

The Hotel/Refugee Camp *Iveria*: Symptom, Monster, Fetish, Home.

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Figure 1: Hotel/Vertical Refugee Camp: Hotel Iveria circa 2002 (Author Photo)

The Iveria Inside Out: Political Subjects and Aesthetic Objects

Up until very recently, the 22 floor *Iveria* hotel was the single most visible architectural summation of Georgia's post-socialist predicament. Built in the 1960s to be the paragon

luxury hotel of the Georgian SSR, it occupies the geographic center of Tbilisi and commands a sweeping panoramic view of the entire city. It is also visible from every point in the city. Hence, when the hotel, along with countless other empty buildings, was turned, in 1992, into a ‘vertical refugee camp’ (Martin 2002) for some of the over 200,000 IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons, known in Georgian as ‘refugees’) from the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict of 1992-3, the hotel became a highly visible reminder of the war, the increasing permanence of the status of IDPs, and thence all that was wrong with the post-socialist condition (Theodorou 2003, 2006).

Few architectural objects were as oft-photographed by foreign photographers as this Iveria, the Iveria-turned-refugee-camp. Not only have several separate photographic studies been made (Martin 2002, Morley 2003), but photo-sharing websites like flicker.com show that many amateur photographers have taken at least one picture of the hotel. For foreigners, it seems, the hotel-turned-refugee-camp was treated as a species of aesthetic object, the picturesque. A specific kind of picturesque to be sure, a post-modern ruin, a hybrid of original modernist architectural intention and the bricolage of architectural adornments and modifications made by the IDPs accreting willy-nilly over a decade made the building at once ugly and strangely beautiful. An unwitting palimpsest of the transition, like another popular image, a large colorful Coca-Cola ad splashed over an immense stony mural celebrating Prometheus’ theft of fire (marking the erstwhile location of the socialist electrical authority), the hotel exhibits plenty of unintentional historical irony. No longer exhibiting the orderly beauty of unified intentionality of an architect, the Iveria took on the rough disorderly aesthetics of contrast of the picturesque, variously described by flickr.com site visitors as a ‘habitable collage’, a ‘mosaic’, and a

‘composition, both literal and photographic’; pictures of it in this state were even recruited into the flickr.com website ‘architectural monsters’, dedicated to ‘the most brutal, dreadful and hideous buildings...freaks of architecture’ (<http://www.flickr.com/groups/669305@N20/>).

The highly visible multicolored picturesque exterior of the hotel also elicits humanitarian concerns about the unseen reality of the prosaic day to day plight of the refugees within, whose attempts to render the interior of the hotel into a habitable living space unwittingly transformed its exterior into a sui generis collage. In commentary on images at this site, the poetic aesthetic exterior quickly becomes a symptom of the prosaic political everyday lives within, between the visible aesthetics of the aesthetic object and the invisible reality of the political subjects it contains, the affective response it elicits moving between the ‘beautiful’ (and also ‘ugly’) and the ‘sad’ (‘terrifying’, ‘horrible’). A number of photographic ethnographies have also sought to connect these two moments of the hotel, moving from the aesthetic exterior to the political interior, the day to day lives and stories of those inside (Martin 2002, Morley 2003). Such narratives that begin with the aesthetic problem of the hotel and move to the political and humanitarian interior connect these discourses with a broader set of political and humanitarian narratives about the Georgian IDP problem, in which the Iveria plays a minor role as a very visible, but numerically insignificant, symptom of the utterly prosaic phenomenon of IDP collective centres and the lives of those within them (Lois and Tavartkiladze 2008).

Visible Wound and Blind Spot: Foreign and Local receptions

In the case of the *Iveria*, we are lucky to have a powerful set of perceptive framings of the Iveria problem (Theodorou 2003, 2006), which I would like to summarize here. First of all, Theodorou notes, the Iveria is to some extent like every other IDP collective center on the interior, but it is its exterior visibility that grants it its exceptional status: ‘What makes Iveria case so unique is the fact that it occupied the center and the most prominent location of a city; usually refugee or IDs camps are in the periphery’ (Theodorou 2006:63). The brute fact of a refugee camp in a hotel brings the political and the peripheral into the center of the picture, where it not only can, but *must*, be seen every day. And certainly, for foreign photographers, it has been seen and documented countless times, a kind of keepsake view of post-socialist Tbilisi, an aesthetic point of entry into the political. But for those explicitly concerned with the politics and policy, Georgians in general or European policy experts, this highly visible hotel became a curious ‘blind spot’ (I thank Zaza Shatirishvili for suggesting this term), a visible irruption of the political which could not be contained, named or enunciated within discourses of policy, even if, as Theodorou notes, in 2003 the hotel seemed to epitomize all the problems that form the objects of policy discourse in Tbilisi.

In 2003, the city bear[s] witness to the effects of economic dilapidation, and corruption. Deserted areas, decaying buildings, high rise[s] of the nouveaux rich illegally buil[t] within central city parks, the half-finished regeneration plan of a neighbourhood financed by the World Bank, rapidly increasing investment in land by speculators were the visible signs of the city’s decadent state. Local architects and urbanists pointed out that the municipality’s chief architect post was always assigned to the most corrupted person in town. However, there was something which was never discussed in the meetings; a kind of wound secluded by the silence of the locals and the puzzlement of the visitors but whose sign was exposed in open view in the heart of the city.

The geometrical center of Tbilisi – a privileged holiday destination under soviet rule –was marked by the overwhelming presence of the Iveria Hotel. The conspicuous site was deliberately chosen – in a gesture of soviet urban rhetoric– to construct in 1967, the best ever hotel not only in Tbilisi but in the whole of

Georgia. In July 2003, at the time of the experts' visit, Iveria was nothing but the war's side effect on the city; a 15-storey vertical refugee camp for 800 uprooted Abkhazians. (Theodorou 2006: 62)

Theodorou's analysis, which sets the hotel between semiotic polarities of visibility and invisibility, policy and politics, grows out of her own engagement with Tbilisi as a European policy expert. In 2003, a group of Council of Europe (COE) experts, including Theodorou, visited Tbilisi as part of a COE program, holding meetings with Georgian government and civil society leaders: 'The experts were expected to analyse existing conditions within the city in order to draft a report and prescribe appropriate cultural policies for the city's cultural regeneration as a means to trigger economic development' (Theodorou 2006: 62). For such experts, analyzing the empirical situation of Tbilisi leads to the creation of policy-relevant objects, 'problems', which in turn elicit 'policies'. However, in the absence of what Theodorou calls 'the political', such policies become, in effect, mere 'politics', an almost autonomous and self-valuable order of expert practices and institutions:

Cultural experts in particular, following the analysis of a specific context, deploy strategies and formulate policies for regeneration, including rehabilitation, especially in case of a city's context. What they actually do, is in the absence of the political, to generate politics (i.e., set of practices and institutions) as the art of experts administration. (Theodorou 2006: 63)

