ROSE–COLORED GLASSES? Color Revolutions and Cartoon Chaos in Postsocialist Georgia

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In November 2001, Georgian students held large meetings protesting a raid by government forces on the offices of a popular television channel, Rustavi 2, which ended in defeat for the government as the channel broadcast the raid live over the air.[1] Two movements emerged from these protests: the "National Movement" of the politician Mikheil Saakashvili (now president of Georgia), and the student movement later to be called *Kmara!* (Enough!).[2] In hindsight, it is clear that both movements played key roles in the later Rose Revolution of 2003, Georgia's first "velvet revolution," so-called to link it proximally to the Serbian revolution of 2000 and distally to earlier East European revolutions—particularly the Czechoslovakian revolution of 1989—that marked the peaceful transition from socialism to postsocialism. With time, the Georgian revolution has come to be seen as the first in a series of brightly hued "color" revolutions—orange in Ukraine in 2004; pink, lemon, or tulip in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 (Pelkmans 2005)—wending their inevitable way through the grey, benighted parts of the world, dictatorships falling like so many dominoes. Such revolutionary color coding is not restricted to these postsocialist states. For a time, virtually every political gesture vaguely associated with democracy in the Middle East was also rebranded as a kind of color (or flower) revolution. There was a "Cedar Revolution" in Lebanon;[3] even the Iraqi elections were rebranded as the "Purple Revolution" (after the purple dye used to mark the fingers of voters). Predicting the colors or flowers of future revolutions became a cottage industry.

In the Benetton-like enthusiasm to draw together and unite all these very different political gestures as different shades of a single phenomenon—"color revolutions"—explanation in terms of local causation could be casually discarded in favor of a global narrative, an easily memorable sound bite–sized color coding, a revolutionary brand, so that each subsequent revolution appears like some franchise with a new color (Orange, Lemon, or Purple) or plant (Cedar or Tulip) of the first one. Making this wave of revolutions seem more impressive and inevitable, political events known locally under names without colors (e.g., Lebanon's "independence uprising") were tendentiously repackaged and rebranded with a plant or color name for the export market. In fact, the very term *Rose Revolution* seems to have first been used in a live CNN broadcast, after supporters of Mikheil Saakashvili entered the parliament building carrying roses. Until then, if there was a locally used name, the standard East European term for any bloodless revolution, "velvet revolution" *(xaverdovani revolucia)* was used, although the term *Rose Revolution* swiftly caught on in Georgia, as elsewhere.[4]

But surely this duality of naming, "velvet revolution" or "Rose Revolution," should not remain external to our interpretation, standing opposed as authentic local discourse to inauthentic global discourse, for example. Rather, I argue that this duality points to important interpretive tensions internal to the reception of the Georgian revolution as well. Initially, of course, the existence of two names for the revolution points to two different publics for the revolution, the domestic "velvet revolution" and the export brand "Rose Revolution." But it is surely important that the glossy export brand almost instantly trumped the domestic one both at home and abroad. Partly this is because the two terms situate the Georgian revolution within very different visions of historical significance, one in which it is unique and the first of its kind, the other in which it is neither. The term *Rose Revolution* brands the Georgian revolution as being unique (this "branding" being part of the "bourgeois repackaging" of the revolution I discuss below), but at the same time creates a forward-looking intertextual series of successive color revolutions. By contrast, the term *velvet revolution* creates an intertextual series that links the events of 2003 to those of 2001 and separates both of these from other bloody revolutions in Georgia. Repackaged as the "Rose Revolution," the revolution of 2003 comes to have the honor of first place in the intertexual series of "color revolutions," rather than as a late addition to another intertextual series of postsocialist "velvet revolutions." At the same time, this rebranding of revolution itself in glossy color packages speaks to a broader change in revolutionary rhetoric from earlier revolutions, because this color revolution was indeed more colorful than all those that preceded it.

The term *velvet revolution* was also used for the protests of 2001. Here, the term drew attention to how different the November 2001 protests were from those before, especially the bloody revolutions that attended the end of socialism in Georgia (1989–92). Unlike the protests of 1989, these were the first large-scale meetings that did not lead to bloodshed or even significant violence. In contrast to the coup of 1991–92, no tanks appeared on the main street of Tbilisi, Rustaveli Prospekt, and no government fell in a hail of bullets. In 2001, the student population of Tbilisi made their debut as political actors.

But the protests of 2001 were not only peaceful, a velvet revolution, they also showed important changes in political rhetoric that now seem to characterize the Rose Revolution. As I show below, the rhetoric of the students and new politicians alike had a self-consciously civic appeal, in contrast to the overtly nationalistic rhetoric of the revolutions that arose at the end of socialism. Rhetorically, this was also in a sense the first color revolution, for here there also a shift to colorful images from popular and religious culture, again in contrast to the largely textual references to canonical nationalist authors that formed the rhetorical core of earlier postsocialist revolutions. At the same time, the new political rhetorics emphasizing sincerity, civil liberties, and transparency faced off against a pervasive logic of reception—evident in official discourse, the media, and among much of the general population—that was decidedly hostile. Like postsocialist society itself, this logic of reception was dispersed, chaotic, and paranoid, an economy of representation as much ridden by crisis and conspiracy as the postsocialist economy proper (Lemon 1998, 2004).

