian” balcony. The latter refers to the perception of “the characteristic appearance of the Tbilisian residential houses”<sup>144</sup>, not only by the neighbors, but also in the discourses of the national elites. Charles Lindholm states, that a sacred meaning system is channeled into sacred objects and that “followers maintained their spiritual connection by worship of those items imbued with the charismatic aura.”<sup>145</sup> In the case of my informant as well as the Georgian intellectuals the connection to the Georgian nation, a sacred meaning system,<sup>146</sup> is established through the worship of the “authentic” Tbilisian cityscape.

One could imagine that the houses look like before, but it is “more different” and “not like it was” as my informant say. Something is missing and in the case of my informant it is the residents and the aura of the houses which represent her memory. It is the habit, her experience which was “written” into the buildings. Such habits can be connected to any building, if they are hundreds or just twenty years old, if they are “typical” Tbilisian, or traditional, or heritage protected, all this does not really matter in the perception of the dwellers. This is what she means when she says that “it is not like it was,” even if the houses might look more “traditional” now.

In the design for the reconstruction of Old Tbilisi a reference is made to the idea of an aura by ascribing some kind of spirit to the old center, as it was the case of the project “Tbilisi Metafisica – the aura of Old Tbilisi”. But in this case authenticity is a deviation from how Benjamin understands it. According to the project's idea the artwork itself (it is the houses on the postcards) represent the aura and therefore its reproduction must include it as well, because they look like the representation of Old Tbilisi on a photo. This huge misunderstanding of the idea of authenticity, is reflected in the rejection of this reconstructions by the dwellers. Intellectuals complain about the reproduced houses as well. The aura is, after all, not included in the reproduction of art. This is exactly what Benjamin means by referring to photography as the medium of reproduction, which deprives the artwork from its aura. The photos, as a reproduced artwork lack authenticity, so the copy of the image (the new old style houses), represented on the photo must lack this aura even more. They are somehow two times reproduced, first when the photo was taken and second when the image on the photo was materialized. Even if the dwellers are not aware of Benjamin's concept of authenticity, for them the buildings lack memory and the witness of history. One can refer to the idea of a “non-place” of Marc Augé.<sup>147</sup> If the old buildings were places which can be “defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity” the new buildings “cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or

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144 Jaoshvili, Tbilisi, p. 369.

145 Charles Lindholm: *Authenticity, Anthropology and the Sacred*, in: 75 (2002), No. 2, pp. 331-338, p. 331.

146 The poet and politician of the early Georgian national movement Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907), for example was canonized by the Georgian Orthodox Church as “Ilia the Righteous”, see sakartvelos biografiuli leksik’oni, <http://www.nplg.gov.ge/bios/ka/00000803/>; 18<sup>th</sup> September 2015.

147 Marc Augé: *Non-Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, London; New York 2000.

concerned with identity”, they are a “non-place”. Both “never exist in pure form [...] place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed[...].”<sup>148</sup> Some photos which provide a reference to the past are not part of the memory of the Kharpukehi dwellers, because they are too old, for them they belong to a mystical past. Others are included in their memories, like the old mosque. In any case the material reproductions of these images lack the aura and are therefore “non-places”.

The city hall uses the aforementioned photos as an archetype to build an old center for tourists. It serves the distraction of the visitor and the residents, but it lacks the “habit” and memory connected with it. This does not mean that it cannot acquire it, but it is unlikely since it is not used by the residents and the tourist is rather an ephemera and usually not able to establish place related habits. The residents' memory is eliminated with the substitution of the old buildings with new look-alikes. This process is nothing new and is used also for ideological statements, like the contradiction between socialist and feudal city, or the demolishing of the Blue Mosque and building a new traffic knot. But the socialist reconstruction served rather daily needs (at least the new built districts), than the new buildings do. The latter serve purely distraction.

The concept of aura, touched upon in the discourses about the renovations in the old city becomes even more crucial, if one considers the claim for authenticity by the Georgian intelligentsia. It is understandable that for my host the erasure of her memory out of the cityscape creates an unpleasant feeling. But the same feeling is expressed by the Georgian intelligentsia which lived mostly in neighborhoods far from the old center. Their anxiety refers to the disappearance of this aura and with it the witness of national history. The intellectuals claim to represent a past which is presented in the cultural heritage of the city. Manning and Shatirishvili call it “a process of idealization of Old Tbilisi on the ground of high culture, as a result of which Grishasvili's book [...] became a 'cult' classic”, which began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>149</sup>. Both authors analyze this idealization in the presentations of the kinto. As they say, the “kinto is a staged figure, a dramaturgic role played by the intelligentsia actor on the stage of the theatre or the city, a style to be adopted and discarded at will.”<sup>150</sup> This applies not only for the adoption of historic figures but also for the cityscape itself, whose (re)construction took place by adopting the old photos of the city, they are the stage setting which must be preserved or reconstructed. As mentioned before also the balconies became genuine Georgian features of the Tbilisi. Here the process of producing authenticity becomes crucial, as Lincoln points it with the words of Daniel Miller: “[...] Authenticity is [...]”

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148 Ibidem, pp. 77f.

149 Manning; Shatirishvili, *The Exoticism and Eroticism of the City*, p. 266.

150 Ibidem, p. 267.

manufactured by self-aware actors seriously playing with the possibilities of achieving meaning in a contingent and open field of symbols, objects, and experiences.”<sup>151</sup>

By claiming this, one should not forget that people make use of the discourses offered by the intelligentsia. My informant knows Grishashvili, some residents even know him personally, same as the historian, Tinatin Chichua. People refer to concepts offered by this intellectuals and others, like Elene Akhvledianis paintings of Old Tbilisi:

“Old Tbilisi was more nice, more different on Elene Akhvledianis pictures. Now more is destroyed and made very much superfluous [...]. [dzveli tbilisi upro lamazi, upro skhvanairi iqo Elene Akhvledianis dakhatuli. akhla mere upro daangries da ashenes dzalian bevri zedmetoba miamates]”<sup>152</sup>

Old Tbilisi in her eyes is what she experienced by herself. She can refer to it by the paintings of Elene Akhvlediani. They contain the aura of the artwork and of the houses represented in it at the same time. Additionally the paintings contain the authority of the intelligentsia, in this case the famous “Georgian Folk Painter” who painted the city from my host's balcony. These works of art (the book of Grishashvili and the paintings of Elene Akhvlediani) serve as “narrative tools”, and the concepts represented in it became a “common place”, like the idea of Old Tbilisi, the baths or the balcony. At the same time these concepts are not consciously part of the neighbors daily life. This “common places” serve primarily their needs: people simply wash themselves in the baths if they have no bathroom, meet their friends on the balcony and live in the old terrace houses. These “habits”, as Benjamin calls it, are not always presented as the “real” Old Tbilisi. But for example, if from time to time an anthropologists asks them, they become aware of the relevance of their neighborhood and try to place it in a greater context.

The discourse on Old Tbilisi is not only adapted by the residents, as their “narrative tool” to organize their memory but additionally it is used by the city hall and businesses in the old center. The former renovates and rebuilds old houses in the way that they look alike the old photographs while placing symbols in the city which are understood by the residents as references to Old Tbilisi's life. For Tbilisians and tourists they should represent the lost multicultural past. At Gorgasali Square one can find a statue of the ashughi<sup>153</sup> Sayat Nova (1712-1795)<sup>154</sup> and at the Right Bank of Mtkvari river stands a statue of Ietim Gurji (1875-1840)<sup>155</sup> – another ashughi.

This Orientalization of the own past started already at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, as postcards from this

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151 Lindholm, *Authenticity, Anthropology and the Sacred*, p. 337.

152 Interview 15211, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2013.

153 Ashughi were poets which performed their lyrics mostly in songs, they are described as a characteristic for Old Tbilisi, see ashughi, in: *tbilisi entsik'lop'edia*, p. 312.

They are like the kinto an example for a peculiarity of Old Tbilisi given in folklorist descriptions of the city.

154 *Ibidem*, p. 769.

155 *Ibidem*, p. 558.

time show. Manning and Shatirishvili claim that “in the Orientalizing Russian literary imaginative geography of the Caucasus, Georgia is exoticized and eroticized as languid 'Oriental' woman.”<sup>156</sup> As they say, figures of Old Tbilisi's life represent the historic Tbilisi. The reprint of Grishashvili's “cult' classic” made sure that the concept of Old Tbilisi was spread. Today probably every Tbilisian has an idea of what Old Tbilisi means (since it corresponds also to an administrative unit), and this “common place” is used for business. For example, hillside the razed Mirza Shapi Street in Grishashvili Street a new bath and restaurant were built. The name of the latter is “Bohema” which might refer to Grishashvili's “cult' classic” Old Tbilisi's Literary Bohemia. Another example are restaurant names like “kinto” or “ashughi”, this places are not always located in the historic center. The new baths provide an Oriental atmosphere but they are made now mainly for distraction (that is why they are so expensive) and not for the residents daily needs.

### *Mirza Shapi Street*

The demolishing of Mirza Shapi Street is somehow the culmination of Kharpukhi's history, because this street, along with Grishashvili Street, represents the neighborhood since the time the old photos appeared. One can see how the houses on these hundred year old pictures looked like before they were demolished in 2008. This is why these sources were also used for statements on the value of the street for architectural heritage of Mirza Shapi Street.<sup>157</sup> These photos served also as a first proposal for the reconstruction of this street. The same architect who created the project “Tbilisi Metafisica” was assigned with the urban planning of Mirza Shapi Street<sup>158</sup> but the building company CPG fired him. The razing of the street was completely illegal and until today every plan of this company is refused by the city hall, since they ignore orders given for this area.<sup>159</sup> My host states that the rock on which the houses were built is crumbling down now. With the razing of the buildings an outstanding stone was destroyed. It was called “Surdos Kva”, which means “Cold Stone”. It was always warm and in old times people took their children there to be cured when they had a cold. As one explanation claims, the name of the neighborhood Kharpukhi derives from the name of this stone. Following this claim Kharpukhi is Armenian for cold.<sup>160</sup> Only neighbors which were defined as outstandingly educated or experts told me this story. For them it was totally incomprehensible that this stone was destroyed, because it could serve as a tourist attraction as well. Besides that some houses were listed as monuments, they demanded excavations in this area, because of its age. As some of them told, the houses there were in bad conditions and had to be

156 Manning; Shatirishvili, *The Exoticism and Eroticism of the City*, p. 262.

157 sap'roekt'o t'erit'oriis ist'oriul-arkitekt'uruli k'vela.

158 As he says the building company wanted to apply his idea for Narikala hill (Tbilisi Metafisica) at Mirza Shapi Street, Interview 24121, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

159 Interview 24121, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

160 Interview 14311, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

razed anyway, this was not the problem, but

„as a result we get a inadequate mock surrounding, whose main character will not be a modern environment, but a 'kitsch eclecticism' [shedegad mivighebt umashtabo butaporiul garemos, romlis mtavar makhasiatebeli gakhdeba ara dghevandeli bunebrioba, aramed 'kichuri eklekturi']“.<sup>161</sup>

The critic sounds similar to the statement of Beridze who described the facades of Tbilisian houses as „eclectic“ style, adopting different architectural features.<sup>162</sup> In the 1980s this critic appeared again when the renovations of Baratashvili Street were discussed.<sup>163</sup> The statement laments on a lack of authenticity, which is alien to the capital of Georgia. The same critic is formulated by my informant who refers to the authentic houses on the paintings from Elene Akhvlediani. Authenticity becomes the most important characteristic for the „typical“ Old Tbilisi.

The city hall in contrast has another idea of how Tbilisi should be. The so called „kitsch eclecticism“ is one of the most eye-catching modes to restructure Old Tbilisi, besides the new modernist buildings. This follows the need to attract the city for tourists and investors. It was not random that Mirza Shapi Street was destroyed. It was due to its location in the very center and its attraction for international investors and architects.<sup>164</sup> As informants told, they had very good contacts to Saakashvili's government,<sup>165</sup> one person even told that the former president's mother wanted the street to be destroyed.<sup>166</sup>

Construction seems to be the only sector where rapid success is visible. Furthermore every government try to place its own landmarks into the center. The communists built the socialist city and modernized the old center, especially at Gorgasali Square. Later they renovated the old center, due to the growth of the national movement. The Saakashvili government, built new modernist buildings in the center and it seems that the actual authorities perform the same way. The latest project is called “Panorama Tbilisi“, which will change the entire cityscape, due to the construction of 4 hotels and a cable car which connects them. Two of the buildings will stand close to the palace of Bidzina Iavanishvili, the former prime minister, who is the main investor of the project.<sup>167</sup> The building will emphasize his residence and underline his significance, since his party is governing the country and the capital as well.