For Theodorou, the Iveria is itself 'an encounter with the absolutely real' (Theodorou 2003: 24). The Iveria represents what she calls 'the political', the problem of 'dead-end states', that is, problems that retain their stubborn resistance to being rephrased as policy-objects, that represent a recalcitrant indexical order of messy contingency, risk, and undecidability.¹

Iveria hotel however, stand as a reminder that the political cannot be ignored for it has violently evaded contemporary cities, not only in Georgia but worldwide, since the last decade of the 20th century. By political we mean the moment in which a problem becomes a dead-end state and creates a crisis that dislocates our social constructions. The political is associated with this moment of contingency and undecidability marking the gap between the dislocation of one socio-political identification and the creation of the desire of a new one. (Y. Stavrakakis, Lacan and the Political). (Theodorou 2006: 63)

But, crucially, from the perspective of an ordering, social construction of problems and policies, the Hotel Iveria itself cannot be domesticated or named, it is repressed, erased, becomes a blind spot:

Iveria is our encounter with the political. As such, it provokes anxiety and triggers defensive constructs that help to pretend that it does not exist. This was the approach of the Georgians but also of the group of experts. (Theodorou 2006: 63)

As a result, the COE report (an artifact of policy-relevant discourse which Theodorou, as expert, helped to draft) made no mention of the hotel. However, when Theodorou was asked to submit an article to the COE magazine, she ignored the report, and instead focused on the hotel Iveria ‘which cannot be contained within a settling approach of rehabilitation or – to put it bluntly – of recycling either of people or of the building’ (Theodorou 2006: 63). The discursive regimes of expert policy, what Theodorou calls ‘politics’, represents a (technocratic, expert-driven) ‘ordering of things’, rather than the political as a contingent state of being ‘ordered by things’ (Miller 2002). Precisely because of its brute reality, its visibility, the Iveria represents the political as reality, not as an elite ordering of things, but as a being ordered by things, as an open wound. But precisely its status as a highly visible open wound (which makes it so obvious to foreigners) is what necessitated, for Georgians, repressing it, turning it into a blind spot.

Monster, Symptom, Fetish: Iveria and History

Such was the situation of the hotel up to the eve of the Rose Revolution. The hotel, like the refugees it housed, was only ‘temporarily integrated’ into its landscape: ‘To an outsider it seemed quite obvious that in Iveria, the people and the built alike were awaiting their rehabilitation’ (Theodorou 2006: 63). Indeed, Georgian and international policy towards the hotel was founded on some of the same policies that marked its attitude toward the IDPs it housed.

The essentially neo-liberal New Approach (NA) to the IDP problem, which was begun in 2000 by the Georgian government in consultation with international relief agencies, attempted to rephrase the rehabilitation of the increasingly obviously permanent IDPs in terms of ‘temporary integration’, and attempted to rephrase their economic situation not as a humanitarian problem (where the IDPs were increasingly despised by the non-IDP population for the perceived privileges and aid they received from the state) but as a developmental one (where the IDPs would be recreated as autonomous self-reliant economic actors) (in general see Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi 2003). As Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi note, the policy was internally contradictory, because ‘temporary integration’ implied that they would be helped to integrate themselves into their immediate localities, but not so that they would not want to return to their ‘true’ homes (in Abkhazia) (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi 2003: 6). Thus, the New Approach implied that a political or military solution to the ‘frozen conflicts’ of Abkhazia and South Ossetia would restore Georgia’s territorial integrity and

make repatriation of IDPs possible in the near future. In this way, the New Approach, especially in the aftermath of the Rose Revolution, essentially identified the IDPs and their collective centres alike as being a temporary problem of integration whose permanent solution was not to be achieved by permanent local integration, but within a much broader political and military program of re-establishing Georgian sovereignty. To this end, it was essential that the IDPs, in effect, remained IDPs, and the Iveria hotel, in effect remain a hotel or refugee camp and not become a true home.

But the New Approach, as pursued in the Rose Revolutionary period, not only sought to reconstitute the IDPs as subjects by finding a permanent political solution to their IDP status (repatriation), but also by reconstituting them as being no longer a humanitarian problem as dependents of the state, but as a neo-liberal developmental one, as self-reliant economic actors to be targeted by private microfinance loans and development programs rather than public humanitarian assistance from the Georgian state (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi 2003). In effect, the relation of the IDPs to the state would be 'privatized', and, at the very same time, so would their collective centers, starting with the Iveria. Obviously, the privatization of the Iveria happened for several reasons, one being to get rid of the visible collections of IDPs represented by these centres, but also, within the terms of the New Approach, theoretically if not in practice, to provide enough compensation monies so that IDPs could purchase their own homes and become to that extent self-reliant economic actors. In general, such attempts to create temporary integration and economic self-reliance by dissolving IDP centres by privatization leading not to the desired result of IDPs purchasing permanent dwellings,

but to a status as ‘Internally Re-Displaced Persons’ (this time by privatization rather than war), a situation characteristic of the period of privatizations from 2004-7.

But up until the privatization of the hotel in 2004, IDPs of the Iveria hotel lived in the precarious interstitial limbo of ‘temporary integration.’ Everyone lives in the meantime, and in the meantime, the temporary residents left a permanent mark on the building. The progressive deformations of the physical form of the hotel as it became a habitable collage of IDP ‘homes’ became an indexical icon of the difference and deferral of ‘temporary integration’. As Theodorou notes, these refugees, in the process of dwelling in the hotel over a decade, came to remake the hotel according to their own needs, unwittingly made turning the clean lines of a modernist monument into a monstrous hybrid of permanent and temporary structure, human and building matter, ‘an animated architecture monster at the center of a city’, as visible reminders of the war and the refugee crisis, and of the increasing permanence of the temporary status of IDPs.

Iveria emerged as the highest-profile IDP refuge. The hotel’s temporary dwellers had remained in a transition state for eleven years already in 2003. Caught in a limbo state, they were still unable to return home and yet not integrated into the host city; Residents but not citizens. In their prolonged sojourn, IDPs have acted upon the architecture of the building and adapted it to their needs. Balconies turned into rooms. Walls made of wooden planks or blue plastic mark the attempt of the dwellers not only to make home out of a hotel room, but to make this home distinct and personal. Over the years the Iveria has grown into an organic community. As the VIP’s of the Soviet era were substituted by the Abkhazian IDPs, the building’s original program was compromised. Life took over and spilled out in what appears as a deformed modernist building. The rationality and controlled programme of modern architecture turned into an intolerable image when anything unwanted which was excluded in the first place comes back with a vengeance. In Iveria, it is as if human matter and building matter were recombined to produce a sensational and monstrous structure. A monster is a living entity created by the combination of already existing entities that lacks a name. In that sense, a future is always experienced as monstrous. Iveria, an animated architecture monster at the center of a city, may announce a future that we haven’t thought of. (Theodorou 2006: 62)

The hotel became a sign of different temporalities. To be sure, the remaking of the hotel as a home figured the temporality of waiting, of a temporary present with no settled future, of New Approach policies of ‘temporary integration’. But for Theodorou, the hotel in its remade state becomes a *monster*, partly in the sense of a chimerical hybrid, partly in the etymological sense, one assumes, of a portent, a sign, of some unknown future.