Two years later, the Rose Revolution bloomed in Georgia. Here, the new rhetoric of the 2001 meetings blossomed, appearing to change the terms of political discourse while overcoming the nihilist logic of reception that had greeted earlier protests. Like a hermit crab, the Rose Revolution seemingly filled the empty and abandoned shell of a largely played out nationalist politics with living civic content. Like all successful revolutions, it worked as a one-off ritual that remade its social context in its own image, stipulating its own persuasive effects. But in contrast to certain anthropological perceptions of what ritual does, this revolution did not reflect an unchanging cosmology (e.g., Tambiah 1985). Rather, as a revolution, it seemed to create a new cosmology, a self-conscious "new reality."[5] The Georgia of 2003 and 2004 was now called the "Georgia of Roses." For believers, surface appearances are constantly interrogated for signs of essential changes, for roses blooming amid the ruins of the ancien regime. For unbelievers, the lack of improvements in daily life and changes that seemed to foretell ill, elicits the observation that every rose has its thorns.[6]

CHANGING REGIMES OF POLITICS, ECONOMY, AND SEMIOSIS

The Tbilisi student meetings of early November 2001 were provoked by a raid on the offices of the popular independent television station Rustavi 2 on October 30. The squad from the interior ministry found themselves confronting a wall of television cameras that broadcast the invasion live: they beat a hasty retreat. After two days of student protests in front of parliament (October 31–November 1, 2001), Georgia's President Shevardnadze dismissed all of his ministers, including the one who had ordered the raid, yet found that his own political situation had been irremediably compromised.

At first glance, the student actions seemed completely straightforward. After all, what could be simpler than thousands of students carrying signs in defense of freedom of speech, demanding the resignation of everyone from the president on down, and marching on parliament? It seemed like a textbook case of a victory of "society" over the "state," and has since gone down that way in the pages of international journalism.[7]

Such was my own naive perspective as I wandered amongst the crowd, my presence exciting occasional interest as I was taken perhaps to be a CNN reporter rather than an anthropologist. But as I elicited explanations, I was struck at how my own inclination to take the crowds as simple signifiers that straightforwardly and transparently represented some political program was treated as an almost infantile naïveté. By the time the meetings ended, various reports in the press, and not a few voices among my acquaintances, some even within the crowd itself, claimed that the protests had been a sham, a theatrical spectacle, controlled or financed by unnamed political forces (Saakashvili? Shevardnadze? Soros? the Russians?).[8] Even some disconsolate students organizers came to believe that they had been used like pawns. How did this happen?

To understand this we need to focus not only on the pragmatics of rhetoric, rhetoric addressed to achieving certain political and social ends, but also on the reflexive gestures, rhetoric about rhetoric, or metarhetoric. In the Tbilisi protests in 2001, the rhetoric of the protestors was highly reflexive, each speaker constantly trying to frame their own acts of speaking as embodying transparent agency and sincere self-expression, attempting to construct themselves as speakers and that of the crowd as being expressive unities, things that stand for or represent themselves or some relatively transparent, exoteric program, and not agents or tools of some hidden actor. The reflexivity of the protestors was in turn met by deconstructive, esoteric logics of reception in which the agencies of individual protestors and crowds were sundered into expressive disunities

where attribution of final responsibility was deferred or attributed to hidden controllers.

The endlessly deconstructive, and often frankly paranoid, logics of reception were lodged in the endlessly divisive and mercurial publics into which postsocialist Tbilisi was divided by rumor and by the 200-odd weekly newspapers and other media outlets alleged to exist in the city.[9] These deconstructive and paranoid logics of reception could be profoundly persuasive, so much so that even people who had participated in the 2001 protests from beginning to end came to doubt that they themselves had understood what they had been doing there, and came to feel that they had been used by parties unknown or at least unnamed.[10]

Hoping to counter the paranoia, students deployed a metarhetoric of transparency, actively facing off against a conspiratorial logic of reception and "occult cosmology" (Sanders and West 2003:6). As Sanders and West explain,

> Occult cosmologies suggest that there is more to what happens in the world than meets the eye—that reality is anything but "transparent." More specifically, they claim that power operates in two separate yet related realms, one visible, the other invisible; between these two realms, however, there exist causal links, meaning that invisible powers produce visible outcomes. Not only do occult cosmologies suggest that power sometimes hides from view, but they also often suggest that it conspires to fulfill its objectives (each an essential trait of conspiracy theories). [2003:6]

Sanders and West go on to explain that when discourses of "transparency" and "conspiracy" are compared, it is clear that claims made for "transparency" are themselves occasioned by suspicions of "conspiracy": "conspiracy ideas and occult suspicions are the raison d'être for transparency claims" (Sanders and West 2003:12). In effect, ideologies of transparency and conspiracy share the same underlying ontology of power, each recognizing the distribution of agency and expression across two separated spheres.[11]

This article, then, is about changes in political discourse in relation to the larger representational milieu in which it seeks to locate itself, and the concrete political consequences of such changes. The novel political rhetoric of the Georgian student protestors in 2001 faced off with an existing representational economy (Keane 2003) comprising political rhetoric and metarhetoric inherited from the socialist and immediate postsocialist period, which they sought to reframe.[12] It is these dynamics, between rhetoric and metarhetoric, between opposing metarhetorics (and associated logics of reception), and between rhetorics

and the representational economies in which they operate, that this article is about.