This shows that the area becomes part of the commercialization of Old Tbilisi which follows, on the

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161 Akhalashvili: uk'anono ngreva mirza shapis kuchaze, p. 36.

162 Beridze, tbilisis khurotmodzghvrebā 1801-1917 ts'lebi, p. 112.

163 Gersamia, Zur Frage der Regeneration alter Stadtviertel von Tbilissi, p. 2.

164 Capital Partners of Georgia Realize Great Plans in Georgia [Capital Partners Of Georgia sakartveloshi grandiozul gegmebs ganakhorzielebs], in: The Georgian Times 31 (10<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2009).

165 Interview 23121, 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov. 2013.

166 Interview with Marina Khatiashvili, 13<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

167 Georgian Co-Investment Fund's 2014 projects: Further transparency needed, <http://transparency.ge/en/node/4279>, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2014.



one hand an exotic idea of Old Tbilisi, deriving from the photos of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to attract the city for tourists. On the other hand any government underlines its claim to power by shaping the cityscape. The needs of the residents were never considered, by the last government. The reference of some residents to the heritage protectors suggest that they agree more with their point of view.

### *Modernist Buildings*

In my host's eyes the new houses with the old style facades lack the aura of Old Tbilisi, while modernist buildings like the Peace Bridge are not even part of Tbilisi:

“I personally don't like this bridge, not only I, also Aleko [Aleksander Elisashvili] does not like it. [...] Our president [Saakashvili] and Ugulava [former mayor of Tbilisi] went and saw, they saw there, they saw there and they learned something, they came, spread golden things, made watches this this this, it is not peculiar to us. Maybe they made it good but I know what I want! In Germany they do it like us? No. They have their own rules, those are just their traditions. In England its also like this, why should I study? I'm someone! I have history! I'm not a new nation! Somebodies rules, this is America. You understand? The new world, America is not a homeland”<sup>168</sup>

This shows a big discern with the “rootless cosmopolitanism” against which the Soviet state placed its national policy.<sup>169</sup> In some publications of the 1960s and later the eclectic style of Tbilisian houses was criticized<sup>170</sup> but later presented as “typical Tbilisian”.<sup>171</sup> Ethnic and national particularity of the different territories was celebrated as the expression of the “friendship of the peoples”, which would enrich the Soviet culture. Each nation contributes its part to the worlds culture, as Stalin stated:

“Every nation, whether large or small, has its own specific qualities and its own peculiarities, which are unique to it and which other nations do not have. These peculiarities form a contribution that each nation makes to the common treasury of world culture, adding to it and enriching it. In this sense all nations, both small and large, are in the same position and each nation is equal to any other nation.”<sup>172</sup>

Once when we had a walk in the old center, the lady lamented once more about the new renovations in the area. She asked me whether I like my own mother before another one, this would be the same with cities, she said, other cities were also beautiful, but for a Georgian, the own city would be the favorite one.<sup>173</sup> The idea of a genuine characteristic of each ethnos had its roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century and was taken for granted by the Soviet state.<sup>174</sup> It was never questioned in Georgia until recently, from

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168 [me p'iradad es khidi ar momts'ons. mart'o me k'i ara, alekosats ar mots'ons. [...] es ts'avida chveni p'rezident'i da Ugulava, da nakhes, ik nakhes, ik nakhes, raghatsa sheitvises, movidnen, okrouli daaskhes, saatebi gaak'etes es es. es chvneburadi araa, sheidzleba gaak'etos k'argi, magram me ra minda vitsi! germaniashi gaak'eten chvneburad? ara. ima tavisi ts'es sada chveulebebia. inglisshits aset, me rat'om unda ists'avle. me vighatsis! me istoria makvs! me ara var akhali eri. vighatsis ts'esebi, es amerik'aa, gaige? akhali kveq'niereba, amerik'a ar aris samshoblo.] Interview 15211, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2013.

169 Yuri Slezkine: The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism, in: Slavic Review 53 (1994), Nr. 2, pp. 414-452, p. 448.

170 Beridze, tbilisis khurotmodzhgveba 1801-1917 ts'lebi, p. 112.

171 Gersamia, Zur Frage der Regeneration alter Altstadtviertel von Tbilissi, p. 2.

172 Ibidem, p. 449.

173 Fieldnotes, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

174 Slezkine, The USSR as a Communal Apartment, p. 414.

here comes also the rejection of the “rootless cosmopolitanism”. The new modernist buildings are extraneous elements which intruded the cityscape. They are not part of the country's old history, only two persons (the president and the mayor) saw these kind of buildings somewhere and wanted to build something similar in Georgia. This modernist architecture is American (which is not even a homeland [samshoblo]) and is characterized by an absence of history. Georgia on the contrary is characterized by an old history and is an old nation [eri].

Besides the Peace Bridge and the golden statue of Saint George the demolishing of Mirza Shapi Street and the building of new Restaurants and baths on the right side of the street are other examples of the intrusion of modernist buildings in the old center. According to the Georgian lady on the right side of her street “were no houses [before] because of the sulfur springs.”<sup>175</sup> It means construction there must destroy the springs and therefore Tbilisi itself, since it is named after the hot springs. This narrative refers to the idea of an eclectic, alien and even hostile architecture which was expressed in the 1960s by Vakhtang Beridze<sup>176</sup>, in the 1980s by Tamas Gersamia<sup>177</sup> and later by Maia Mania.<sup>178</sup> The modernist buildings are brought from foreign countries to Tbilisi, which is understood as unnecessary because “Georgia has history”.

The idea of a pure Georgian culture is expressed here. While the “eclectic architecture” of the “typical” Tbilisian houses is not a problem, the modernist buildings are. The kitsch reconstructions of the old center are a problem as are the modernist buildings as well. Only the preservation and renovation of old buildings is accepted as it was done from the 1970s until the 1990s. They are an expression of the national character of Georgia and not “rootless” as the new modernist buildings are.

My informant has a powerful ally for her point of view: Aleksandre Elisashvili, who is engaged in the NGO “Tiflis Hamqari”. Referring to intellectuals is always part of the narratives on Old Tbilisi. The impact which such different personalities like Stalin, Grishashvili, Akhvlediani and Elisashvili have on the narratives, is due to the idea of culture which focuses on authenticity and/or national particularity, which all of them share to some extent. In many statements of intellectuals a connection between the cityscape and the nature is underlined – by referring to the “nests of swallows”,<sup>179</sup> stressing the “organic” character of the city,<sup>180</sup> stating a determination of the city by the “local topography”<sup>181</sup> and that Mirza Shapi Street was “coalesced with its environment”.<sup>182</sup> In

175 Interview 15211 24.11.2013.

176 Beridze, *tbilisi khurotmodzhgveba 1801-1917 ts'lebi*, p. 112.

177 Gersamia: *Zur Frage der Regeneration alter Stadtviertel von Tbilissi*, p. 2.

178 Mania, *Tbilisi – a unique system of houses with courtyards*, p. 11.

179 *dzveli tbilisi parglebshi*, in: *k'omunist'i* 206 (16<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1950).

180 Elisashvili, *rogor sheitsvala tbilisi*, p. 7.

181 Mania, *Tbilisi Architectural Heritage to be Preserved*, p. 6.

182 Akhalashvili: *uk'anono ngreva mirza shapis kuchaze*, p. 36.

early Soviet times the socialist city should replace the “nest of swallows” while later, age and a natural character were positive attributes, which were referred to Tbilisi by intellectuals.

The building of modernist buildings represents the nemesis of the national culture. The idea of being one of the oldest cultures and nations in the world (contrary to new nations like America or Azerbaijan), is a “commonplace” within the Georgian national narrative. This idea refers to the “Golden Age” of the reign of King Tamar in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. And the “nostalgia for this cultural past turned national history into a work of art, an illustration of Georgians' aesthetic superiority.”<sup>183</sup> This “cultural nationalism”<sup>184</sup> finds its expression also in the perception of the “own” architecture, or better said the idea of it. This idea was established through the integration of Old Tbilisi into the national culture by declaring it a “national protected zone” in the 1970s.<sup>185</sup> This idea was not suppressed by the Soviet state but supported. Not only the renovation of buildings took place but also a revival of an idealized culture of Old Tbilisi. The establishment of the city festival Tbilisoba in the 1970s as well as the publication of articles like “Our Old and Always Young City”<sup>186</sup>, “How Can we Bring Back the Old Shops of Old Tbilisi”<sup>187</sup> or “Old Tbilisis New Life”<sup>188</sup> aimed at strengthen the interest in the capital, especially the old center. It seems to be an education project of the Soviet intelligentsia to reinforce national consciousness and reinventing the city culture, which at this time was inseparably connected with Georgian culture. This project was quite successful.

Georgian culture was overall distinguished through its age. Connecting the value of a nation to its age (“Georgia is a homeland – America not”) is explainable by the uncritical appropriation of the concept of nation into the Georgian historiography and the promotion of this idea by the Soviet state. It was claimed that national consciousness in Georgia reaches back into antique times.<sup>189</sup> Nevertheless, since the 1950s it was common sense in the architectural history of Tbilisi that the “typical” Tbilisian house with its balcony was a mix of “Oriental”, Russian and European influences.<sup>190</sup> Only recently this primordial concept has been challenged in Georgian historical science and a more constructivist approach been spread.<sup>191</sup>

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183 Jones, Georgia, p. 15.

184 Ibidem, p. 16.

185 This time Pushkin Street [amjerad p'ushk'inis kucha], in: *tbilisi* (9<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1989).

186 Old Tbilisis New Life [dzveli tbilisi akhali sitsotskhle], in: *soplis tskhovreba* (27<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1984).

187 How Can we Bring Back the Old Shops of Old Tbilisi [rogor davubrunot dzvel tbiliss dzveli maghaziebi?], in: *tbilisi* 203 (2<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 1982).

188 Our Old and Always Young City [chemi dzveli da marad ch'abuk'i kalaki], in: *tbilisi* 161 (13<sup>th</sup> July 1982).

189 Oliver Reisner: Zum Begriff Eri in der georgischen Historiographie, in: *Georgica* 35 (2012), pp. 62-77, p. 72.

190 Meskhia, *tbilisis istoria*;

Beridze, *tbilisis khurotmodzhvrebha 1801-1917 ts'lebi*;

Gersamia, *Zur Frage der Regeneration alter Stadtviertel von Tbilissi*.

191 Reisner, *Zum Begriff Eri in der georgischen Historiographie*, p. 73.

### *The Georgian Intelligentsia and the City*

The reference to the Georgian intelligentsia in the perception of Old Tbilisi can be shown in the narrative about Elene Akhvlediani and her works of art. My main informant mentioned often that the famous Georgian painter Elene Akhvlediani came in her house to sit on the balcony and paint the old city. The artist had studied in Paris and Milan in the 1920s, until she returned to Tbilisi in 1927. Her main subject in painting was Old Tbilisi. Her flat became a meeting point for “cultural workers” of her lifetime. As it is said, the interior was not changed after her death and functioned as some kind of club for artists and intellectuals.<sup>192</sup>

It is not surprising that the painter chose my host's balcony to paint the old city, because the view on this area is overwhelming. We were often standing there and she showed me details of Old Tbilisi. She did not miss one single moment to tell anybody that such a famous person had visited her house to paint. By using the “Georgian Folk Painter” as witness for the importance of her house, especially her balcony, she uses a “narrative tool” which is addressed to a Georgian audience. This is her own group – the one to which she wants to belong. When we visited places like museums she never talked about her Azerbaijani neighbors, even if they were not unknown persons (as she told me, one of them was a journalist and another one became a famous architect in Baku).<sup>193</sup> This also shows her appreciation for persons which are representatives of Georgian culture. In the Soviet society “the concept of 'kul'turnost'”, widely accepted as an index of good manners, honesty, education, and decency in interpersonal relations,”<sup>194</sup> was referred to the intelligentsia. “Less educated groups, people whose lack of erudition or indifference to high culture became associated with a lack of civilization and with 'backwardness.'”<sup>195</sup> In Georgia, the producers of culture (such as Elene Akhvlediani), were connected to a genuine Georgian culture, as Manning shows:

“The primary role of the intelligentsia was to take care of the Nation, while the State took care of socialism (as in the phrase 'National in form Socialist in content'). Hence cultural production of culture was almost always about the Nation. Culture was foremost a set of national forms, a set of ideologies of ethnolinguistic identity.”<sup>196</sup>

The Georgian intelligentsia established their own monuments – most importantly, two pantheons. In one of them Akhvlediani is buried. As Manning says, Tbilisi was not connected with Georgian culture in the eyes of the Soviet intelligentsia until the 1960s. This perception changed later on as the state rooted the intelligentsia in the city by virtually inscribing their existence, by establishing

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192 Akhvlediani, Elene, in: *tbilisi entsik'lop'edia*, p. 316.