The hotel as a monster (in both these senses) was also, of course, a visible wound, a *symptom*, that had to be erased, repressed. The hotel remained a blind spot throughout the Shevardnadze period, a repressed architectural symptom of the political reality. Theodorou argued that it could not become visible until the political conditions changed with the Rose Revolution (2003), at which point the Iveria became visible, only because it, and the IDP problem, was immediately to be *erased* not *discursively*, but *materially*:

Since 2004, the city government has taken new initiatives to curb uncontrolled construction projects; it had a good reason to do so, given the speculation allure which the new government was quick to exploit. ‘The Iveria Hotel must be evacuated and restored to its original condition,’ said Mikheil Saakashvili in June 2004 and set the process in motion. Two months later, on August 20, a deadline expired for the hotel-dwellers to move out. ‘Private interests are not involved here,’ Tbilisi mayor told the reacting community of refugees. ‘It’s the city and the country which needs the Iveria restored.’ But he said foreign investors had shown interest in buying into the Iveria, and it was they who were offering the refugees 7,000 dollars per room if they move out. ‘The investors will soon transform the Iveria into a five-star hotel,’ A Georgian company called Silk Road has taken the initiative. ‘The company’s business was oil and petrochemicals transportation, Silk Road got lucky because its vision of the Iveria’s future coincided with the government’s own’, said the company’s spokesman. (Theodorou 2006: 63)

In Theodorou’s fascinating analysis, the ideological sea change of the Rose Revolution changes the Iveria hotel from invisible to visible, from symptom, to fetish: ‘It is when the last public remain of a hated soviet rule disappeared as Shevardnadze was forced out by

the Rose revolution, that Iveria became visible as a city symptom' (Theodorou 2006: 63). The Iveria moves from being a 'blind spot', an anxiety-provoking irruption of politics that cannot be contained, or ordered, within the anodyne technocratic rule by policy experts, to a visible 'symptom'. As a symptom, 'the exception which disturbs the surface of the false appearance', the monstrous form of the Iveria was a visible challenge to the transformative claims of the Rose Revolution to have created a utopian cityscape. According to Theodorou, it was not merely sufficient to erase this now-visible symptom, this putative 'exception' to the new utopian reality, the symptom had to be replaced with a fetish, with an architectural monument that would serve as a paragon or prototype of the transformative claims of the Rose Revolutionary order:

Only at that point [when the hotel became a visible 'city symptom'] it became urgent to be torn down to make way for a new hotel and shopping complex. What was in fact urgent was the city symptom to be substituted by a city fetish. According to Zizek fetish is a kind of inverse of the symptom. That is to say, the symptom is the exception which disturbs the surface of false appearance, while fetish is the embodiment of the Lie which enables us to sustain the unbearable. (Theodorou 2006: 63)

As a visible *symptom* of the problems of Tbilisi, an exception to the utopian claims of the Rose Revolution, a 'holdover' from the hated past(s) (both soviet and post-soviet), its cure, the building of an exemplary Western luxury hotel on its carcass, could transform the hotel and its environs instead into a *fetish*, a monumental embodiment of the political fantasy of the Rose Revolution.

Reality and Symbol: Strange encounters in the hotel lobby

Until 2004, when the hotel was finally closed, the IDPs finally evicted, the Iveria hotel hovered between the orders of the political and the aesthetic, the indexical orders of the

‘absolutely real’ and the imaginary order of the symbol. Even the moment of its closing, a move designed to purify the cityscape of this strange hybrid of hotel and refugee camp, generated another series of ‘strange encounters’, strange hybrids of different orders, that turn the material reality of the hotel into a ‘political symbol’:

This symbol is disturbing. The hotel’s faces are covered with mismatching loggias made from bricks and wooden boards so as to increase the surface of those makeshift apartments. Its occupants had understood a long time ago that they had to get accustomed to this place and all its accompanying troubles -no gas supply, but makeshift stoves laying on floor of the bathroom or of the balcony turned into a living room.

Let’s go back to the reality. While observing the comings and goings of clergymen in robes who came to collect materials before the building be pulled down, Aleko and Zaza, both security officers of the Iveria hotel in their thirties, explain that *«the company in charge of the dismantling authorized monks to collect the doors, windows, woodworks, and glass of two floors of the hotel. They want to build an annex of their Shavnabada monastery, in Dariali valley in Teleti.»*

Strange encounters in this hotel of unusual fate. Today, monks. Tomorrow construction workers. And yesterday, the Georgian president himself who came at the beginning of September to contemplate the deserted hotel. On this very day, Saakshvili was delighted to announce in front of a crowd of journalists that the administration had kept its word for the compensation, and that *« by the end of 2006, Republic square will be entirely renovated.»* (CHAUFFOUR and GUSEP 2004)

At every level the hotel shows the material order of ‘reality’ and the immaterial order of the ‘symbol’ clashing and producing strange intentional and unintentional encounters, just as the building is a monstrous hybrid of modernist architectural intentionality and post-modern unintentional bricolage. But the ‘strange encounters’ of the Iveria do not end with the eviction of the IDPs, with the construction of a new hotel on its carcass. Each attempt to purify the cityscape of this strange hybrid in which all the problems and contradictions of post-socialist Georgia are writ large only produces more strange encounters, more hybrids (Latour 1993). The space of the Iveria remains a site for

‘strange encounters’, as both the existing hotel, and later, its *disjecta membra*, generates meaningful and meaningless associations and linkages in various orders of reality and symbolism. The Iveria hotel stands at the center of Tbilisi geographically, but it is the blind spot in the center of the changes that Tbilisi is undergoing, an invisible centerpoint which generates linkages and associations.

To order these linkages and associations in a linear fashion, as a narrative or an argument, would imply that we know, once and for all, what the final reading, the final fate, of this strange, disturbing symbol is. Theodorou’s narrative, which situates the hotel between the Zizekian semiotic orders of the **symptom** and the **fetish**, draws attention to one potential set of linkages, the revolutionary narrative of the Rose Revolution (see also Shatirishvili this volume). Because this is a hegemonic, and very materially consequential, narrative, I will adopt Theodorou’s temporal ordering of semiotic categories into **symptoms**, **monsters** and **fetishes**, using them where appropriate to relate different categories to each other. Thus, the Iveria Hotel, the Deserters’ Bazaar, the Republic Square all in one way or another become visible as **symptoms**, disruptive, anxiety-producing exceptions to the new utopian revolutionary order (or **monsters**, amorphous hybrids prognosticating an uncertain future), to be replaced with **fetishes**, exemplars, paragons, of a reassuringly orderly utopian order coming to be in the wake of the revolution, typically Five Star western Hotels and Supermarket shopping complexes. Essentially, if for Zizek a symptom is the semiotic inverse of the Fetish, the Rose Revolution ideology orders the material cityscape into pairings of symptoms and fetishes.