GEORGIA IN HISTORY

Georgia's political history in the aftermath of socialism is a checkered one, and can be roughly periodized in terms of changes in social imaginaries and the political economic and semiotic regimes that underlay them. These range from a late socialist period (roughly corresponding to the period from the "period of stagnation"—Russian *zastoy,* Georgian *udzraoba*—beginning with Brezhnev in 1964 and continuing to Gorbachev's accession in 1985) when the socialist state was able to represent itself as a unified authorial intention, a true semiotic regime with respect to public material and cultural production, carried and indexed by socialist realism.[13] This period was followed by one of "chaotic domination" (a period that begins with the chaotic period of revolutions and wars from 1989–92 and continues through the 1990s) when the power that is perceived to lie behind the order of appearances ceases to be seen as unified in a single entity but, instead, follows varied decoupled means and motives of money and power. Last, with the arrival of new, Western-educated elites who form the present government, some of the older discourses of "the nation" have been revived to serve as a local veneer for a political product that is effectively neoliberal, in what I call "bourgeois repackaging."

The transition from socialism to postsocialism in Georgia was a rapid and violent one, a transition in which the Soviet slogan "nationalist in form, socialist in content" was turned on its head. With the regime of Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1991–92), technocratic socialist elites were replaced by nationalist cultural ones: the nationalist intelligentsia utopia of Georgia for the Georgians was to become the content as well as form of state planning (Zurabishvili 2002:50). It was when this "intelligentsia state" began to neglect its patronage duties to the rest of the intelligentsia, and not, for example, because of its rabid, almost mystical, ethnic nationalism, that there emerged a rather sharp polarization of the population into "Zviadists" and their opposition (Zurabishvili 2002:52). The Zviadist government, brought to power by the protests in 1989 that were the beginning of the end of Socialism in Georgia, in which many protestors were massacred, was in turn ousted by a violent coup that ravaged the historic downtown buildings of Tbilisi in winter 1991–92. It was this coup that ultimately led to Eduard Shevardnadze returning to Georgia at the invitation of the victorious generals Jaba Ioseliani (a noted Soviet-era professional criminal) and Tengiz Kitovani (a virtually unknown sculptor, whose

handiwork in ravaging downtown Tbilisi came to be known jokingly as "Kitovani's Exhibition").[14] Indeed, the entire early postsocialist period was one of coups, wars, infrastructural and economic collapse, and everyday violence on the streets of a city peopled by heavily armed young men. Shevardnadze's period was in general characterized by his weakness as a leader, and a descent into chaos marked by a lack of clarity about who, if anyone, had control of the forces that raged through the streets.

The transition from late socialism to postsocialism seems a bleak one: a transition from a relatively ordered and peaceful (albeit oppressive) universe to one plagued with disorder and violence (for an excellent general ethnography of this period in Georgia, see esp. Pelkmans 2006). At the center of this transition was the disappearance of a specific agency, the state, as a paternalistic ordering principle in all spheres of official public life. At the level of official representations, late socialism remained a unified semiotic regime in which orderly public manifestations were attributed to the one authorial source located in a state whose paternalistic relationship to society was manifested (however problematically) homologously across multiple dimensions of social life. An ordered political-economic regime at the official level seemed to correspond to orderly, "cultured" regimes of semiosis; political-economic production overseen by workers and technical experts corresponded to an equally important political-cultural production overseen by cultural elites, the so-called intelligentsia (Nodia 2002, Verdery 1991). If socialist discourses could attribute any public manifestation to a known agent, "they," the corresponding postsocialist ones increasingly were framed as a question, "who?" The active and unified voice of the state was increasingly rendered as a passive voice, an elided or unnamed agent or agents, a rhetorical tendency I have reproduced from the usage of my informants.

The late-socialist order, then, was orderly in that it could be attributed to a single source, even if the order of official representations was an order of appearances at some remove from experienceable realities. With the disappearance of this general unified agency from material and cultural production alike, the world of appearances in all spheres of life increasingly was haunted by multifarious agencies, mediated by now separable economic and political media, money, and power, whose identities and motives were difficult to assign. Postsocialist Georgia, like Russia, was characterized by a failed state and a collapsed economy that corresponded to a more general collapse of semiotic orders: political corruption and manipulation were matched by the falsification of products and inscrutability of advertisements and the general disappearance of orderly, sincere, and "cultured" relationships between

private persons. The situation in Georgia bears much resemblance to that in post-Soviet Russia, as Lemon notes:

> In the 1990s, post-Soviet discourses about dollar bills converged with more general discourses about social change, especially where the latter opposed the false to the authentic and sought signs that would untangle them. The end of the Soviet regime, the new Russian society, and even human psychology were all being described as transmuting between states of visibility and invisibility. In a world where once-closed archives were opening, once-illicit market trade was moving to central urban space, and once-public party connections were going underground, everyday moral and material judgments depended on the ability to quickly re-discern substantive value from illusory surfaces. Best-selling books on psychology, once repressed for being "bourgeois" and "individualist," focused on how to detect the unseen motives of interlocutors. But post-Soviets obsessed over a seeming paradox: the signs of inner substance were inset onto surfaces—new product labels, currency watermarks, and human physiognomy. [1998:23–24]

Postsocialist Georgia was characterized by a "chaotic mode of domination" (Nazpary 2000) in which political intentions, like other social intentions, could never be transparently legible or attributable to a singular source, leaving little possibility for taking a stance of response or attributing final responsibility. In the face of this, Georgian student protestors and other political actors, like the Russians described by Lemon, sought to maintain a stance of authenticity and sincerity, facing off against a generally nihilistic reception that met all public manifestations with the questions "Who is controlling this, who is funding this?" As detailed below, the cartoon *Dardubala,* "Misfortune," became a key reference for students, allowing them to convey the chaotic mode of domination of Shevardnadze's regime with the visual language of cartoons, taking inspiration from the way in which this cartoon represented Georgia as a domain of clownish chaos.