193 Interview 15211, 23<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2013

194 Michele Rivkin-Fish: *Tracing Landscapes of the Past. Practices of Memory and Distinction in Marketizing Russia*, in: *American Ethnologist* 36, Nr. 1, 2009, pp. 79-95, p. 83.

195 *Ibidem*.

196 Manning, *The City of Balconies*, p. 74.

two pantheons for the elite and plaques on the front doors, indicating that honorable persons lived in the house.<sup>197</sup> This means, the reference to Akhvlediani is a reference to the importance of my informant's balcony for Georgian culture and history. She gives herself and her flat a (Georgian) meaning which becomes a contrast to the idea of Tbilisi as a multi-ethnic city. Kharpukhi is still more connected to the latter, since one informant pointed out that he was born in Kutaisi (in west Georgia), where “real Georgians [namdvilat kartvelebi]” are living – not like in his neighborhood Kharpukhi.<sup>198</sup> Another informant, who is an art historian, mentioned that this neighborhood should be protected not only because of the housing stock, but also because of its inhabitants which were typical for the multi-ethnic Old Tbilisi.<sup>199</sup>

To show the “real” Georgian culture, my main informant suggested that we could go together to the Elene Akhvlediani House Museum. I was not enthusiastic about this idea but agreed to go there. My lack of enthusiasm came from considering that Kiacheli Street in Vera, where the museum is located, is mainly inhabited by the (Georgian) Soviet intelligentsia while my informant's neighborhood is more connected to a multi-ethnic, culture-lacking image of the city, where the intelligentsia is absent.<sup>200</sup> The disparity of this two neighborhoods implied that the specific museum was of no value for my research. I did not expect to get information about Kharpukhi neighborhood there.

The Museum is the flat where the painter had her workshop. Besides of a sign on the outside wall (one of the above mentioned plaques), there is no evidence that this is a museum. We went there together with a neighbor of my main informant. This neighbor drove us by car and spoke Russian, English and some German. She almost never talked in Georgian, even if she knew this language. It seemed that for the Georgian lady it was such an important event that she (1) engaged a driver to the museum, even if it was neither far from her house, nor badly connected. (2) It was important for her to take someone to manage communication problems, if such problems were to appear. It was meant that I should miss nothing of the important information that the museum and its staff there would provide me with. The lady was dressed in remarkably good clothes (compared to her home dresses where she puts emphasis on comfort rather than elegance). She also took her handbag with her (she never uses one in her neighborhood).

It has to be mentioned that for my host it was the first time that she visited the museum. That means that it was the first time she had some contact to the painter since the artist visited her in the 1960s,

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197 Ibidem, p. 81.

198 Interview 24211, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

199 Interview 24121, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

200 People in the neighborhood, especially the Muslim population, were considered to be less educated and speaking a bad Georgian, Interview 24211, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014; Fieldnotes, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

or better to the memory of her and the artworks. This means that this was an extraordinary event that established a connection between herself to her own group – Wertsch calls it “ethnocentric narcissism”.<sup>201</sup> The driver, who was not Georgian, and myself had not such an exalted feeling to this place. My informant in contrary had a feeling on the aura of the place and the paintings, because she knew how the painter produced the art and these pictures now have an increased value due the passing of time. This is what Walter Benjamin describes as the aura of an artwork: The marks and the testimony of history which are represented by the work of art.<sup>202</sup> To underline the feeling of the aura and to honor the authority of the painter, the visit got the character of an outstanding event. This happened often when we went together to remarkable places which were connected to the history of Kharpukhi neighborhood, the city or the nation. The visit of the city museum and later at the new Muslim cemetery followed this pattern.

My informant states that the authentic Old Tbilisi is visible in the paintings of Elene Akhvlediani. This authenticity was lost after the recent rebuilding of the old houses. The real Tbilisi can only be experienced through the pictures of the painter. Therefore the visit in the museum was somehow an act of experiencing history – a history which the Georgian lady undeniably experienced. Due to the testimonial character of art, the museum (seen as some kind of artwork) can present any event that took place in Tbilisi and in the life of my host. Therefore, this visit to the museum was an extraordinary moment for her.

When we arrived at the museum all doors were closed in the house. The lady knocked a door and a policeman opened up and guided us into the flat which the museum consists of. The staff of the museum was sitting under a balcony which was built into the flat and were watching TV. We were somehow interrupting them and it took a long time until the sale of the tickets was completed. What is interesting to mention is that my informant did not lament a single moment about the closed doors and the complications by buying a ticket. While her neighbor who had joined us, became markedly nervous. Perhaps, for my host, this procedure belonged to a real visit to the past – something like a ritual, one must undergo before entering another sphere.

The museum was established in 1976. It is full of paintings, drawings and sketches produced by the painter herself. In addition there are some objects the artist had collected, such as carpets, dishes, furniture, musical instruments as well as balconies and a column which had been built into the flat. The column was presented by the staff of the museum as typical for Georgian houses. One carpet was more than 200 years old and the painter loved the balconies of traditional Tbilisian houses – as they mentioned. The museum shows a “typical Georgian interior”,<sup>203</sup> as it is stated on the web page

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201 Wertsch, *Texts of Memory and Texts of History*, pp. 10f.

202 Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, p. 245.

203 Georgian National Museum: Elene Akhvlediani House Museum, [http://museum.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=GEO&sec\\_id=55](http://museum.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=55),

of the museum. It is remarkable that the typical Georgian house is found not in the old center but in the flat of a Georgian intellectual. This shows once more the role this group plays as an upholder of the national culture as well as a promoter of Historism.

The balconies are in many ways a central element of my informants narratives about the artist. As Manning mentions, the balcony represents the historic city and is characteristic for Georgia, in the contemporary discourses of Georgian intellectuals. It presents the openness of the new Georgian society after the Rose Revolution.<sup>204</sup> As he says this idea is the result of a reinterpretation which started at the end of Soviet time in a discourse between the old intelligentsia and the new rich. The balcony is the architectural representation of the national form. In the museum were not only paintings of balconies, but also real ones. Even Elene Akhvlediani's gravestone at the Didube pantheon has the shape of a balconied house.

Inside the museum the total lack of information provided for the visitor is remarkable. There were no explanations of the objects apart from one crumpled piece of paper on a piano giving information about the artist and the museum in English and Georgian language. Besides the fact that a good Tbilisian should know this outstanding person and its past,<sup>205</sup> the visitor should not be informed about remarkable dates in the life or the development of Akhvlediani's artwork. They should somehow feel her importance through the mass of objects. The flat was untouched since the death of Elene Akhvlediani – it was very original. It should present the real, authentic painter's flat and by thus Georgian history. What the visitor finds here is a historical approach that appeals to the feelings of the audience and is rather distraction than education or better, it combines both, like in a movie.

The staff showed two kind of items – such that were really testimonies of history (the history of Georgia): the old carpet and old dishes. And such that symbolized the history of Georgia, like the balconies (representing Tbilisi), the pillar (representing Georgian housing) or illustrations for a Vasha Pshavela book (representing Georgian language). Interestingly only a few illustration in the museum were devoted to famous Georgian writers, most of which where made for fairy tales.

This means both, the staff and my informant, knew exactly what they should show me, while providing me an image of the painter and thereby Georgian history. Both considered the “Folk Painter” as a remarkable person (the staff identified themselves with the museum as their working place), worthy of being shown to the foreigner and both considered her a valuable representative of the history of their country. For my host she is also a representative of the history of her

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24.06.2014.

204 Manning, *The City of Balconies*, p. 96f.

205 As it was claimed in an article in the 1970s: Know Your City's Past. Kharpuksi [itsode sheni kalakis tsarsuli. kharpuksi], in: *tbilisi* 101 (29<sup>th</sup> April 1969).

neighborhood. The objects as well as the museum itself had for them an aura in the sense as Benjamin uses it. Every single object in the museum contains the marks of history and therefore is a testimony to the long history of Georgia.

For my informant and for the staff of the museum this institution represents not only the history of her neighborhood (and Georgia) in the last 35 years, but also the essence of Georgian culture, tradition and history as a whole. What I did not know before we went to the museum was that Tengiz Abuladze shot some scenes of his movie “Repentance” in the museum. The house became literally the stage for the intelligentsia, a stage which reflected the idea of the nation imagined by the country's elite. In this movie Varlam Aravidze<sup>206</sup>, the mayor of a city, dies and after he is buried, his body appears outside the grave. Ketevan Baratelli is accused of digging him out. In the following lawsuit she tells the story of the crimes Varlam has committed. One victim was her father Sandro Baratelli who was killed for rejecting collaboration with the mayor and his engagement in protecting a church against its destruction by Varlam to make place for a power plant. In the movie the “Elene Akhvlediani House Museum” is the flat of the artist Sandro who tries to protect the tradition, history and culture of Georgia (represented in the church that is destroyed by Varlam). This shows that an outstanding Georgian filmmaker had considered the museum a place, representative of the history, culture and tradition of Georgia. Abuladze as well as Akhvlediani and the fictive personalty Sandro belong to one group – the Georgian intelligentsia – and as Manning claims, this group understood itself as the upholder of Georgian culture, and later as its defender against the Soviet state. Elene Akhvlediani belonged to the first generation of this group which was educated in Europe, and from time to time was part of the establishment. Manning states that the Soviet intelligentsia was a critical as well as a legitimizing force for the regime.<sup>207</sup> In Abuladzes movie Varlam appeals to Sandro to become part of his rule. Only after he refuses, he is tortured and killed. It is complicated to define the different groups of Soviet and opposition intelligentsia or the later “red” intelligentsia and the “grant eater” (as they were called in post Soviet Georgia).<sup>208</sup> It appears that some connections between these different groups exist and a clear division between them is not always possible. This is visible in the continuation of the approach of heritage protection. This goal was stressed by the Soviet government and its “red” intelligentsia and continued by “Tiflis Hamqari” – the so called “grant eaters”. Elisashvili laments on the destruction of the Church of 40 Martyrs of Sebaste and on the construction of toilets nearby and is satisfied that the area was later heritage protected and excavations carried out.<sup>209</sup> The story line in Abuladzes

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206 The name can be translated as Varlam No One, Christensen states that it can also mean Everybody, see Julie Christensen: Tengiz Abuladze's Repentance and the Georgian Nationalist Cause, in: *Slavic Review* 50 (1991), No. 1, pp. 163-175, p. 166.

207 Manning, *City of Balconies*, p. 73.

208 Mühlfried: *Postsowjetische Feiern*, p. 136.

209 Elisashvili, *rogor sheitsvala tbilisi*, p. 25.



movie reflects the self perception of the Georgian cultural elite.