But even so, this hegemonic ordering is only one among many possible, therefore, under an unordered series of headings or keywords, I want to untangle the various ways

that the Iveria is ordered as an element of different potential or actual series, giving it different potential significances. As the hotel becomes ordered with different elements of its context (as a hotel, as a refugee camp, as an economic object of privatization, as a soviet achievement, etc.), different aspects of the hotel are brought into relief, invested with meaning (compare Manning 2008 for this method applied to Georgian churches). In this way, the hotel Iveria as material object is revealed to not have one ‘meaning’ once and for all, but it draws our attention to a series of qualitative possibilities for meaning (‘qualisigns’), that are ‘bundled’ together in its materiality (on ‘qualisigns’ and ‘bundling’ see Keane 2003).

Republic Square (Public, Soviet, State). Let us begin with the observation that the Iveria hotel occupies a very ‘public’ space. In fact, this is one thing that differentiates it from other Refugee centers and even from other well known vertical refugee camps like the Adjaria hotel. Not only is it in the geographic center of Tbilisi, but it is visible from every point in the city. But not only that, it is on a large plaza on the central thoroughfare in Tbilisi, adjacent to one of the central, and one of the earliest, Metro stations, next to the Central post office. This is a space which represents publicness *to* the public (just as the hotel, as a soviet achievement, represented soviet modernity to the citizens and tourists who came to it), as well as being a space in which large public gatherings can be held. The hotel is not only visible, but it is ‘on stage’.

Not merely on stage, but the hotel forms part of one of the public spaces, one of the prosceniums of the cityscape. In fact, a literal proscenium, across the road from the Iveria was one of Tbilisi’s most recent, and ugliest, Soviet monuments, Andropov’s ears. The ears form the arches of a proscenium, a stage from which the Soviet and post-soviet

leaders would view military parades and processions. Even as late as 2004, right before it was dismantled, brigades that were the product of the American-funded Georgian train and equip operation, like the Shavnabada light infantry, were paraded here in front of the tribunal occupied by the leadership, in a manner equivalent to the Kremlin. The Republic square represented the publicness of the state, for the state to represent itself before the public, representational publicness, in contrast to the similar proscenium in front of Parliament, which was used by the public to represent itself to the state. Next to Andropov's Ears, on the other side of the plaza, once stood a huge hoarding on which would be displayed political messages.



Figure 2: Andropov's Ears during a parade on Republic Square in 1996 (courtesy of Hulya Sakarya)



Figure 3: Iveria Hotel during the same parade in 1996 (courtesy of Hulya Sakarya)

The square, as a public space for parades, was also filled with soviet period monuments other than the Iveria, the most notable of which was the strange structure, Andropov's Ears. As Hulya Sakarya notes of one picture of this monument she took during a parade there in 1996 (figure 2), this monument seems to have represented a specific 'symptom' of the Soviet past and a 'blind spot', very similar to the Iveria hotel across the street from the same period (figure 3):

For instance, I shot one photograph [figure 2] that at first glance evokes the past but was in fact taken during Georgian Independence Day in 1996. It captured Georgian soldiers as they assembled in front of a spectacular monument. Years later I learned that the monument had been erected in 1983 during the Andropov administration and had rarely, if ever, been used for its original purpose as a podium for public events. In addition, in all my field interviews and casual conversations, no one seemed to be able to identify this monument, nor were they interested in it. Instead, they smiled and claimed it was “Andropov’s Ears.” (Sakarya 2008: 66)

While Sakarya’s photos of the existing monument (figure 2) seemed to belong to order of the symptom, her photos of the process of dismantling of the monument in 2005 was caught up in the ‘representational economy’ of the Rose Revolution, and was read as ‘record[ing] the spirit of change and newness’ of the revolutionary times (ibid.). Like the Iveria itself, ‘Andropov’s Ears’ formed a symptom that changed into a fetish.

The Iveria hotel then, is not merely visible, but it is one element of a complex of structures that form together the publicness of Republic Square. But this public space, is appropriately enough, also, a very ‘Soviet’ space in architectural terms. Virtually every element of Republic Square is of late Soviet vintage. Each element of Republic Square represents an aspect of the publicness of the late socialist state, and into the Rose Revolution period this was the locality at which the state represented itself to the people. The **privatization** of the Iveria hotel was part of a general reconstruction project involving the whole of republic square, a general rehabilitation of a very public set of buildings, which was at the same time a **privatization** of them, thus making the Republic square into a set of **symptoms** that would be replaced with a suitable set of **fetishes** of the representational economy of the coming utopian order.

Privatization and Investors

As an object of privatization, the hotel belongs to a group of thousands of other ‘objects’ of different kinds privatized after the Rose Revolution. As a result, the privatization of the Iveria hotel in 2004 produces another set of strange encounters, this time the hotel is grouped together with a wide array of other economic objects, and serves as an uneven field where very different kinds of economic actors encounter one another: investors and IDPs. On this level, the privatization of the hotel could be seen as being a perfect example of the New Approach to the IDP problem, at once attracting foreign investment into the local economy and fulfilling terms of the IDP housing law by finding them permanent housing in the private sector (Fitigu 2005). By having private investors (and not the Georgian state) compensate the evicted IDPs at 7,000 US dollars per unit (at a total cost of some 2 million of an estimated 50 million dollar investment) (Chauffour 2004, Lobzhanidze 2004), the IDPs could be also turned from state-dependent into self-reliant economic actors, theoretically able to purchase their own apartments in Tbilisi. The privatization of the hotel would provide the funds to bring the IDPs into the private housing market as owners. In one blow, the IDPs could be turned into ‘temporarily integrated’ ‘self-reliant economic actors’, all with the money of private investors.

But it is worth looking in detail at exactly *what kind of economic actor* the IDPs become as a result of this privatization scheme. Certainly not all of them became owners of private apartments. By 2004, 7,000 dollars was something like half the cost of an average Tbilisi apartment on the periphery of the city (Lobzhanidze 2004). Moreover, the compensation was calculated per hotel room, and therefore often had to be shared between sometimes 2 or 3 families sharing the same hotel room in the Iveria (Lobzhanidze 2004, Fitigu 2005). Nor were the IDPs able to negotiate the terms of the

contract. The deal was not optional or subject to negotiation, those who did not sign the contract were evicted by force (Chauffour 2004). Nor was it even clear who should be compensated in the first place. In the intervening 12 years many of the rooms had changed hands, passing from one IDP family (who had gone abroad to work, for example) to another (Remtulla 2004). Lastly, there is the question of ‘self-reliance’. Even if residence in the hotel made the IDPs a sort of resented, even loathed, visible pariah group for Tbilisians, nevertheless each collective centre forms its own community, and many IDPs mourned the end of this close-knit community which allowed a considerable amount of mutual-aid between members (as opposed to the implicitly individualistic model of the self-reliant economic actor of the New Approach) (Lobzhanidze 2004). There is no question that the privatization of the hotel turned the IDPs into private economic actors of some kind, but whether they could be called self-reliant is debatable.