Under these unlikely conditions, the discourse of the "nation" reemerged in Georgia. The emergent National Movement of Saakashvili was frequently compared to that of the first postsocialist president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, inasmuch as both used the legitimating figure of the nation at the center of their political programs, a move that brought the alienated Zviadist contingent into Saakashvili's group of supporters. Yet the resemblance is only apparent: Zviad Gamsakhurdia was in many ways a typical socialist member of the intelligentsia. His conception of the nation was simply a variant of the national imaginary shared by other intelligentsia and

by the state itself, whereas Saakashvili is a so-called "new intellectual"—Western educated, and generally neoliberal (Shatirishvili 2003). These new elites do not hearken to the same founding texts as the old socialist intelligentsia, and do not speak their inherited language. Rather, as Zaza Shatirishvili has commented:

> The "new" politicians and intellectuals speak in a language familiar and understandable to the West. If the political leaders of the 90s [like ex-president Zviad Gamsakhurdia] referred to the national mission of Georgia, today's leaders (Saakashvili, Zhvania, Burjanadze), primarily depend on the country's constitution, the rhetoric of human rights, legitimation from the will of the people, and so on. For the "New" the constitution is the national narrative, and not the poetry of the Middle Ages [as with Zviad Gamsakhurdia]. [n.d.]

Although the content of Georgia's National Movement has been and remains largely neoliberal, its forms and images, including a new flag hearkening back to the Middle Ages, is a kitsch pastiche from such diverse visual registers as popular cartoons and Georgian Orthodox Christianity, rather than from canonical socialist period narratives of the nation. The National Movement has drawn in older generation intelligentsia, including Zviadists, partly by using a colorful *mélange* of political images and references drawn from frankly contradictory political programs, partly through a metarhetoric of proceduralism developed by students in their 2001 meetings. Through a metarhetoric of proceduralism, discordant voices were brought together in the name of freedom of speech, and at a literal "tribune of freedom" students constructed on the steps of Parliament. Student initiatives in 2001 were thus critical to the development of the National Movement, and it was largely through innovative rhetoric and metarhetoric that they had such a significant impact.

DAYS 1–3: THE VISUAL SPECTACLE

Because of the large numbers of participants, the lack of adequate audio technology, and the colorful signs the students carried, the first days of the protests were primarily a visual spectacle. The students used the multilevel structure of the parliament building itself to produce a theatrical opposition between stage and stands, the students displaying themselves and their signs as a *tableau vivant* to the crowd.[15] In this way they displayed and emphasized the studentness of the protests, producing themselves as the central focal participants, the "actors" in the protests, which "belonged" to them, the rest of the crowd becoming in the process, second-order participants, a spectating audience. This studentness became an important

FIGURE 1. This banner reads "Georgia without Shevardnadze."

factor for the perceived legitimacy of the protests. In Georgia, students are associated with an apolitical innocence, a sincerity one might associate with children. This set of associations, on the one hand, allowed the students to be perceived as sincere, speaking with an "out of the mouths of babes" apolitical wisdom but, on the other hand, offered the possibility of interpreting them as innocent dupes of "political" actors. The students arrived by long processions from Tbilisi State University down Rustaveli Prospect displaying signs announcing their university affiliation, their mission to defend the freedom of speech, and their opposition to the Shevardnadze government (see Figure 1).

The primarily visual form of the students' rhetoric attracted commentary as a harbinger of changing times. Editorials in some newspapers not only faulted the students for their lack of appeal to the standard slogans and figures of the nationalist rhetoric that characterized earlier protests on the same spot but also for the unsubtle ad hominem attacks on Shevardnadze and the vandalism of parliament:

> The youth gathered before the government building did not express their just protest with subtle forms. They speckled the walls of Parliament with a thousand different insults directed at the President. About ten years ago today, at the manifestations of the 9th of April having come out with analogous demands, youth raised in the Communist epoch carried slogans taken from

the works of [19th century nationalist writers and poets] Ilia [Chavchavadze], Akaki [Tsereteli] and Vazha [Pshavela] and not [*ad hominem*] insults. . . . Ten years of freedom have passed since then. No one remembers any more the Ilia and Akaki taught in the communist period. [Editorial 2001:4]

Such commentaries saw the form of the protests, the lack of respect shown the government building as well as the government itself, as well as the absence of textual citations of slogans of famous nationalist authors, to be a sign, an index, of the moral character of a generation ruined by a corrupt regime, of the nihilistic implosion of society itself under the corrosive influence of the state. In effect, the visual rhetoric the students launched against the state, as well as the absence of textual rhetoric based on citations of the cultured canon of nationalist authors, was read as an index of the negative moral effects of the postsocialist state, and a chaotic mode of domination, on these same students:

Neither the building of parliament, nor the constitution nor the word "president" for such a generation deservedly (and logically) no longer represents, unfortunately, a set of moral values . . . everything among us is an index of the nonexistence of general civic responsibility, or general state interests. [Editorial 2001:4]

It was not words alone, or the absence of them, however, that drew the ire of the critics as being characteristic of the new, and unsubtle, uncultured, political voice of the students. The most remarkable thing about the student signs was the use of visual references to a popular cartoon, *Dardubala,* aired weekly on Rustavi 2, the very channel in whose defense the students marched. This immensely popular weekly cartoon, which ran until 2002, lampooned with a *Simpsons*-like sensibility the wacky adventures of Eduard Shevardnadze and his sidekicks as they attempt to save Georgia from one disaster after another (see Figure 2).