My main informant does not distinct between 2red” or new intellectuals. She uses both groups as references for her claims of authentic Georgian history. Sometimes the Soviet government, sometimes the opposition is the truth presenter of culture. It is visible also in her perception of Stalin. It has to be mentioned that in the western perception of “Repentance” it is a retribution with Stalinism. In fact Varlam has features of different suppressors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the beard of Hitler, the uniform of Mussolini, the habits of Stalin – the ability to disguise – and the glasses of Beria).<sup>210</sup>

In some of our meetings I asked my informant about the movie while mentioning that it was made in the museum. She said “yes I know, a very good movie,” and added “they say that Varlam is Beria.”<sup>211</sup> Another time she started to speak about Stalin and praised his intelligence. He had been a great poet and scientist.<sup>212</sup> At this point I mentioned once more that the Akhvlediani Museum is interesting and “Repentance” was made there. “Yes” she said “a very good movie.”<sup>213</sup> It appeared that she was unable to conceive a connection between Stalin, the movie and the museum. What can this tell us about the relation between Stalin, the museum and Georgian tradition, culture and history? It is possible to place them all together in one thought. In the scene I refer to, Varlam is guest in the house of Sandro and it seems that he does not yet have the intention to kill him. Instead he is pretending to be a great singer and lover of arts, it is Georgian culture. Differing from Abuladze, for my host, Stalin and Georgian culture are strongly connected and do not exclude each other. For her, Stalin is a great artist – as well as Akhvlediani and Abuladze. One can even add other Georgian “cultural producers” such as Shota Rustaveli (1189-1207), Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907), Merab Kostava (1939-1989) and Konstantine Gamsakhurdia (1893-1975)– personalities to whom my informants refer as well, especially when we talked about her favorite books.<sup>214</sup> Stalin presents, as well as Akhvlediani and Abuladze, the history of Georgia and its glory. Benjamin states that concepts “such as creativity and genius, eternal value and style, form and content—which, used in an unchecked way (and monitoring them is difficult today), allow factual material to be manipulated in the interests of fascism.”<sup>215</sup> Referring to the Soviet Union this means that it was not by chance that heritage protection became part of the political agenda in the 1970s, but it was connected to the authenticity of the Soviet culture (including Georgian), which goes back to Stalin's national policy. The opposite of Soviet culture is the capitalistic one – like the American which is no

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210 Christensen, Tengiz Abuladzes Repentance, p. 168.

211 Fieldnotes, 4<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

212 Fieldnotes, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

213 Fieldnotes, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

214 Ibidem.

215 Benjamin, The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, p. 252.

“homeland [samshoblo]”, but “rootless cosmopolitanism.”

At the same time Soviet culture is seen as not Georgian (as in the movie of Abuladze, where Stalin replaces the Georgian dream with a foreign one, that is, Marxism).<sup>216</sup> It is something which is external. This applies for Georgia after the Rose Revolution which is represented in the new modernistic buildings, as well. The new intellectuals find themselves represented in the openness of the balconied houses, while the new rich are represented in the modernist architecture.<sup>217</sup>

This idea one can find in the neighbor's narratives as well, when my informant states that “our president and Ugulava went” and then “spread golden things” in Georgia. She said that they destroyed churches in Soviet times while Saakashvili had been destroyed the houses in the old center.<sup>218</sup> He replaced the Georgian culture with a foreign one. The recent government is not yet part of such a narrative although some people stated that it will end the commercialization of their neighborhood.<sup>219</sup> This seems to be a fatal mistake, since the plans for the new project “Panorama Tbilisi”, meets massive protests of residents and heritage protectors.

#### 4 Kharpukhi Dwellers

##### *The Neighbors in the Flat*

To complete the narratives of the neighborhood, the perception of the residents living there have to be explored, because they shaped their environment and the stories are mostly connected to peoples own live. Like the ones of my host who shared her balcony with a Georgian and an Azeri family before they moved out. Slezkine adopted the idea of the Soviet Union as a “large communal apartment in which 'national state units, various republics and autonomous provinces' represented 'separate rooms'.”<sup>220</sup> The neighborhood and my host's flat somehow represented a miniature version of the Soviet Union as a big multi-ethnic construct – or communal apartment. This was expressed in a newspaper article on the occasion of the 1500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city:

“In Tbilisi are living and working representatives of different nations: Georgians, Russians, Ukrainians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis and many others. This is a clear expression of the idea of unbreakable friendship of the people of the Soviet Union.”<sup>221</sup>

Each ethnic has its own room in my informant's flat, apart from the Iranian family which was

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216 Christensen, Tengiz Abuladze's Repentance and the Georgian Nationalist Cause, p. 175.

217 Manning, The City of Balconies, p. 96f.

218 Fieldnotes, 23<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

219 Fieldnotes, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

220 The idea derives from I. Vareikis and Zelenskii: National<sup>2</sup> no-gosudaarstvestvennoe razmezhevanie Srednei Azii, I refer to Slezkine, The USSR as a Communal Apartment, p. 415.

221 [tbilisshi tskhovroben da mushaoben skhva da skhva erovnebis ts'armomadgenlebi: kartvelebi, rusebi, uk'rainelebi, somkhebi, azerbaijanelebi da mravali skhva. es ch'eshmarit'ad sabch'ota k'avshiris khalkhta urq'evi megobrobis natel gamokhst'ulebas ts'armoadgens.] tbilisi 1500, in: tbilisi 231 (14<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1958).

probably deported before my host moved in. The neighbors might have been just Georgians and Azeris but the neighborhood as a whole was more mixed.

The head of the Azeri family was a journalist (she showed me his grave later at the Muslim cemetery). He had one son and two daughters. The son is now living in Kutaisi and the daughters are living in Baku. Their relationship was quite good, “my mother was not eating without them,” she said.<sup>222</sup> I once met one of the daughters while they were visiting the wedding of a relative. She is around 50 years old, and has a daughter of about 18 years. The wedding was between a relative of the Yezidi neighbors and a relative of my host's former Azeri neighbor. It also appeared that the couple were relatives although their grade of kinship was not clear for me. However, their relation propelled my host to give me a lecture on marriages between relatives in Georgia, which I came to understand as a taboo. What was interesting was that the former neighbor and the new neighbors of my host, as well as the other Azeri neighbors are often relatives and all of the neighbors, attended the wedding, including the Georgian lady. Furthermore, the Yezidi neighbors are somehow relatives of the Azeri ones, which can be considered remarkable, since it is claimed that the Yezidis marry only among each other and within their own community.<sup>223</sup> I did not manage to find the reason for this “mistake”. What is especially intriguing, is the close relation between all the neighbors in the area. In this case my informant became a part of the group through her former neighbors, while they stayed in their old home. Their shared language is Russian, as her old neighbor don't speak Georgian, and communicate with her daughter only in Azerbaijani language. My host and her neighbors emphasize their friendship and describe their neighborhood as a place where everybody lives together peacefully. They say that the wars in the last decades were made by politicians, not by the people.<sup>224</sup> The official narratives which focused on the friendship of the people derives, among others, from the Soviet ideology of internationalism. But also shortly before and at the beginning of Soviet rule, such a narrative was spread by Grishashvili.

This idea is stressed by the Azeri community throughout the neighborhood, while among Georgians the idea of “an organic, mystical, genealogical version of nationalism“ is spread.<sup>225</sup> This idea was popular by the end of Soviet rule, spread by the national opposition and culminated in the second Georgian republic, lead by Zviad Gamsakhurdia. My main informant praised his demand towards all people in Georgia to learn the Georgian language. One informant contrasted his multi-ethnic neighborhood Kharpukhi to his “real Georgian” home – Kutaisi. But besides all nationalistic rhetoric, they still celebrate holidays together (my informant had also attended the Yezidi wedding).

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222 Interview 15211, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2013.

223 Martin Affolderbach, Ralf Geisler: *Die Yeziden*, Berlin 2007, p. 10.

224 Fieldnotes, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

225 Ramishvili, *March of goblins. Permanent revolution in Georgia*, p. 183.

Their marriages are interethnic and -confessional, and the Muslim cemetery is used by Orthodox Georgians as well. This suggests that another reason for the narrative of friendship is their shared experience as neighbors and their need to establish relations among each other.

The relationship between my host and her neighbors has changed insofar as they do not share a flat anymore. It might have been more comfortable for her Azeri neighbors to go to Azerbaijan, but one neighbor (the son of the writer) still lives in Georgia (in Kutaisi, which was perceived as “really Georgian” by the informant mentioned above). In the 1990s nationalistic rhetoric caused an exodus of many non-Georgian people into these countries which correspond to the ethnicity assigned to them in their Soviet passport. The reasons were either secessionist wars, or insecurity and discrimination.<sup>226</sup> It might have been during this time that the Georgian lady and her compatriots acquired the consciousness to form an exclusive group in their “homeland“.

Here we can find a change in perception of ethnicity. While in Soviet times they lived all together in one house, shared a language, cultural habits (they always celebrated holidays together) and ate together, they live in their “native“ countries today. The flat of my host corresponds literally to the idea of the Soviet Union as a communal apartment.<sup>227</sup> After the end of socialism the neighbors left this flat, but they still come back from time to time, and the differences between the residents that were enforced in Soviet times are present at a discursive level.

### *The other Neighbors*

During my research I asked my informants if they could arrange an interview with some of their neighbors, if possible not Georgian ones. This was irritating for my Georgian informants, they said that the Azerbaijanis know nothing and I should not speak with them.<sup>228</sup> After a while my main informant wanted to introduce me to an 84 year old woman. The old lady is Georgian and was married to an Iranian or Azeri man. I went there with my main informant and another neighbor, who helped me with translations. In the flat of this old Georgian lady was also her best friend, another Georgian woman which I had interviewed before. Altogether there were five of us which turned the interview into a catastrophe, as everyone wanted to talk and tried to contribute something important, and the young woman decided to keep translating everything. But it was interesting to see how different the perception of the neighborhood was. The two old girlfriends said that there is nothing to tell about the neighborhood, it is poor and dull. It was normal for them to be Georgian and to be married to a Muslim man. What was more relevant for them was how many children and grandchildren they had. They referred to the idea of Tbilisi as a multi-ethnic city, without being

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226 Ibidem, p. 186.

227 Slezkine, *The USSR as a Communal Apartment*, p. 415.

228 Fieldnotes, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

conscious that they did so. And they told what they considered important – their family. It was simply their unquestioned experience.

For the young Georgian translator the mixed character of the area was not a problem, but she said she was surprised when she arrived here some years ago and seeing a mixture of people lived peacefully together. The idea of Georgia as the country of ethnic Georgians and the home of Christianity was revived after the collapse of the Soviet Union. She grew up during this time which was probably a factor in determining her point of view on other ethnics and religions. She asked the old lady about her religion and ethnicity to show me how harmonic things could be.

The old lady I wanted to interview came from Lechkhumi region<sup>229</sup> and was Orthodox, while her husband came from Iran and was Muslim. In this situation, my host agreed with the young woman that in this neighborhood all people were friends. Even when the Karabakh War between Azerbaijan and Armenia started, people were saying that this is Georgia, not Armenia or Azerbaijan and the conflict should be kept out.<sup>230</sup>

When people of different ethnicities were discussing together they were closer to the idea of Grishashvili and the Soviet Union meaning that Tbilisi was the place for different kind of people. They refused the idea of a pure Georgian city which was not the case when I was alone with Georgian informants. One has to consider the composition of my host's neighbors. Besides her Azeri neighbors and her Georgian neighbors from the next floor, she has Kurdish, Azeri, Armenian and German neighbors. When we first met her she was visiting her Kurdish (more exactly Yezidi) neighbor. The latter lives together with her mother in a flat located in a small passage which connects the street with my informant's house. Her sister, who lives in Armenia, visits her from time to time to refresh her Armenian residence permission. Azeri or Iranian neighbors live in the same block, which consists of different floors and small stairs which lead to other levels of the street. They are all relatives or at least good friends, like the two ladies I presented above. The residents living in the upper part of this housing block perceive themselves as Iranian-Azerbaijani. Their native language is Azeri. The two ladies with whom I had interviews, the oldest members of the families which are around 80 years old, are Georgian. One of them met her husband “through matchmaking [mashvlobit, mashvlobit, machankali, machankali]”,<sup>231</sup> as the other one of the friends explained with emphasis. Following them it was common that marriages were arranged.<sup>232</sup> They were brought from the countryside to Tbilisi and they could decide whether they wanted marry the

229 Interview 15213, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2014.

230 Interview 15211, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2013.

231 That they repeated the term for matchmaking in different ways and various times shows that they saw a reason to emphasize it, my interpreter was not used to it and it was explainable to her as well, she was unsure by translating it and added an explanation of marriage habits in Georgia, matchmaking “does not exist anymore, do not think so!”, Interview 15213, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2014.