The privatization of the Iveria and Adjaria hotels under these terms also created a set of expectations or fears amongst the other IDPs, approximately 42 percent of whom live in collective centres in Tbilisi and elsewhere, that similar deals would be struck in their case (van Selm 2005). In each IDP collective centre, IDPs began to wait not only for repatriation, but for an investor to appear. In some cases, similar compensation deals were proposed, and often as not, the investors neglected the terms of the contract (<http://www.humanrights.ge/>). Elsewhere, the high profile privatizations of the Iveria and the Adjaria hotels generated expectations of investors that have yet to materialize. For IDPs in every collective centre, privatization and the figure of the investor are paradoxical objects of fear, hope, and waiting. As one IDP explained:

Now we live in Vashlijvari (a suburb of Tbilisi), in the collective centre. No fewer than 200-250 internally displaced people live here. The building is big. My neighbours are all good, kind people and we help each other. Nobody has discriminated against me for being Abkhazian -either during the war, or afterwards. Maybe I'm just lucky that all my neighbours are good people. It's not easy to live here. Almost everybody is unemployed. We live under constant pressure, we're afraid that we will be turned out of here; we don't know what will happen next. You can see what's going on in different places; they're turning people out everywhere. Nobody has said anything officially, but generally people are [talking about the issue of privatisation. People are afraid that they will be deceived, that the documents they're given will be fraudulent, and things like that. No investor has appeared yet. If there is an investor, maybe things will finally become clear. Otherwise we don't know yet whether we'll be moved elsewhere or, if we do leave, whether they'll give us some kind of a compensation. The main thing is to buy something with the money they will give us. I remember when we first arrived in Tbilisi, it was possible to buy an apartment for 3,000-4,000 [US dollars]. Now the prices are so high that it is impossible to buy anything even for the 7,000 [dollars] usually offered usually by investors. I am a mother of four children and there are six of us living in this family - how are we going to live in one room apartment? And, in general, will it be possible to buy an apartment for 7,000 [dollars]? (IDP Inga in Lois and Tavartkiladze 2008: 50-1)

But factually, it is unclear whether the privatization program had anything specifically to do with the IDPs at all in any capacity. An attempt at purification, removing remnants of the hated past from public spaces as well as privatization, turning these same public spaces into privately owned one, the privatization of the hotel seemed to be a curious mixture of public and private motives and interests. On one level, the privatization of the hotel was political and symbolic, but not related to the IDPs and Abkhazia, but rather to erase the hated symptom, which included all the other 'disliked remnants' of socialism on Republic Square, such as Andropov's ears (Sakarya 2008, Chauffour and Gusep 2004).

The former mayor of Tbilisi Zurab Tchiaberashvili explained it this way:

This decision is not directly related to the Abkhazian issue. If one should give a political meaning to the matter of the families' eviction and the renovation of this square, then Yes Silk Road with the agreement of the city government decided to renovate this square in order to pull down the Andropov monument, this disliked

Soviet remnant. But also so as to renovate the Iveria hotel and put an end to what symbolizes one of the greatest national tragedies of this past decade. But our decision was before all motivated by economic reasons: to enable downtown's economic expansion. (quoted in Chauffour 2004)

On this level, the Iveria Hotel is merely part and parcel of an urban renovation scheme embracing the whole of **Republic Square**, which would transform this dilapidated but valuable real estate and public space into an exemplary statement of Georgian aspirational modernity: “ ‘Private interests are not involved here,’ Tbilisi mayor Zurab Chiaberashvili told refugees. ‘It's the city and the country which need the Iveria restored’” (Lobzhanidze 2004). On this level, the symbolism of the transformation is purely public, to remove the ‘open wound right in the middle of Tbilisi’ (Chauffour and Gusep 2004).

But clearly, private interests *were* involved in the form of the investors, a group of Kazakh and Georgian investors, the Silk Road group (a group which includes amongst its shareholders members of Georgia's infamous paramilitary paracriminal organization of the early 1990s, the Mkhedrioni) (Chauffour 2004). According to a spokesman for the investors, it was merely a lucky happenstance that its ‘vision of the Iveria's future coincided with the government's own.’ (Lobzhanidze 2004)

"The Georgian government wanted to resume the Iveria's operation as a hotel, but didn't have the money to resettle the refugees, and that's where we were able to help." (Lobzhanidze 2004)

On the broadest level, the decision to evacuate the hotels was purely economic, part of a vast neoliberal plan for the privatization of state assets, including companies as well as real-estate, including ‘than 1,800 all-sized companies – from hydroelectric centrals and vineyards to an airport.’ (Lobzhanidze 2004). As with these other privatizations, the privatizations of the Iveria and Adjara have raised questions about the private interests of

public figures being at stake. Ucha Nanuashvili, the executive director of Human Rights Information and Documentation Center, not only asserted that the privatizations were a violation of IDP rights, but also that “high-ranking officials of the Georgian had direct and personal interests in the Iveria and Adjara hotels – this would indeed explain the motivations to put pressure on the refugees so that they quickly and silently evacuate those places” (Chauffour 2004). This massive transferral of state property into the private sector could be said to include not only the Iveria hotel, which had been state property along with the rest of Republic Square, but also, figuratively, the IDPs themselves. But it is not at all clear that the privatization scheme was seriously intended to fulfill the IDP housing law as well as attract investment, inasmuch as the privatization scheme went forward without consultation with the ministries that deal with IDP accommodation (van Selm 2005). In addition, the claims that the entire compensation deal itself was private and merely ‘brokered’ by the state as a mediator seems to be belied by the role played by the state monopoly on violence in enforcing the deal.

The Collective Center (Temporary Integration, Community, Mutual Aid)

From a certain perspective, the Iveria is simply a more remarkable, more visible and more comfortable version of a common and banal reality, a Collective Centre. Against a shared context of common poverty affecting IDP and non-IDP Georgians in virtually equal measure (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi 2003: 25), it is the Collective Centre itself that serves as a visible diacritic that marks an emergent social, even ethnic, boundary between IDPs and non-IDPs as the status of IDP becomes permanent, hereditary. The Collective Centres, a motley array of buildings intended for other

purposes, some with better amenities (the Iveria) some with much worse ones, are united by the secure but squalid conditions they offer, the small consolation of a community with other fellow sufferers against a general impoverished population that resents the minor privileges attendant on their status and looks down upon them.