This well-known visual characterization of Shevardnadze was a constant leitmotif of the student posters. All images of Shevardnadze displayed at the meetings were based on the *Dardubala* character. However, the student artists seldom left their visual defamation of the president to the visual language of cartoons but, rather, combined the cartoon with other elements of the grotesque. Defamation was heaped on Shevardnadze by combining the already defamatory cartoon image with clownish elaborations, such as a red nose (see Figure 3). Others morphed the same *Dardubala* cartoon image into a satanic figure, or depicted him on the toilet, and so on. Nevertheless, most of these posters had no verbal component: it seemed

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FIGURE 2. Characters from the TV cartoon *Dardubala*. (Image courtesy of Telecompany 202, Tbilisi, Georgia)

sufficient simply to display this well-known image of Shevardnadze (and once or twice similar *Dardubala*-esque images of his more sinister cronies) to indicate their opposition to the regime. As a final insult added to visual injury, these various cartoon images of Shevardnadze were apparently considered to be sufficiently mimetic to be burned in effigy as virtually all such signs were.

If the students borrowed representations from *Dardubala, Dardubala* in turn borrowed from the students.[16] The weekend following the protests, the episode of *Dardubala* began with a protest set off by a Georgian citizen enraged by the misappropriation of a small tool (a file) by his neighbor (see Figure 4). This citizen marches on the capital with two principal demands: (1) the return of his file and (2) the resignation of the president and the entire government (see Figure 5). The

FIGURE 3. The protestors displayed images of Shevardnadze and other political leaders to indicate their opposition to the current regime.

FIGURE 4. Frame 1: Misha: Hello. We will begin our broadcast with a scandalous report from Georgian reality. . . . Frame 2: Yesterday in the city of Bliqviri, Brendi Makacaria came into the house of Ianguli Kalabandishvili, residing at number 25, Vepkhistqaosani Street, and asked to borrow a file for one week. Then he did not return this file. (Image courtesy of Telecompany 202, Tbilisi, Georgia)

implication is that the population of Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, require very little to set them over the edge, converting a "social" set of demands (here, absurdly, a misunderstanding about a tool) into a set of "political" ones (the resignation of the president and government), but also reminding citizens how political and social spheres are not as clearly divided in the Georgian social imaginary. Eduard Shevardnadze, watching TV at home, haplessly complains, "The masses are out of control!" showing him more as an ineffectual clownish onlooker than as an effective leader (see Figure 6).

The visual rhetoric of the students converted the parliament building into a *tableau vivant* in which they used cartoon images from *Dardubala* to question the authority and legitimacy of the president. By using the images drawn from *Dardubala*
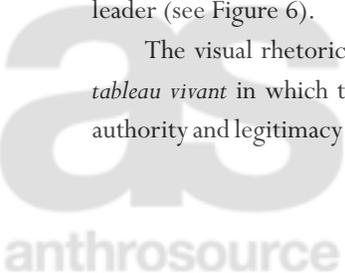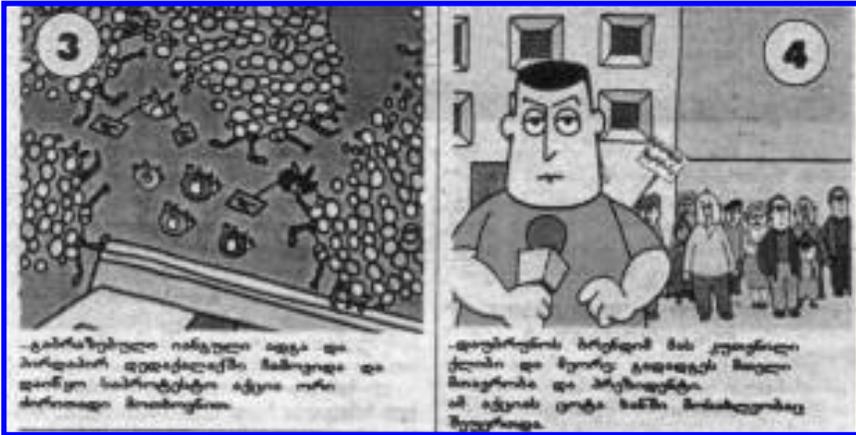
FIGURE 5. Frame 3: The enraged Ianguli got up and went straight to the capital and began a protest action with two principal demands: . . . Frame 4: that Brendi return to him his file, and the second: that the entire government and the president resign. In a short time the population also joined in this action. (Image courtesy of Telecompany 202, Tbilisi, Georgia)

they also reminded Tbilisi how the station Rustavi 2, the home of *Dardubala,* had become for the moment the representative of society par excellence in opposition to the state as represented by the cartoon image of Shevardnadze. The question is, what made these cartoon images rhetorically self-sufficient?