232 Ibidem.

man they were presented to.<sup>233</sup> The husband was “Tbilisian [tbiliseli] – Azerbaijanan [Azerbaijaneli]”, they used first the term which was used by Grishashvili's narrative on the Tbilisian community as well: “tbiliselebi” – the people from Tbilisi. Then they added the category, Azerbaijani [azerbaijaneli].<sup>234</sup> The grandson of this lady specifies himself as Tbilisian as well but for his ethnicity he uses Iranian-Azerbaijani [iraneli-azerbaijaneli]. Referring to language as marker of ethnicity they must be Azeri. It could also be the case that they are Azeris from Iran since a lot of Azeris live in the North of this country. To determine the exact ethnic category is not of much use if one does not consider the social practices by which they define their belonging or refuse to define it. That is why it is more useful to keep the ethnic category open and use the concept of “*groupness* as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable.”<sup>235</sup> The terms Tbilisian, Azeri, Iranian-Azerbaijani or Tatar refer to the same persons, but are used in different situations to define them – the same applies for religious categories.

The two old ladies said that they are Orthodox Christians but their husbands were Muslims. The former are usually buried at the Muslim cemetery beside their husbands. Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century a Persian pilgrim claimed that, “the Muslims there are like Christians: they never obey the dietary laws [of Islam]; they eat [Christian] food and animals slaughtered by Christians; and they use all kind of intoxicating beverages.”<sup>236</sup> The narrative of religious practice which could be characterized as “indifferent” is spread among the residents as well (Muslims and Christians). Here the “Muslims are like Christians” but this can also work in reverse as Christians adopt Muslim practices as well. A young woman explained to me, when people celebrate festivals, they prepare food and invite their neighbors as well, same to which religion they belong.<sup>237</sup>

### *The Languages*

The different groups in Kharpukhi communicate in Russian or Georgian language, the former is more common, while the latter was used whenever I participated in their talks, due to the fact that my Russian is very poor. Sometimes people could not speak Georgian, especially those who were not permanent Georgian residents. This means that all neighbors speak at least two languages if they are Georgian and even more if they are not (Russian and Georgian for public communication and their native language in the family). Once my informant urged a neighbor boy<sup>238</sup> to proof his language skills. He was told to come and translate something into English, because I did not

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233 Ibidem.

234 Ibidem.

235 Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, p. 167.

236 Mirza Mohammad-Hosay Farahani (1885), cited from: Alexidze, *Persians in Georgia*, p. 254.

237 Fieldnotes, 12<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

238 Interview 22112, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

understand her arguments, which was sometimes the case. This boy, who is Armenian, explained that his grandmother was already living here. He attends a Russian school where he learns Russian, Georgian, English and German. He is not taught Armenian at his school although he does speak it at home.<sup>239</sup> Other young people I met, told me that they are Georgian but besides Russian they also have knowledge of Armenian and Azerbaijani.<sup>240</sup>

In the neighborhood all South Caucasian languages and Russian are spread. People are able to communicate with each other without any problems. Notwithstanding their networks with other countries need to be explored, I know due to my observations that they have relatives in almost all parts of Europe and the Caucasus. In Soviet times this diversity was celebrated as “a clear expression of the idea of unbreakable friendship of the people of the Soviet Union.”<sup>241</sup> Nevertheless, in Georgia an acute sense of linguistic heritage was spread because of the importance which was assigned to language by the early national movement, and later the Soviet authorities. The early national movement, the so called “tergdaleulebi”<sup>242</sup> of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, intended to spread a national consciousness through alphabetization. During the Soviet Union, language was declared as one of the central markers of ethnicity and the members of one group were supported in learning their “own” language.<sup>243</sup> In Georgia this learning, combined with the rich literary traditions in the country reaching back to the establishment of Christianity in 4<sup>th</sup> century, led to a high identification with the “own” language. The number of monolingual speakers was relatively high while the knowledge of Russian was quite low in Georgia.<sup>244</sup> In the 1970s the promotion of Russian language was initiated by Shevardnadze and as a result of the protests against this policy, the importance of Georgian language was reaffirmed.<sup>245</sup> In 1991 Zviad Gamsakhurdia abolished minority rights.<sup>246</sup> My informant stated that Georgia's first president demanded from them to learn Georgian language. This is something she perceives as normal by rationalizing through the example that in Germany the Turkish population would learn German as well. She added that if one goes in another country they had to learn the local language, it had to be same in Georgia. In the neighborhood would live medicine students from Africa, they would learn Georgian as well, only “Azerbaijans and Armenians” wanted to speak only in their native language or Russian, she lamented. She had once been with a friend to Yerevan where they stepped into a shop to buy something and when they tried

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239 Ibidem.

240 Fieldnotes, 21<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

241 Tbilisi 1500, in: Tbilisi 231 (1958/14.10.).

242 “tergdaleulebi” means “the ones who drank the water of the Terek River [dividing Georgia and Russia]”, referring to an academical education in Russia, see Oliver Reisner: Die Schule der georgischen Nation. Eine sozialhistorische Untersuchung der nationalen Bewegung in Georgien am Beispiel der 'Gesellschaft zur Verbreitung der Lese- und Schreibkunde unter den Georgiern' (1850 bis 1917), Wiesbaden 2005, p. 21.

243 Slezkine, The USSR as a Communal Apartment, p. 432.

244 Lenore A. Grenoble: Language Policy in the Soviet Union, New York 2003, p. 117.

245 Ibidem.

246 Jones, Georgia, p. 43.

to communicate with the staff in Russian the staff refused. This reaction was in her view correct. This is how she believed it should be. An Armenian friend once told her she would go to her “homeland [samshoblo]” in Bolnisi (located in Georgia). This was very bad, she commented, and would show that the Armenians wanted to own everything. She argued that they were saying the Georgians are nationalistic but that is not true.<sup>247</sup> The reference to Gamsakhurdia's idea of language is interesting because it contradicts the narrative of good neighborhood and friendship as it is spread by the residents. For him the Georgian people are superior to others due to their language:

“[Their] raising will again revive this nation, when it will regain the position it held in the prehistoric period – a leading position, the position of mankind's spiritual teacher. This is implied in Ioane-Zosime's<sup>248</sup> statement to the effect that on the Judgment Day God will judge all the languages through this language. And this means that the Georgian people will be the chief bearer of spirituality, i.e., Christianity, and that it will judge the sinful humankind.”<sup>249</sup>

Such a statement assigns the (“spiritual”) leadership to Georgians over the other (not Georgian) neighbors. However, the result of such ideas, is the demand of subordination under the “chief bearer of spirituality”. This idea of the president had, besides a rhetoric rearmament and the demand for the knowledge of Georgian, almost no impact on the relationship between the Kharpukhi residents, different from the autonomous regions where this rhetoric led into ethnic motivated clashes and even war. The minorities should speak Georgian language, even if there is no communication problem and they have been speaking their mother languages in Tbilisi since centuries. The idea of a Georgian cultural struggle was popular from the 1960s onwards. The communist party fled into nationalism due to fear of the national opposition, and the Georgians were frightened of becoming a national minority in late Soviet times.<sup>250</sup> This focus on nationalism found its expression in the heritage protection programs which were executed. The above mentioned idea of an authentic Georgian culture finds its expression also in the perception of the neighbors. The protection of cultural heritage also included the protection of the Georgian language. Georgian language was enforced in a way similar as the balcony houses being a marker for Georgia or the Georgian capital respectively.

The balconies were perceived as a “typical” feature of Old Tbilisi and represented Georgian culture, even if they were shaped by different non-Georgian influences (like European and Oriental architecture)<sup>251</sup> and described as an “eclectic” style.<sup>252</sup> The residents were also somehow “eclectic”

247 Fieldnotes, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

248 Gamsakhurdia refers to a text of the 10<sup>th</sup> century's Georgian Christian monk Ioane-Zosime, Praise and glory of the Georgian language [kebij da didebij kartulisa enisaj], <http://armazi.uni-frankfurt.de/armaziII/enebi/kartuli/kebij.html>, 29.03.2015.

249 Zviad Gamsakhurdia: The Spiritual Mission of Georgia. A Lecture Delivered at the Idriart Festival in Tbilisi Philharmonic House 2 May, 1990, Tbilisi 1991, p. 27.

250 Jones, Georgia, p. 31, 42, 47.

251 Mania, Tbilisi – a Unique System of Houses with Courtyards, p. 11.

252 Beridze, tbilisis khurotmodzghvreba 1801-1917 ts'lebi, p. 112.



as they consisted of different ethnicities and religions, so they had to be “Georgianized” like the architecture. And indeed something similar happened: the reconstructions of Gorgasali Square (the former Tatar Square) and Metekhi Bridge (where the Shiite mosque was located) and the razing of the Muslim cemetery in the center of Tbilisi deleted the presence of the Muslim population from the cityscape. This process found its expression also in the demographics of the Georgian SSR. While in 1959 the percentage of the Georgian population in Georgia was 64,3% it reached 70,1% in 1989. One reason therefore is the emigration of the Russians, Armenians, Azeris and other minorities.<sup>253</sup> My informant's neighbors, for example, went to Baku. She frequently places focus on this when she laments that a lot of people left Tbilisi and there is no one left which she actually knows.<sup>254</sup> But Gerber states that the “decisive reason” for the increasing number of Georgians in the SSR was a high pressure for assimilation, which “forced non-Georgian minorities to declare themselves 'Georgians’”.<sup>255</sup> This might be another explanation for the change of the population. But it is questionable if they could simply declare themselves Georgian and if this was accepted by the Georgian majority. The knowledge that people have of their descent is remarkable. The residents in Kharbukhi stated, for example that Ioseb Grishashvili had Armenian ancestors.<sup>256</sup> Also Saakashvili “was accused of being Armenian”<sup>257</sup> (which signifies having Armenian ancestors).

Nevertheless, the pressure on minorities for assimilation or emigration is expressed frequently by Georgian neighbors, in the demand to learn good Georgian. We once visited the Yezid neighbors of my host. I had problems to communicate with one of them, because she speaks mostly Russian and only some words Georgian. Nevertheless my Georgian was very poor, my host stated that they should take me as a role model of someone who learns good Georgian.<sup>258</sup> In my eyes the situation was embarrassing since in reality the neighbors speak much more languages much better than me (especially Georgian and Russian) but any mistake they make is immediately commented on, which is probably one of the reasons as to why they prefer to speak Russian.

### *Inscribing Ethnicity - the Deportation of the Iranians from Old Tbilisi*

As Brubaker suggests, it is more useful to speak of “groupness” in order to define belonging to a certain unit, when the social practice of group making is in the focus of the analysis. Such a practice can also be a shared traumatic experience, or the narration of this experience, which forced people to clearly define the group category to which they do or do not belong. In the case of the

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253 Jürgen Gerber: *Georgien. Nationale Opposition und kommunistische Herrschaft seit 1956*, Baden-Baden 1997, p. 40.

254 Fieldnotes, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

255 Gerber, *Georgien*, p. 40.

256 Fieldnotes, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2014

257 Jones, *Georgia*, p. 22.

258 Fieldnotes, 23<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

deportations of the Iranian population of Tbilisi such definitions became crucial and could become decisive of life and death.