Over the last 12 years, the Iveria has become a world of its own. The stairways are covered in sunflower-seed husks and cigarette butts, and the dark hallways have broken doors. But there are makeshift greengrocer's outlets on every floor, filled with cucumbers, tomatoes and potatoes. Gerzmava, like many others, says the Iveria has grown into an organic community. "We live here like a family," he said. "When I have no food, I can go and eat with my neighbour. Who will take care of us when we move out and we go our separate ways?" (Lobzhanidze 2004)

The picture is a familiar one of squalor and innovation in the face of necessity. This aspect of the Iveria makes it like the squalor of other Collective Centres, though the Iveria was probably the best Collective Centre in Georgia. A more typical Collective Centre is one found in Zugdidi West Georgia, where the majority of the IDPs live.

As for living conditions, the [collective centre] building is badly damaged. It's a very old, shaky building. The floor is rotten in numerous places - once a woman fell when she trod on a rotten floorboard. We try to repair it somehow, on our own. When it rains, the rainwater collects in the basement. It's damp and scorpions make their nests there. The conditions are good for scorpions and they multiply. The wiring is in a very bad condition as well. Fire broke out in some cables and the dwelling behind [this one] burnt down the other day. An IDP [lived there]. Sometimes when it's windy, we switch off the electricity to avoid fire and stay without it all night. The stairs are in a very dangerous state. There are wooden steps that are rotten. We try to repair them every day.... The dirt [is everywhere] - there have been no cases of disease, but there's no guarantee [against that]. We organise Saturday cleaning days and collect the garbage. We've appealed to the *gamgeoba* (local government), and requested them to remove the collected garbage but they've done nothing. Then the dogs and pigs spread the garbage around and the area is filled with dirt. (IDP Peter in Lois and Tavartkiladze 2008: 36)

But for all their many material deficiencies (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi 2003: 35), and as much as the Collective Centres like the Iveria symbolically represent ‘open wounds’ for the rest of the population, and give focus to the resentments of the local populations of the IDPs living in their midst, it must be stressed, as virtually all IDP accounts do, that the collective center provides a community capable of mutual aid (very different from the neoliberal individualist self-reliant economic agents visualized in the New Approach). One IDP living in a collective centre in Poti describes the collective centre thus

We live in hope as people do everywhere. People feel at home in the collective centres. Why? Because we are all close to one another, former neighbours having common traditions and customs. Now, there are different traditions and customs in all regions of Georgia... When there’s some happy occasion in a family, the neighbours help. When there’s trouble, they help as well. This way, the problems are easier to deal with. The collective centre is good, because people are united, with common traditions, and this certainly makes life easier... (IDP Temuri in Lois and Tavartkiladze 2008: 60)

If there is a community within the Collective Center, the IDPs are almost universally resented, even loathed, by the other Georgians residing outside its walls. The main differences between IDPs and other Georgians do not have to do with unemployment or poverty, but manner of livelihood (IDPs are more strongly associated with petty trade (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi 2003: 28), the fact that IDPs, at least nominally, receive a large share of what little state aid there is (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi 2003: 26n), for which they are deeply resented by other Georgians, and, of course, the most important, the matter of homes. Roughly, Non-IDP Georgians are owners, IDP Georgians are not. However poor they may be, a striking 97% of non-IDP Georgians are home-owners (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi 2003: 36). By contrast, IDPs are in the

first instance *defined* as those who have been deprived of their ‘true’ (permanent) homes, but secondary they are defined by the way that they do not, in the meantime, own their homes. Under the regime of ‘temporary integration’, their non-homes define them: They live in collective centres (42% of them), or they rent, or stay without rent, but very few of them own: “More than 80% living in collective centres and more than 60% living in private accommodation compared to approximately 5% of the local population report not owning their own home outside the conflict zones” (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi 2003: 35).

Their real homes are elsewhere, elsewhen. They are in the limbo of ‘temporary integration’, they are afraid that even if they did acquire a home, they are afraid to register it, lest they lose their IDP status and lose the very minor privileges attendant on that status, including largely theoretical possibility of repatriation to their original homes (Eagen 2003).

Shavnabada Monastery (Secular and Religious Modernity).

One of the strangest encounters is the strange fate of some of the materials of the hotel after privatization, ‘the doors, windows, woodworks, and glass of two floors of the hotel’, which were taken away by monks to build an annex for the Shavnabada monastery (Chauffour and Gusep 2004). This conjuncture reminds us that the Iveria, as a material object, has multiple fates. The carcass of the socialist modernist building, it is true, will remain in place, and become the skeleton of an entirely new, western style Steel and Glass Radisson hotel. The erstwhile inhabitants, the IDPs and former employers, scattered to the four winds. The material of the hotel has been stripped away, but part of it will become part of a new building, and annex to the existing Shavnabada monastery.

The fate of these materials reminds us that the builders of the new hyper-modern steel and glass buildings of Tbilisi are not the only builders seeking to rebuild Georgia in their own image. The Rose Revolution is only one of emerging post-socialist utopias changing the material landscape. It reminds us that that alongside the new building campaign associated with western privatization, one of the largest in recent history, is another that up to this campaign was, and may still be, the largest single building campaign, a church building campaign unprecedented in Georgian history (Manning 2008). The fates of different material components of the Iveria hotel reminds us of the material similarity of these building campaigns, however different the secular and religious cosmological worlds they will eventually incarnate. The materials of a monument to Soviet secularism (**symptom**) will then have two progeny inimical to it, on the one hand, a private western luxury hotel, on the other, a sacred Georgian orthodox building, each a kind of architectural **fetish** belonging to a different, and competing, utopian orders, the secular, Westernizing transformation of the Rose Revolution, and the sacred transformation of renascent Georgian Orthodoxy.



Figure 4: Varketili Bazaar Entrance (Author Photo)