DARDUBALA: CARTOON REALISM AND POSTSOCIALIST CHAOS

The visual spectacle presented by the students was noteworthy for its radical break with the past in form and rhetoric, particularly in the use of visual iconography drawn from a satirical cartoon. The wildly popular *Dardubala* began its broadcast in 2000, airing on Sunday nights. On Mondays, I would often find myself discussing the previous night's episode with my friends. While drinking coffee in the Georgian museum's workroom, coworkers recounted with relish the previous night's episodes for those who had missed it; friends would sing songs from a favorite episode; children imitated the distinctive cartoon voices of favorite characters as kids in the United States might imitate Daffy Duck or Bart Simpson. In general, *Dardubala,* love it or hate it, was probably the most successful program in Rustavi 2's repertoire. No single program on that station had more of a negative impact on Shevardnadze and his regime: as my friend Dato Toklikishvili put it "*Dardubala* has done more than anything else to turn Shevardnadze into a clown." Even those who thought the show presented Georgia in a shameful light, acknowledged the effectiveness of using the grotesque aesthetics of the cartoon medium to portray the chaotic reality of Shevardnadze's Georgia. Some commentators, in line with the paranoid

FIGURE 6. Eduard: No, this is not possible, the masses have gotten out of control! (Image courtesy of Telecompany 202, Tbilisi, Georgia)

logic of reception I have been discussing, even claimed that the makers of the show worked under "instructions" from the West, specifically the United States. In making this claim, they implicitly confirmed the rhetorical effectiveness of the genre. Indiana University professor Dodona Kiziria, a noted Georgianist, and Georgian ex-patriate, in a Georgian language article in the newspaper *Axali Taoba,* stated her position thus:

I am convinced that "Dardubala" works with instructions from the West. . . . I think that it comes from America in order to diminish the prestige of Shevardnadze. Such a making of a laughingstock of the institution of president is accepted in America, nowhere else.[Mdzinarishvili 2001]
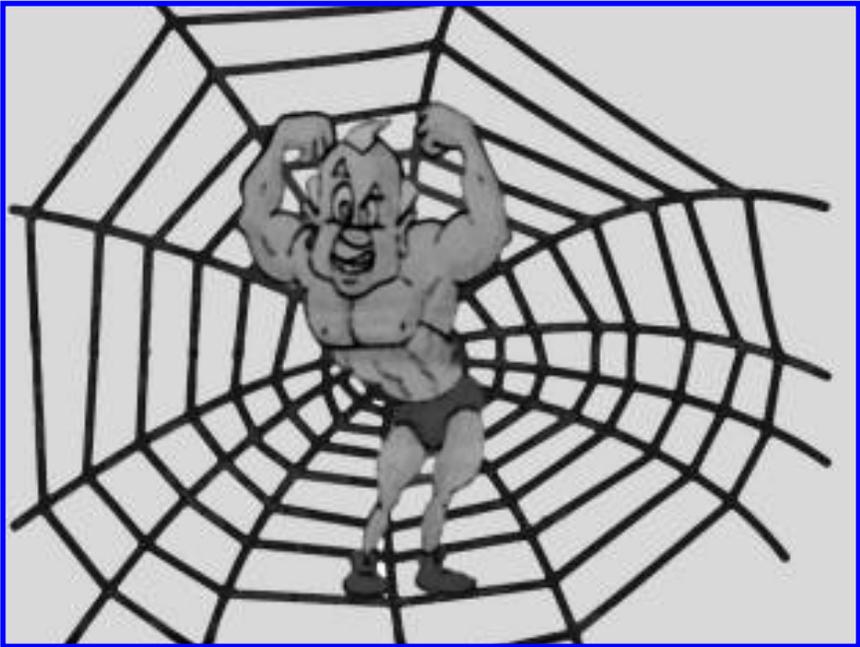
FIGURE 7. The journal *Axali Versia* used a *Dardubala*-like image of Shevardnadze for an article detailing the connections of his "extended family." (Image courtesy of Telecompany 202, Tbilisi, Georgia)

The producer of *Dardubala,* Shalva Ramishvili, laughingly dismissed the notion that there were hidden political interests, Western or otherwise, at work behind the scenes of *Dardubala,* but the potential of *Dardubala* for public political ends was certainly not lost on Mikheil Saakashvili in his prepresidential period as opposition politician. The pro-Saakashvili paper *Axali Versia* reproduced the cartoon on a weekly basis in its pages, and special episodes of the cartoon showing Saakashvili defeating Shevardnadze at a soccer match were shown at rallies of the National Movement in 2002. An entirely typical example is an *Axali Versia* article from 2002, entitled the "Web of Misfortune" *(Dardubalas ablabuda),* describing in detail the clannish elite connections of Shevardnadze's "extended family" (see Figure 7). The article referenced the show in its title, where the word *dardubala* is treated morphosyntactically as a proper name (*dardubala*s "of Dardubala"), rather than a common noun (*dardubali*s "of misfortune"), hence more properly translated as "the Web of *Dardubala.*" To remove any ambiguity, it adorned the article with the now-familiar figure of Eduard from the show.

In the opening sequence of each weekly *Dardubala* episode, the character *Eduard/Edika* (Shevardnadze) appears riding a traditional two-wheeled Georgian

cart, which may represent the ship of state. He is joined by the other characters one by one. First, Zvio the loud-mouthed village bumpkin, followed by a character Shalva, the producer and stand-in for the creator of *Dardubala* (Shalva Ramishvili), followed by the journalist Misha, and then Zaza and Gubazi, the dynamic duo of lumpenized Tbilisi street kids, and finally their nemesis, the piggish and stupid policeman, Leo.