The so called “Tatars”<sup>259</sup> had different categories for self-determination: Tbilisian [tibiliseli], Iranian [iraneli], Azerbaijani [azerbajaneli] or Iranian-Azerbaijani [iraneli-azerbajaneli] and the term Persian [sparseli] which I never heard from them. The Georgian neighbors and the official name for this people, which included also place names on the city map was “Tatars”, until the late 1930s. Since 1939 the category Azerbaijani appears in the census for Tbilisi.<sup>260</sup> Before only Persians and different “Turkish-Tatar dialects [Turetsko-tatarskie narechie]” were registered.<sup>261</sup> This is also reflected in the narratives of the neighbors. When we first asked my informant about life in the neighborhood, she immediately started to talk about the Azeris:

“Here lived Azerbaijanis but more exactly Tatars, which were in the Stalin period deported from Tbilisi and from Georgia to Almaty and Tashkent [...] [ak tskhovrobdnen azerbaijaneb mara upro stsorad tatrebi, romlebits eh stalinis periodshi almaatashi da tashkentshi, tibilisidan da sakartvelodan gaasakhles [...]].”<sup>262</sup>

Her street, she said, was called “Street of Tatars [tatrebis kucha]”.<sup>263</sup> The neighborhood is considered to be dominated by Azeris. What is interesting here is how she speaks of her former neighbors, her neighbors and the other residents. For her own close personal network she uses the term “Azerbaijani [azerbajaneli]” for the others she uses more often “Tatars [tatrebi]”, which often has a negative connotation. It is some kind of respect when she called people “Azerbaijani”, like her friends from Baku, this might mean that they have a homeland – Azerbaijan – even so it is a new one. She claims that some nations are new. When she spoke of “Tatars” she meant people who had no own nation: “Azerbaijan is basically a new nation [azerbajani printsipshi akhali eria]”.<sup>264</sup> They fitted in the category “Tatar”, but later they got their own national category and became Azerbaijani (the category “Tatar” existed alongside as a different group). They had no choice, because since 1932 Soviet citizens had to adopt a nationality which was written in their passport, only ethnicity from „the officially sanctioned list of nationalities“ could be used. For the designation of nationality the belonging of the parents was decisive, just in case they had a different ethnicity a choice was possible. „Nationality, then was related to descent, to ancestry, within the limits of the official Soviet inscription of existing nationalities.“<sup>265</sup> This group making made the deportation of the

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259 Here I subsume also the Persian population under this category, since the Georgian neighbors call them by this name, nevertheless “Persian” and “Tatar” are different categories in all census (in the ones which use language and the ones which use ethnicity as group markers), see [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/emp\\_lan\\_97\\_uezd.php?reg=522](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/emp_lan_97_uezd.php?reg=522), 24<sup>th</sup> March 2014; [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/ussr\\_nac\\_39\\_ra.php?reg=771](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/ussr_nac_39_ra.php?reg=771), 24<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

260 [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/ussr\\_nac\\_39\\_ra.php?reg=771](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/ussr_nac_39_ra.php?reg=771), 24<sup>th</sup> March 2014;

261 [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/emp\\_lan\\_97\\_uezd.php?reg=522](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/emp_lan_97_uezd.php?reg=522), 24<sup>th</sup> March 2014;

262 Interview 15211, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2013.

263 Ibidem.

264 Ibidem.

265 Ronald Grigor Suny: Making Minorities. The Politics of National Boundaries in the Soviet Experience, in: Burguière, André; Raymond, Grew (eds.), The Construction of Minorities, Ann Arbor 2001, pp. 245-264, p. 250.

Iranian population of Tbilisi possible. While in the last census group belonging of the population followed their language, in the Soviet census it was ethnicity which served as a marker.<sup>266</sup> From this time on the group to which an individual belonged was what was most important as shown by the deportation of the Iranian population of Tbilisi. Hirsch follows the assumption of historians of “census-taking and border-making as 'cultural technologies of rule'“ which was used in the Soviet Union to integrate them into the Soviet state. As she states, “Soviet citizens learned that they were supposed to define themselves as members of an official nationality.<sup>267</sup> This is exactly what happened in Kharpukhi neighborhood. The population adopted the official ethnonym: the “Tatars” declared themselves Azerbaijani or Iranian or both (even if their neighbors till today prefer the term “Tatar”, which shows that Soviet rule had its limits), and this category made them to subjects of the Soviet Union with all its consequences. This concept survived even the end of the Soviet Union.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century it did not really matter if they were exactly Iranian or Persian, Azerbaijani, Iranian-Azerbaijans or simply “Tatars”. But generally the more abstract concept of “Tatar” was common. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the German scientist Friedrich Bodenstedt wrote in his travelogue: “[...]I made efforts to look for a teacher for Tatar, to learn this in the Caucasian countries inevitable language rapidly.”<sup>268</sup> The teacher he chose was Mirza Shapi. The street my informant lives in was named after him in 1938<sup>269</sup>. One of his pupils was Mirza Fatali Akhundov, the “famous Azerbaijani poet”, as he was called in newspaper articles.<sup>270</sup> He was buried at the former muslim cemetery and his gravestone, among others, can be found at a memorial cared by the Azerbaijani Ministry of Culture.<sup>271</sup> Mirza Shapi is also seen as a Persian intellectual, since he organized the “Divan-e Hekmat”, meetings where literary and philosophical topics were discussed. Also Akhundov was a important Persian intellectual, as the literature on Iranian-Georgian relations states.<sup>272</sup> This shows that they were transformed from “Tatars” to Azerbaijanis by the Soviet state and to Persians by the Iranian state, which means ethnic assignment could happen at random. One can also see such transformations in other realms. In a Georgian map from 1924 the Muslim cemetery is still called “Tatar's Cemetery [tatarta sasaplao]”<sup>273</sup> while on a map of 1934 it is called

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266 [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/emp\\_lan\\_97\\_uezd.php?reg=522](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/emp_lan_97_uezd.php?reg=522), 24<sup>th</sup> March 2014;

[http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/ussr\\_nac\\_39\\_ra.php?reg=771](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/ussr_nac_39_ra.php?reg=771), 24<sup>th</sup> March 2014;

267 Francine Hirsch: Border-Making and the formation of Soviet National Identities, in: Hirsch, Francine (ed.), *Empire of Nations. Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*, Ithaca 2005, pp. 145-186, p. 146.

268 Friedrich Bodenstedt: *Friedrich Bodenstedts gesammelte Schriften*, Berlin 1865, p. 55.

269 mirza shapis kucha, in: kuchebis dasakhelebebi. My thanks goes to the National Archive of Georgia which was so friendly to provide me this document.

270 tbilisi 1500, in: tbilisi 231 (14<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1958).

271 This suggests a plaque at the cemetery from 1996.

272 Marina Alexidze: Persians in Georgia (1801-1921), in: *Journal of Persianate Studies* 1 (2008), S. 254-260, p. 258.

Saeed Talajooy: The impact of Soviet Contact on Iranian Theatre. Abdolhosein Nushin and the Tudeh Party, in: Cronin, Stephanie (ed.): *Iranian-Russian encounters. Empires and revolutions since 1800*, London 2013, pp. 337-358.

273 City map of Tiflis [kalak t'pilis gegma 1924].

“Muslim Cemetery [musulmanta sasaplao]”<sup>274</sup>.

The narratives connected to places changed according to policy. The perception of these changes are reflected in the narratives about people, but they do not fit perfectly into the descriptions given in maps, newspapers, instructions, the official ideology and the images of the elite. It had no impact on them under “normal” circumstances but it became crucial by the end of the 1940s when the deportations of the “Tatar” population started. During this time the “exact” nationality of people was registered in their passport, and according to the political situation the Iranian and Turkish population were deported. As some of the Georgian residents state, Azernaijanians had never lived in the neighborhood but the so called “Tatars” declared themselves as such to avoid their deportation.<sup>275</sup>

In official narratives Iran and Turkey were not part of the “big Soviet family [didi sabchota ojakhi]”, or more exactly Southcaucasian countries. In Soviet times and even before, the latter were considered to be especially close to each other with a shared history, living peacefully together in Tbilisi. To prove this friendship the writers and dramatists Gabriel Sundukian (1825-1912)<sup>276</sup>, as an Armenian representative, Akaki Tsereteli (1840-1915), for Georgia and Mirza Fatali Akhundov, for Azerbaijan, are presented, because they all lived in Tbilisi.

“This three famous representatives of the Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani people, unified the traditional friendship of the Southcasian people, which was also formed and hardened in the collective fight against the Turkish and Iranian conqueror.”<sup>277</sup>

A part of the Tbilisian population was excluded by assigning to them another ethnic term (Iranian or Turkish) and so they were considered to be the “conqueror”. In an article in the magazine *Tbiliselebi*<sup>278</sup> the deportation of this people is connected to a community of Georgians living in the province of Fereydan in Iran. They settled there by force or came voluntary in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>279</sup> Following the popular scientific article in the weekly magazine *Tbiliselebi*, Stalin wanted to repatriate this community but due to the discord with the allies at the end of World War II

“Stalin resigned from the return of the Fereydan Georgians into their homeland [...] but he never gave up the chance for revenge. And this time came. [stalinma uari tkma pereidneli kartvelebis samshobloshi gadmosakhlebaze [...] magram shurisdziebis shanss khelidan arasdros ushvebda. ase mokhda amjeradats.]”<sup>280</sup>

274 City map of Tiflis 1934 [kalak t’pilis is gegma (skema) 1934].

275 Fieldnotes 14<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

276 Agop J. Hacikyan: *The Heritage of Armenian Literature: From the eighteenth century to modern times*, Detroit 2005, p. 268.

277 [kartveli, somekhi da azerbaijaneli khalkhis am sam gamochenel ts’armomadgenels ertmanettan ak’avshirebda amierk’avk’asiis khalkta t’raditsiuli megobroba, romelits iranel da turk damp’q’obta ts’inaaghmdog ertobliv brdzolashi chamoq’alibda gamoits’rto.] *tbilisi* 1500, in: *tbilisi* 231 (14<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1958).

278 Why Ordered Stalin the Deportation of the Iranians Living in Georgia [rat’om gadats’q’vit’a st’alinma sakartveloshi mtskhovrebi iranelebis gasakhleba], in: *tbiliselebi* 19 (2014).

279 Babak Rezvani: *The Fereydani Georgian Representation of Identity and Narration of History. A Case of Emic Coherence*, in: *Anthropology of the Middle East* 4 (2009), Nr. 2, pp. 52–74, p. 52.

280 rat’om gadats’q’vit’a st’alinma sakartveloshi mtskhovrebi iranelebis gasakhleba, in: *tbiliselebi* 19 (2014).

In August 1951 the deportation of 1400 Iranian families from Georgia started.<sup>281</sup> This interpretation of history shows how ethnic belonging was naturalized and used by the Soviet government. The structure of the article shows that the focus of the author is strongly ethnocentric. Only at the end of the last paragraph the deportation of the Iranians is mentioned the rest of the article describes the deportation of the Georgians in 17<sup>th</sup> century and their hardships in Iran. This is remarkable for an article that claims to deal with the deportation of the Iranians from Georgia. Such a focus appears also in the narratives of the Georgian neighbors, this is what Wertsch calls “ethnocentric narcissism”.<sup>282</sup>

However, the reason for the deportations remain unclear, but even in the aforementioned article a connection with the events in Iran after World War II is recognized. By the end of the 1940s the relationship between the Soviet Union and Persia worsened due to the Iranian government demanding the withdrawal of Soviet troops from its territory. Initially the occupation of the Iranian territory served for the transit of supplies from the allies for the Soviet fight against the Nazis. But soon the Sovietization of the Russian zone in Iran started with the support of dissident Kurds and Azeris. They were based in the Soviet Union as well and their demands for autonomy in Iran were supported by Stalin. In 1946 Soviet troops left Iranian territory and in 1947 the Iranian government directed military campaigns against Kurdish and Azerbaijani separatists in North Iran. The communist party was outlawed in 1949 after an attempt on the Sha's life.<sup>283</sup>

The situation between the Soviet Union and Iran was all but good. Whether this was the ultimately reason for the hostility against the Persian population in the Caucasus or if the replacements have to be seen in the context of other treats against different people in the Caucasus and the Crimea in this time, needs further exploration. But there might be a link between the Azerbaijan crisis of the late 1940 and the sharp differentiation between the Soviet Azerbaijani and Soviet Persian population. The idea of a fifth column of this people who would support a western aggression in the Caucasus could serve as a pretense for the ethnic cleanings in the Caucasus and in our case in Tbilisi. My informant mentioned also Persian Jews which became subject of deportations, which shows that the expulsion of all ethnically “alien” people might be the background for the replacement. On 29<sup>th</sup> of May 1949 a degree which aimed at the deportation of the “remaining Greeks, Dashnaks, Turks from Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Black Sea Coast” was adopted.<sup>284</sup> The deportation of the Persian population of Tbilisi was ordered in August 1949 as the author of Tbiliselebi claims. People which were not part of the “Soviet family” had to move to Central Asia. As my informant told me,

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281 Ibidem.