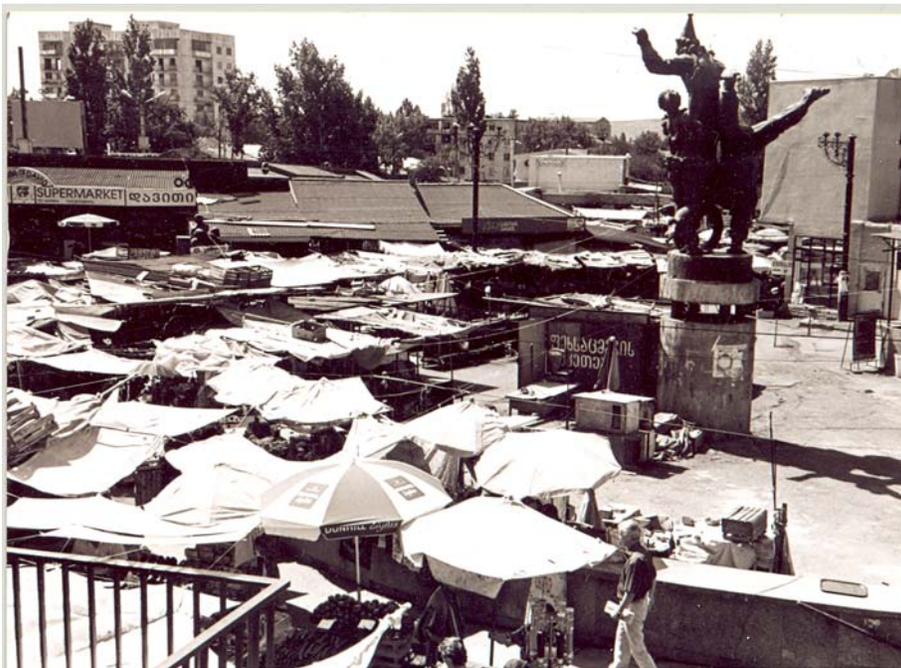


Figure 5: Varketili Bazaar (circa 2002) is a typical emergent and temporary space for private trade appearing in an erstwhile public space (evidenced by the socialist period statue), even as more permanent structures point to a more permanent order (the supermarket in upper left) (Author photo)

Dezerters' Bazaar (Bazaar, Picturesque, Chaos, Disorder, 'Market economy' Symptom). The picturesque aesthetic quality of the Iveria as a 'habitable collage', 'as if human matter and building matter were recombined to produce a sensational and monstrous structure' (Theodorou 2006: 62), links it to a series of other amorphous urban structures that appeared in erstwhile socialist public squares at the same time as the refugees, products of liberalization, privatization, as well as simple absence of regulation, chaos and anarchy of the post-socialist period. The most notable of these new structures were the various bazaars that appeared in various empty public spaces from 1992 onwards (figure 4-5). But the architectural deformations visible in the Iveria, the epitome passed over in silence, also find their equivalents in the architectural innovations made on private homes, which include balconies, loggias, extra rooms hovering in space. The privatization of public space for private purposes the hotel embodies are echoed in countless garages, kiosks and small stores built into public spaces such as underpasses. The Iveria thus forms part of a continuum of architectural bricolage both a product of privatization but also illicit, that ends up in the bazaars, which are like horizontal versions of the same kind of mosaic or collage. The roughness, the lack of planning, can lead these structures to be celebrated as exemplars of urban picturesque by foreigners, but detested as signs of ghettoization, of dilapidation, chaos and disorder by urban residents.

The bazaars, along with street vendors and petty merchants whose stores are built into underpasses, in particular draw our attention, because, not longer after the closing of the Iveria, these ramshackle structures which form the backbone of the city's commerce were targeted for elimination (in 2007), representing the culmination of a campaign against street vendors that began at the same time as the closing of the Iveria hotel in

2004 (Bezhiashvili and Kavelashvili 2004). The **privatization** of the central bazaar, the so-called Deserters' Bazaar (Dezertirebis Bazroba), in early July 2007, is particularly interesting in this respect, insofar as it reveals the simple contradictions of which the Rose Revolution reform program consists.

For one, the Deserters' Bazaar, like the Iveria, is strongly associated with IDPs, who took control of the existing informal Bazaar in 1992-3 until its dissolution in 2007 (Morley 2003). Since the IDPs moved into urban centers at a time when public spaces were often being appropriated to make informal open air urban markets (for example Varketili Bazaar in figures 4-5), they soon came to dominate unregulated petty capitalism, up to 34% of IDPs self-employed in petty commerce (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi 2003: 28). Since urban IDPs are unlikely to be engaged in agriculture, but much more likely to engage in petty commerce, structural conflicts between petty agricultural producers ('peasants') and petty traders in the bazaar are easily mapped onto the Non-IDP/IDP opposition, and IDPs are accused of 'fleecing' peasant producers as well as their customers (e.g. Papaskiri 2004: 8). In addition, one notes that many of the Abkhazian refugees in Tbilisi are Mingrelians, speaking a language related to, but not mutually intelligible with, Georgian, so that the status of IDP is not only related to specific spaces (collective centres [Iveria], bazaars [Dezertirebi Bazaar]), occupations (petty vendors) but also has a strong ethnic (Mingrelian) and ethnolinguistic associations (Mingrelian/Russian verbal repertoires) (Broers 2001: 10). Broers (2001: 13) comments that "As a result of the displacement of population from Abkhazia Mingrelians are also strongly associated especially in Tbilisi with market trade and the negative aspects of capitalism, i.e. profit-seeking dishonesty." The association of IDPs with the highly visible

central bazaar was one way, like the Iveria, in which the IDPs took on a distinctiveness and visibility and attracted resentment from city-dwellers even as they formed communities in exile in their new home.

Secondly, the bazaar, like the Iveria, represents for the Rose Revolutionary government, for respectable pro-western elites, and for some local residents who live near it, an atavistic, chaotic ‘oriental’ outdoor bazaar, an ugly and unhygienic disfigurement of the orderly new reality (for similar Russian perceptions, see Lemon 2000: Chapter 2, Humphrey 2002: chapter 4). Ask any of these people, and they will tell you that bazaars, street vendors, petty merchants, are regrettable, backwards, even ‘oriental’, and should be replaced with western-style ‘supermarkets’ at every turn. One acquaintance of mine, a pro-Saakashvili, pro-western intellectual, even as he was shopping in one of these ‘oriental’ establishments, regretted its very existence and told me in all seriousness and with evident relief that this store, literally a few steps from his front door, was destined to be replaced by a modern western supermarket at some fair distance from his home. If the order of the bazaar represents the order of the **symptom**, the unhygienic, backwards, ‘oriental’ excrescence on the new, modern, western revolutionary order, then the supermarket represents the **fetish**, the paragon or epitome that expresses the coming utopian order.

Thirdly, the Deserter’s Bazaar was targeted for elimination not merely because, like the Iveria, it represented a **symptom** of the despised older order, including the parallel association with IDPs, but also because it became an object of **privatization**. Just as the Iveria was turned over to private investors to produce a modern, western Five-star Radisson hotel (**fetish**) on its carcass, so too, the Deserters’ Bazaar was privatized (in this

case, without compensation for the IDP traders whose livelihoods were in all likelihood destroyed) in order to build a 5 star hotel (Messenger.com 2007). Alas, these plans were for naught, the territory is directly above the Tbilisi metro, and it is impossible to build such a structure on that location.