The characters of *Dardubala* represent a kind of social ontology of postsocialist Georgia.[17] In place of the heroic troika of the socialist imaginary (peasants, workers, and intelligentsia) that characterized the average Soviet poster of the Brezhnev era, we find uncultured village hicks and lumpenized urban petty criminals alongside the new NGOniks and media elites, the legions of newly trained reporters and representatives of the new media, as well as their opposites in the state sector, the equally numerous hordes of police. Each week, this motley representation of Georgia in miniature confronts real, possible or purely fantastic problems faced by Georgia, ranging from popular insurrections, economic deficits, and Russian spies to alien invasions, Godzilla-like monsters, genies in bottles, and time machines.[18] The plotlines, songs, and video sequences are freely adapted from a mélange of Western and Georgian pop culture references, from movies like *The Terminator* (1984) to Michael Jackson's *Thriller* video to old Beatles songs. The visual aesthetics are clearly indebted to Western cartoons like the *Simpsons.* The central joke of each episode is that, in effect, Eduard is always trying to solve a postsocialist problem that is, in one sense or another, his own legacy from the socialist period. The postsocialist world of Georgia is represented by cartoon chaos. The visual iconography is not only grotesque but also by turns vulgar, racy, erotic, chaotic, violent, and ugly. The world of the cartoon is funny, but not always pretty. The solutions provided by Eduard to Georgia's problems are often comically obtuse.

A particularly good example is the episode in which Georgia faces an alien invasion. In the first sequence of this episode (see Figure 8), we encounter a teapot-shaped alien spaceship in deep space, somewhere near the star Sirius. The alien leader is telling his minions that they have decided to conquer and destroy the planet Earth, beginning with the country of Georgia. One confused minion asks "Why Georgia?"; to which the leader replies that Georgia was chosen because it is notoriously the weakest country on the face of the earth, adding, "Don't you know this? Everyone knows this." The aliens set course for Earth. In the next sequence, now on Earth in Tbilisi, the reporter Misha introduces a news report presenting President Eduard and his motley cast of cronies presiding over a military parade celebrating Georgia's independence. First appear the Georgian tanks, being pushed
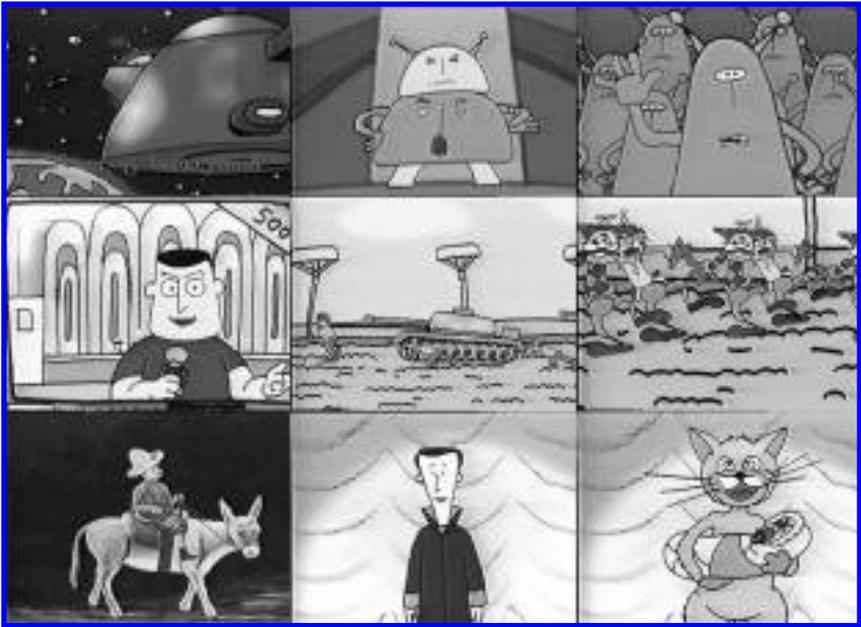
FIGURE 8. In this *Dardubala* episode Georgia faces an alien invasion. (Image courtesy of Telecompany 202, Tbilisi, Georgia)

or pulled by their heroic crews because of the lack of gasoline, but making the point to possible enemies that "At least Georgia HAS tanks." Following this comes the skateboarding infantry brigade, followed by the elite clown brigade, the pride of the Georgian army, whose purpose is to demoralize enemies. There follows a typically bizarre faux commercial break, all of which in *Dardubala* involve products made by or for or derived from the legions of feral cats visible everywhere in Tbilisi. In this case the ad is for a dial-a-cat service.

After the commercial, the character Eduard (Shevardnadze) complains that the Georgian air force has not appeared, but he is told that the pilot of the plane (there is only one) will fly over any minute. Instead, the aliens arrive (accompanied by the Darth Vader imperial theme song from the *Star Wars* series) in their teapot shaped vessel that sets about destroying Tbilisi in just exactly the way one might expect a teapot shaped vessel to destroy Tbilisi (see Figure 9).