282 Wertsch, *Texts of Memory and Texts of History*, p. 11.

283 Amin Saikal: *Iranian Foreign Policy, 1921-1979*, in: *The Cambridge History of Iran in Seven Volumes*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 426-456, p. 437f.

284 Fedorovich Bugafi; Nikolai Bougai: *The Deportation of Peoples in the Soviet Union*, New York 1996.

his parents had been denounced by neighbors who did not like them. They had been deported on 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1950 and had traveled for two months on a train to Kazakhstan. Half of the deported had died along the way while the ones who managed to reach their destination had to build their own houses, he told me.<sup>285</sup> He was born in Kazakhstan, his parents came to Tbilisi in the 1930s and stayed part time in Iran and Georgia. In 1956 the Iranians were rehabilitated. They were allowed to come back to Georgia. Some of the deported stayed in Central Asia or settled in Azerbaijan after their rehabilitation. Many of the Tbilisians could not go back into their houses because they were either destroyed or occupied by Georgians. It was only if they could prove that they lived there before that they could move in again. This was hardly possible because they had to leave home within some minutes and could take only a few things with them.<sup>286</sup> He and his parents was lucky and could move into his parents house. I don't know how exactly they managed it.

We were using Georgian language to communicate, as I have no knowledge of Azeri and since as I have mentioned my Russian is quite limited. He used a lot of Russian words and asked my host for Georgian translations. We sat down on a closed terrace with an impressive view of the neighborhood. From there he could show me any site and gave me information about the area.

He said that the area between the sulfur baths and Ortachala was settled by Iranian people. They represented 80% of the neighbors there. While speaking with him he showed me the area. The street along Mtkvari river was build up, as one can see also on photos from the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. He said that in the area where the botanical garden is located was “our cemetery [chveni sasaplao]”<sup>287</sup> and that it was destroyed like the Gorgasali Square. That this destruction appear again and again in the narratives of the Iranian-Azerbaijani shows that this is a real loss of memory for them. It shows also that they perceive themselves as an inseparable part of the city's history, which is visible in the use of the concept “Tbilisian” besides the ethnic marker “Iranian-Azerbaijani”. The discursive strategy of these Azeris is the same as the one of the Georgian neighbors. They cite authorities to prove the “truth” in their narrative. In the case of the Azerbaijani's its the reference to Grishashvili's idea of Old Tbilisi, in the case of the Georgian neighbors it is the reference to the Georgian intelligentsia (Elene Akhvlediani, for example).

However, for my informant the Iranian-Azerbaijani's narrative was not plausible. When she talked later with a Georgian friend about what her neighbor told, she lamented on the categories “Tbilisians [tbiliselebi]” and “Iranian-Azerbaijani [iraneli-azerbajaneli]”. She liked her neighbors, she is fine with her neighbors and she likes also to attend their holidays, to have tea and cake with them and to help each other – but such categories are, for her, unacceptable. She said they are not

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285 Interview 24212, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

286 Ibidem.

287 Interview 24212, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

Georgians and was wondering why they came back from Kazakhstan, and had moved into the flats which had been renovated by Georgians while they were absent. In her narrative exist clear distinctions between people, such as Armenian or Georgian, maybe also Azerbaijani, or “more exactly Tatars”. We once had a discussions about this, I argued that it is not that clear as she thinks that I am German and my girlfriend Italian and our children will be Italian-German (like Iranian-Azerbaijani), no she said, this would be impossible they would be either German or Italian. She follows exactly the Soviet rule of ethnic designation, the children had to chose one ethnicity from their parents (in the case they were mixed) which was assigned to them a life long.<sup>288</sup>

Here appears the same idea like in the article in Tbiliselebi. The focus is not the deportation of the Iranian population but the own group. The Georgians in Iran had to come back to Georgia and the Iranians from Georgia had to go back to Iran. This view was spread in the Stalin era and is dominant until today. Similar to the naturalization of the built environment, where a national character or its other is assigned to certain styles, like the balcony or the modernist buildings respectively, humans are arranged in the same way. There exist a community identified with the nation (Georgians) and its other (minorities) and similar to the discourse on architecture some are authentic and others not. The concept of authenticity may not be adopted for human beings, but in the narratives terms like “pure Georgian [supta kartveli]” or “real Georgian [namdvilad kartveli]”, suggest that a similar idea is spread for the humans.

“narrative tools” (narratives on events – the deportation; on cultural practice – celebrating together; on place names – Tatar Street, Tatar Square; on groups – Tatars, Iranians, Azerbaijanis) are used for structuring memory, and by this to assign meaning to the neighborhood, including its respective places and inhabitants. Such “narrative tools” are used differently by different groups but all narratives refer to the multi-ethnic character of Tbilisi. In the version of the Soviet and of the later Georgian national state, it was defined who belongs to this multitude of citizens and who not (all Soviet people or all Georgians respectively), while the neighbors used their own categories (“Tatars” and Georgians). Such narratives can be excluding (like the deportation of the Iranians), including (like the creation of the Azerbaijanis) or indifferent (like the use of the category “Tatar”). Besides the ethnocentric narratives, the practices are more indifferent, Jones claims that “Georgians are accustomed to the idea of a multinational community, but most believe in an ethnonational one.”<sup>289</sup> This multinational community and practice can be observed at the new Muslim cemetery.

#### *Old Friends – the New Muslim Cemetery*

Once my host proposed to visit the new Muslim cemetery at Ortachala (in Tbilisi exist two Muslim

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288 Suny, *Making Minorities*, p. 250.

289 Jones, *Georgia*, p. 145.

cemeteries, as some workers there told me),<sup>290</sup> after I told her that I was looking for gravestones at the old one, but could find almost none (except the Azerbaijani monument and three stones which were hidden in the grass). The new one was built in the 1960s after the one at today's botanical garden was razed. It exist some photos of the former cemetery and on city maps one can see it. On this sources it is named Muslim or Tatar Cemetery. What is now of interest is not the perception of material change but the perception of cultural practices, concretely how the graves are perceived and which practices are visible at the cemetery. This reflects how the dwellers in the neighborhood perceive themselves, since this site is used mostly by them.

The trip to the cemetery was similar to the trip to the Elene Akhvlediani Museum. My informant put on good clothes and called some neighbors to find out the correct Marshrutka. For her it was again a trip into her memory. Almost all her former friends, neighbors and even neighbors were buried there. The place has a certain meaning for her and connects her present life to a lost or imagined past. Like the painter, she knew the buried people and the place provided the possibility to experience this memory.

The cemetery is, different to the Ahkvlediani Museum neither located in the center of the city nor in an area referred to the intelligentsia. It is located in Ortachala and just a small, hidden path is leading to the place. We arrived and had to walk some hundred meters, before the first graves appeared. The first gravestone we saw was from the husband of the old lady I had interviewed together with my host and the young interpreter. The graves consist of parcels in which at least two generations of one family is buried. In a few cases I found small vaults. My host and the Iranian-Azerbaijani informant said that such kind of tomb could be found on the old cemetery. This is also visible on old photos and this sepulchers are the oldest ones on the new cemetery. On the gravestones are the pictures of the persons combined with an object which characterized her or him. Most inscriptions on the stones are in Cyrillic letters if the person died until 1990, afterwards the inscription were made mostly in Latin. On the same parcel the letters can be Cyrillic, Latin and Georgian as well as Arabic. As my guide said, this is because Azerbaijanis don't have their own script, similar to the claim that they don't have their own nation.

First the family names, then the first name and the father's name is written down. The names are written in their Azeri or Russian form, but from time to time also Georgian names appear. On some graves one could see the rest of the traditional Georgian Easter celebration. For this holiday the relatives of the dead gather on the grave, eat and drink (mostly wine) and “share” the food with the deceased. We went there shortly after Easter, so we could see wine bottles and the wine sprinkled

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290 Fieldnotes, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2014.



over the tombs, along with food and flowers. On such a grave was also a stone with Georgian letters but the rest of Easter celebration was also visible on other places. Following the signs of a tradition, which is connected to Georgianess, one can guess that the relatives are Georgians or wanted to show their belonging to the Georgian (perhaps also Orthodox) community.

The oldest date on a gravestone I found showed the year 1926 but the stones of this parcel looked quite new. Due to the fact that the old cemetery was razed in 1952, I presume that the graves could not be older than this year. I found a stone from the year 1952. What is of interest is that some people were buried two times. One informant told me that the old Muslim cemetery was relocated to where it is currently found, and people could exhume their relatives and bring them to the new place.

This means that the memory of Muslim ancestors was not erased totally but there was the possibility to replace it. The characteristics of the graves suggest to speak of an indifferent cultural practice. First referring to language, which changes from time to time and shows tendencies of belonging. The script on the stones show to what extent language is part of politics. The use of different writing systems within one family, and sometimes even on a single stone, suggests that language is not an inseparable part of a person but can be changed following political tendencies, like the change of the writing system in Azerbaijan. Adopting these changes can show the self perception of people on the cemetery and how they are perceived by neighbors, as the statement on the absence of an Azerbaijan script suggests. The script can show belonging since it underlines the ethnicity of a person. About one grave bearing a Georgian inscription my informant told me that this person was “pure Georgian [supta kartveli]”<sup>291</sup> and explained the kinship relations of this person. The grave had a Georgian inscription, while the one of her “pure Georgian” parents was still Cyrillic.

Secondly a religious indifference can be recognized here. On the one hand it is a genuine Muslim cemetery, ethnicity has usually no impact on the religion of a person. On the other hand Christianity and Georgianess became inseparably connected in the last decades.<sup>292</sup> When we went back to my host's neighborhood she called the neighbor whose husband's grave we saw. She told her that we saw her husband and then she explained that this lady will be buried by his side, even if she is Orthodox, except she wants to be buried on another place.<sup>293</sup> Christian rituals take place at the cemetery, alcoholic drinks sprinkled over the area shows that the religious rules vary in the neighborhood. I could not figure out which religion people at the cemetery belonged to, even so one would think they are Muslims. This is invisible, only relatives or neighbors can know it. Even the

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291 Fieldnotes, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

292 Jones, Georgia, p. 22.

293 Fieldnotes, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

signs of a christian ritual does not mean that the family or some members entombed there belong to one religion or another. Maybe people just want to prove their belonging to a group by carrying out a ritual which is connected to it. This shows further more the distribution of power in Georgia. The Muslim cemetery is violated with not Muslim drinks and rituals, while it is hardly imaginable that Muslim rituals take place on a Christian cemetery, since the Georgian Orthodox Church takes care that their religion stays pure. Islam is marginalized, while Orthodox Christianity is the dominant religion.

My informant mentioned that her neighbors were buried in this cemetery.<sup>294</sup> In the neighborhood itself it is not easy to recognize who belongs to which religion. Some families are mixed like the one of the two old Georgian ladies, which were married to Muslims. I could recognize when the young interpreter asked the ladies to which religion they belong that religion matters in the narratives. At least for the younger generation it was important, otherwise she had not asked.<sup>295</sup> One informant told me about the old Muslim cemetery at the botanical garden. It was not questioned that he and his relatives would be buried at a Muslim cemetery. They still perceive themselves, despite all assaults to the Islamic community in the Soviet Union and independent Georgia, as Muslims. Islam in Soviet Union was challenged like any other religion, with atheist propoganda. In general it was intended that Islam was practiced within a registered institution. In the case of Tbilisi's Muslims this was the "Spiritual Board of Transcaucasia" in Baku. Each board used a different language, the one in Baku Azeri,<sup>296</sup> which caused once more a "Azerbaijanization" of the non-Georgian population (the first attempt was made by using the category Azerbaijani in the census of 1939). The demolishing of the Shiite mosque also enforced religious indifference within the Islam community of Tbilisi, as they now had to share the same building. The same effect had the demolishing of the old cemetery, which had separated areas for Sunnites and Shiites,<sup>297</sup> there is no evidence for a separation between the different branches of Islam at the new cemetery. Even Christians and Muslims share one parcel.