While the logic of the sale of the Iveria hotel implied that the IDPs would move from public dependents to private self-reliant economic agents with respect to their homes, the sale of the Deserters' Bazaar revealed a very different, antagonistic, attitude towards IDPs (along with petty traders in general) as private economic agents. While the Shevardnadze period was, in effect, thorough-goingly liberal in its economics as it was in its approach to civil society, allowing private petty commodity production and trade (even in state services!) to proliferate, the 'top down' Rose Revolution seems to take aesthetic offense at the marginal economic activities of the impoverished population. Hence, the war on the bazaars and petty commerce, as well as similar forms of 'bottom up' market-based forms (such as the private system of *marshrutka* taxis which represent the bulk of public transport in Tbilisi, which is in part rationalized as part of a highly publicized Government war on the 'Thieves of the Law' who are said to run this transport system (Muhlfried and Diakonidze 2006)), which is difficult to rationalize coherently in terms of any typically liberal ideology of 'bottom up market liberalism', shows the Rose Revolution allegedly 'westernizing' reforms are preoccupied with westernization of surface appearances than substantive economic goals (Manning 2007), their 'neoliberal privatization'' reforms favor capital intensive projects and investors rather than the kinds of petty economic agents, to be targeted by microfinance loans, that populate the 'bazaar economy'.

The very term ‘bazaar’ is ambiguous. For the Neoliberal regime of the Rose revolution, the very term ‘Bazaar’ (*Bazari*) in Georgian denotes both a **symptom** (of the hated past) and a **fetish** (a portent of the utopian future). While Georgia’s transition period as a whole is encompassed by the abstract term ‘market economy’ (translated into Georgian as ‘bazaar economy’ (*sabazro ekonomika*)), the term ‘market’ (*bazari*), itself not only denotes a kind of exchange (capitalist), but also a concrete space for market exchange (Agnew 1986). The positively valued notion of a *bazari* as an abstract sphere of unfettered capitalist exchange (the bazaar as fetish) comes into conflict with the despised concrete spaces where such exchange actually transpires, associated with so-called ‘informal economies’ (whatever that could possibly mean in a liberal deregulated market model), also called *bazari* (the bazaar as symptom). Here again the imaginary Orientalist opposition between Western and Eastern is represented in the opposition between Western style ‘supermarkets’ and ‘Oriental’ bazaars. Both kinds of markets are indexes of the arrival of a ‘market economy’, but the resemblances end there. Supermarkets are associated with Westernizing elites and Western goods, linking together new elites and new objects of consumption. The very presence of supermarkets in a neighborhood are understood as aspirational indexes of the arrival of Western modernity. By contrast, the equally new bazaars in Georgia are associated with remainder of the post-socialist population (self-designated ‘simple people’) and non-brand name (rural) goods for ‘simple people’, who often do not see themselves as consumers of brands. The hostility of the Rose Revolutionary government to the existing socialist era populace, whom they regard as being ‘dark, unenlightened’, essentially themselves corrupted **symptoms** of the socialist past, is reflected too in the complex set

of ideas about the privatization of bazaars as part of the transition to the 'Bazaar economy'.

Rose Revolution Square: Steel and Glass/Western Fetish/Supermarket, erasure

The systematic replacement of symptoms with fetishes, which begins with the Iveria, the systematic erasure of different aspects of the old order and their replacement with icons of the new, can be seen everywhere in Tbilisi. The self-conscious top down directed changes can be documented everywhere one looks, in the metro, in the transport system, public squares, fountains, painted buildings (for example Manning 2007). As we noted, the only building campaign that even comes close to this secular apotheosis of Tbilisi is the massive church-building campaign that preceded it (Manning 2008). But this campaign's centerpiece is the plan for transforming **Republic Square** (a collection of **symptoms**) into an icon of the Rose Revolution, Rose Revolution Square. The project is not finished, perhaps the only building that will be completed is the transformed Iveria hotel itself. Hence, I cannot show you pictures, only direct you to the web pages where the visionary plans for a complex of asymmetrical steel and glass polyhedrons with rose coloured walkways between them, along with shopping and underground parking, are displayed.² The textual 'gloss' for the new architectural monument includes statements such as the following, incorrectly labeling this square as a place that played a significant role in the Rose Revolution (fetish), but drawing attention to its status as a once important socialist public space (symptom). The opposition between the 'formal geometries' of socialist modernist public space with the 'informal geometries' of the new Rose Revolution square point, perhaps, to different ideas of being in public, enabling the private appropriation of public spaces for sociability rather than military parades, thus

attempting to rephrase this highly ‘top down’ alteration of public space as potentiating new forms of sociability, new ‘evolving and emerging’ forms of identity (including, of course, shopping and parking!), and so on.

The square, renamed after Georgia’s Rose Revolution of 2003, is where the country’s nascent quest for democracy and the development of a new identity was founded. This design transforms the square in which the city’s traditional May Day parade was held into a dynamic urban space where Tbilisi’s evolving and emerging identity will be enacted. The square’s design is based upon an informal rather than formal geometry: a series of separate spaces which are aggregated into a single and coherent public space. This approach allows for the creation of a suite of distinctly different spaces, each of which articulates, through a range of scale and activities, the relationship to the immediate and diverse surrounding urban context. (http://www.arplus.com/MIPIM/entries08/exhibitor_85.html)

But plans are risky. After the events of September 2008, it remains a question as to whether this project will be completed, or, indeed, many of the other investment and architectural projects that dot the landscape in varying degrees of completion. A final irony is that an attempt to reintegrate the territorial integrity of Georgia, to finally return the 1992-3 IDPs to their original homes, has produced a new legion of IDPs, and has made the IDP status of the existing ones effectively permanent. All the while, the recently vacated IDP collection centres like the Iveria that have been returned to the status of ‘hotel’ stand a very good chance of becoming what they were in 1991-2, that is, hotels, but empty ones.

¹ I am borrowing terms like ‘indexical’ from a Peircean semiotic theory, on which see, for example, Keane (2003), Manning and Meneley 2008. Briefly, ‘indexical’ signs are those in which the sign stands for its object by virtue of real existential connection, cause and effect, or proximity (a bullet hole stands for a bullet, a road sign communicates partly through its physical orientation in space, and the post that connects it to the ground, for example), while ‘iconic’ signs stand for the object by virtue of resemblance (an image of a deer stands for a real deer, a smiley face emoticon ^_^ or =) resembles in an attenuated, highly conventionalized way a smiling face, to the extent that it is conventionalized, it is a ‘symbol’). Obviously it is possible for something to be both at once, a map is an icon and, if there is a ‘you are here’ mark on the map, an index, a footprint in the sand is both an icon and an index of the foot that made it (‘indexical icon’). Because indexical signs are founded on real cause-effect relations and materiality, they are also a site of contingency and risk, as the above studies point out.

² For the existing plan see <http://www.arplus.com/MIPIM/entries08/entries/85/085a.pdf>, <http://www.investinggeorgia.org/projects/view/239>, <http://www.ds.com.ge/>, http://www.investor.ge/issues/2008_2/05.htm, for alternate, equally non-euclidian plans, see <http://www.s333.org/NWwebPDFs/s333.1167.Tbilisi.pdf>.

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