By speaking of ethnic or religious indifference, one has to keep in mind that it requires a reference to a normalized state, a definition on what "pure Georgian" means or how a true Muslim or Christian cemetery has to look like. For the Muslim case it might be easier to define since the burial follows strict rules,<sup>298</sup> as Sanikidze and Walker point,

"for many Azeris, it is imperative that burials be performed according to religious structures[...], [and

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294 Ibidem.

295 Interview 15213, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2014;

Interview 15213, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2014.

296 Yaacov Ro'i: Islam in the Soviet Union. From the Second World War to Gorbachev, London 2000, p. 100.

297 George Sanikidze; Edward W. Walker: Islam and Islamic Practices in Georgia, in: BPS Working Paper Series, 2004, p.22.

298 Burial rituals are codified in Islam, they include washing, enshrouding, facing to Mecca of the buried and prayer, Death, in: Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World, New York 2004, p. 175.

they] equate religion with nationality. Thus one-third of those questioned in the 1990 field research considered Islam to be their nationality ('my nationality is Muslim')."<sup>299</sup>

According to Sanikidze and Walker this could mean that Islam, especially the burials, has a strong ethnic meaning for the Muslim neighbors, it is to prove their "Azerbaijaniess". But it could also mean that religion is the primary identity marker, which is more similar to the answer "my nationality is Muslim" and the unclear self assignment as "Iranian-Azerbaijani" suggests.

To prove the belonging to the Georgian community, religious rituals are useful since the ethnic and religious categories are mixed as well. Because Georgian Orthodoxy is connected to the nation an answer like "my nationality is Christian" or rather the other way round – "my religion is Georgian" is imaginable. However, normalized rituals are performed and customs stressed to underline group belonging, like the Easter celebration to underline the Georgian descendant of the deceased or the change of scripts on the gravestones. Such practices can be adopted according to the self determination of the own identity. They show rather the self perception, then a preexisting identity which is inseparably connected to a person. Such practices have changed or appeared, following political or social tendencies in the last decades. As the Georgian writings on the grave of the "pure Georgian" person identifies her as Georgian (while her parents grave had Cyrillic letters), or the eastern celebrations show the belonging to a Christian community (even so this assignment happens on a cemetery which is defined as Muslim).

The cemetery is somehow equivalent to the neighborhood and reflects the indifferent cultural practice there. Only external events make it necessary to define clear boundaries within the community. An example for such an external event is the restructuring in the city, like the demolishing of the mosque which until today provides a feeling of marginality to the (Shiite) Muslim community. The same can be said for the deportations of the Iranians or the definition of the capital as a national protected zone. Besides these separating events, the Kharpukhi dwellers are still neighbors. Pointing at some graves my informant told me that these persons were very good friends and their families are now living in Baku. She also found the grave of her old neighbor, the journalist of the newspaper "Soviet Georgia" whose daughters now live in Baku and who had visited my host to attend a Yezidi wedding.

## 5 Conclusion

I showed which narratives about Kharpukhi neighborhood in Old Tbilisi are spread among the neighbors and how they refer to their daily life and discourses on Old Tbilisi and the nation. I

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<sup>299</sup> Sanikidze; Walker, *Islam and Islamic Practices in Georgia*, pp. 24f.

analyzed a multitude of such discourses and their social environment related them to the stories of the Kharpukhi residents, especially one Georgian lady, who lives in the neighborhood for around 60 years. This public discourses I understand as “narrative tools” which are used to bring the own memory in an order, which is understandable for the own group.

Beginning with the analysis of the balconied houses of Tbilisi I argued that it became a cultural myth or, referring to Boym, a “common place” to which a multitude of meanings are inscribed. Another “common place” is Old Tbilisi. I argue that this concept was established by Grishashvili and adopted in early Soviet times by the authorities as a negative counterpart of the socialist city. While the former was related with narrow streets, darkness and backwardness, the latter was linked to wide streets, light and modernity. After World War II this image changed. Now Old Tbilisi was connected to the Georgian nation. As a representation of this idea served the balconies which became inseparably connected with the old part of the city and therefore with Georgia. From this time on the protection of the national heritage became more and more important. As a result renovations of the old center started. During the renovations the importance of the balconies was underlined by adding them to the newly renovated houses. The main actor of this process was the Georgian intelligentsia, as Manning states: “the primary role of the intelligentsia was to take care of the Nation, while the State took care of socialism (as in the phrase 'National in form Socialist in content').”<sup>300</sup> The Tbilisi residents were encouraged to esteem Old Tbilisi, this happened through newspaper articles as well as through cultural events, such as the in the 1970s established city festival “Tbilisoba”.<sup>301</sup>

The influence of this official discourse on the narratives of the residents is limited, since Old Tbilisi and the balconies are the places where their daily life takes place and people do not tend to contextualize their daily life into abstract discourses. Their narratives are more influenced by their social situation. It appears that the difficult living conditions in this “typical” Tbilisian houses, sometimes without heating and bathrooms, are mentioned frequently. This reminds more to the statements of the 1950s when the “shanty-like houses [sakhlebi, khukhulebivit]”<sup>302</sup> were described. Nevertheless, the Kharpukhi dwellers use the discourse about “Tbilisi proper” as some of them call their neighborhood, to underline their group belonging to either the dominant national group – the “pure Georgians [supta kartveli]” – or the Tbilisian community – the “Tbilisians [tbiliselebi]”.

In the perception of changes in the built environment one can see how narratives are shaped through the transformation of the surrounding and the discourses which accompany this changes. One of the first restructurings affected today's Gorgasali Square. From the 1940s on it was rebuilt which

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300 Manning: The city of balconies, p. 74.

301 Vardosanidze, Socio-Cultural Rehabilitation of Old Tbilisi, p. 51.

302 dzveli tbilisi parglebshi, in: k'omunist'i 206 (16<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1950).

included the demolition of the Shiite mosque, the building of a new highway, razing of houses and placing the statue of king Gorgasali next to Metekhi Church. What for the Soviet government was modernization was for the Muslim population of Old Tbilisi the obliteration of their presence from the cityscape.

The renovation of the baths, which begun in the 1980s, reflected the new focus of the authorities as well as the intelligentsia on heritage protection. Places which were considered to be characteristic for Old Tbilisi were chosen for the revitalization project: The old city wall at Baratashvili Street and the baths. This revival affected not only the built environment, but was accompanied by a focus on an idealized city culture. Such an idea of Old Tbilisi was located in a past, in which a multicultural character could easily be placed, while the actual situation turned into a ethnonational concept of the nation. Such an image is reproduced by the Georgian residents of Kharpukehi. Additional to the discourse on the national character of the city authenticity serves as a marker to describe Old Tbilisi. Authentic is what appears on the pictures of the painter Elene Akhvlediani, as it was stated by my main informant. Here appears the reference to the Georgian intelligentsia which took “care of the Nation.” This role is stressed in the movie “Repentance” of Tengiz Abuladze who represented the guardians of the nation in the person of Sandro whose flat in the movie is the Elene Akhvlediani House Museum – a place to which my main informant refers as well.

For the latter buildings and concepts which were alien to the idea of a genuine Georgian culture are accused to intrude and destroy the character of the city and thereby the country. Such impurities are connected with “rootless cosmopolitanism.” Especially the modernist buildings, constructed under the presidency of Saakashvili, like the Peace Bridge, which “also Aleko don't like,”<sup>303</sup> are declared a challenge for Georgia, since they come from “a new established country, America, [which] is not a homeland [akhali kvekhniereba, america ar aris samshoblo].”<sup>304</sup> Each nation (not America because it is none) has its characteristics, which are important for their citizens, like a mother is loved most by her own children. This idea derives directly from the Soviet idea of preexistent nations, as Stalin stated: “every nation, whether large or small, has its own specific qualities and its own peculiarities, which are unique to it.”<sup>305</sup>

Similar to the idea of an authentic built environment exists the idea of an authentic Georgian population. Each individual belonged to one ethnicity in Soviet times and the Soviet Union was a “large communal apartment in which 'national state units, various republics and autonomous provinces' represented 'separate rooms'.”<sup>306</sup> The neighbors and the former flat's neighbors belong

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303 Interview 15211 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2013.

304 Ibidem.

305 Slezkine, *The USSR as a Communal Apartment*, p. 449.

306 Ibidem, p. 415.

also to different groups and live together in an “unbreakable friendship” as it was stated during socialism.<sup>307</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet Union many people left Georgia and headed for the country assigned to them in their Soviet passport. Nonetheless, some stayed and others come back frequently. The idea of Tbilisi as a multicultural community, initially established in Grishashvili's book about the “literary bohemia”, is stressed by the non-Georgian neighbors in Kharpukehi, while the Georgians stress the ethnonational character of their country.

This idea was experienced in a harsh way by the parts of the Muslim population of the neighborhood, which until today use the “inexact” ethnic marker Iranian-Azerbaijani and are called “Tatars” by their Georgian neighbors. From 1932 on the nationality was fixed in the Soviet passport and in 1950 it became crucial if one was Iranian, Azerbaijani or Tatar. In this year the Iranian population of Tbilisi was deported, as time witnesses say. They were rehabilitated at the end of the 1950s but their neighborhood had changed. It is not surprising that they refer to a multicultural past and Grishashvili's story about it.

The nationalist rhetoric was intensified at the end of the Soviet Union, when the first president demanded that all Georgian citizens had to learn Georgian. After the Rose Revolution even the flag became Christian. Such references to presumed Georgian values can be found in the narratives of the Georgian neighbors in Kharpukehi as well, but besides this rhetorical rearmament, their cultural practices were and still are indifferent to ethnic and religious belonging. Such an indifferent practice can be observed on the new Muslim cemetery where different religious rituals take place (Muslim burials along with Easter celebrations) and on the tombs are signs of different ethnic belongings (Azeri language along with Georgian script). Nevertheless the Georgian majority dominates the minorities in the country, since indifferent practices are spread among the latter, due to a high pressure for assimilation.

The narratives of the Kharpukehi residents are embedded in public discourses on Old Tbilisi, but not one single and contingent idea is adopted but a variety of sometimes contradicting conceptions. Even so it is not possible to assign one dominant idea, nationalism plays an important role, but mostly on a rhetorical level. It has only a limited impact on daily life. It is surprising how resilient once established narratives can be. This can be explained by the individuals preference for ideas which upgrade the own group before such that diminish the own relevance. The narratives reflect above all the social situation, namely the experiences in daily life, though in an unconscious way. Nevertheless, these are the stories which characterize life in Old Tbilisi and the perception of the neighborhood's transformation. Not the idealized image of urban life, but its social reality must be explored. More research on the daily life in the city must be done before the center is totally

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307 tbilisi 1500, in: tbilisi 231 (14<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1958).

commercialized and is only a Potemkin Village, in which it is not affordable to live.

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## 7 Appendix

### Abbreviations

BPS	Berkeley Program in Eurasian and East European Studies
ed.	Editor
IBSUSJ	International Black Sea University Scientific Journal
USSR	United of Soviet Socialist Republics
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
SU	Soviet Union

### Key for the Interviewees

1. Gender  
1=female;  
2=male

**2. Age**

1=0-7 (no schoolchild);

2=7-18 (schoolchild);

3=18-32 (not educated in the SU);

4=32-70 (educated in the SU but after destalinization);

5=older 70 (witnessed Stalin era)

**3. Education**

1=Academical education;

2=No academical education;

3=Unclear

**4. Place of residency**

1=Old Tbilisi;

2=Tbilisi;

3=Other place of living

**5. Ethnicity**

1=Self-designation Georgian;

2=Self-designation not Georgian;

3=Self-designation unclear

Example:

my main informant = 15211

## **Eigenständigkeitserklärung**

Ich erkläre, dass ich vorliegende Arbeit selbständig und nur unter Verwendung der angegeben Hilfsmittel und Quellen angefertigt habe. Die eingereichte Arbeit ist nicht anderweitig als Prüfungsleistung verwendet worden oder in deutscher oder einer anderen Sprache als Veröffentlichung erschienen.

Halle, den 13.04.2015.