In the next section, there is a retreat to a secret bunker, from which Shevardnadze orders a series of attempts to save Georgia. All fail comically. Finally, the street kids Gubazi and Zaza go out amid the ruins to find some kind of alien weapon. There they encounter a lone alien. They administer a series of personality tests and quickly determine that he is a "good guy"—that is, that he is
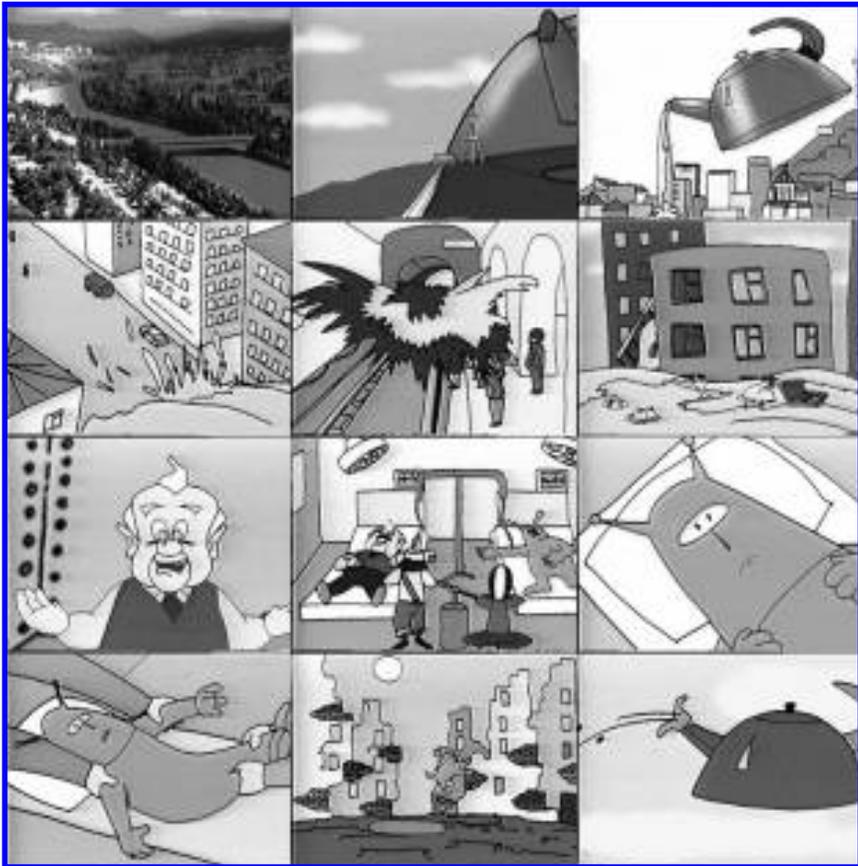
FIGURE 9. The aliens arrive and destroy Tbilisi. (Image courtesy of Telecompany 202, Tbilisi, Georgia)

corruptible, even though he apparently does not know any of their hooligan friends. They lure the alien into the bunker.

In the last scene we find Shevardnadze hiding in the bunker, where he reveals to his cronies that he carries in his bloodstream a secret "corruption virus" that he had developed in the 1960s (when the real Shevardnadze was in charge of a major anticorruption campaign as Georgia's minister of internal affairs); it has until now been the source of Georgia's degraded social conditions. However, he suggests that if an alien can be infected with this virus the aliens will become like Georgians and set about destroying one another. A transfusion of virus-laden blood is given to the alien. Then the alien shows that he has become fully Georgianized, that is, corrupt, by announcing a general willingness to accept money. The alien is then returned to the ship, spreading the Georgian corruption virus to the rest of the aliens.

FIGURE 10. The aliens are destroyed by the same virus that is destroying Georgia. (Image courtesy of Telecompany 202, Tbilisi, Georgia)

In a musical finale images of Georgia's actual degradation are montaged on cartoon images of alien degradation. The aliens are shown mimicking the actual fistfights that have been common scenes in the Georgian parliament. The aliens are destroyed by the same virus that is destroying Georgia (see Figure 10). Yet in the final scene, Shevardnadze, against a backdrop of a destroyed Tbilisi, proclaims to the people of Georgia that he has always believed in the positive value of corruption. He proclaims, "Corruption will save Georgia, hurray for corruption!"

The world of *Dardubala* is, as its title suggests and own theme song proclaims, nothing other than a miniaturized representation of the "post-socialist chaos" (Nazpary 2000) of contemporary Georgia. It is a world from which the central organizing values that dominated the socialist moral order, "culture" and "civilization," are missing. *Kultura,* in the socialist sense is a set of premises about orderly interiorities and exteriorities, having as much or more to do with regulating public comportment and private consumption, as traditional folk dances and epic poems.[19] The opposite of *kultura* in this sense is *chaos. Dardubala* is a representation of the chaotic inversion of the orderly norms of *kultura* of the socialist world. Indeed, as noted above, the student use of visual images from *Dardubala* instead of textual citations of canonical classical nationalist authors in their rhetoric was in itself seen as indexing an absence of *kultura*. In *Dardubala,* the paternalism of the socialist state that guaranteed the existence and reproduction of *cultured* relationships is replaced by Shevardnadze's comic inability to fix Georgia's problems. We are meant

to understand that he cannot fix these problems because he himself created them, either under socialism or in the current period.

Under socialist canons of aesthetics, the "critical realism" of the late 19th century, which used realistic description as a way of criticizing Tsarism, was replaced with "socialist realism," a realism that portrayed things not as they are, warts and all, but instead tried to descry in the present order the future world that was coming to be under socialism (Clark 1981; Fitzpatrick 1992:216–237; Hoffmann 2003:161). One might suggest that *Dardubala* utilizes the grotesque aesthetics of cartoonishness that seemingly at all points oppose themselves to the established socialist norms of verisimilitude, whether "critical realist" or even "socialist realist," to produce a kind of realism adequate to the postsocialist condition. The chaotic cartoonishness of *Dardubala,* both in terms of form and content, stands in sharp contrast to the neoclassical tendencies toward harmony and order of Stalinist art (Hoffmann 2003:160). Instead, the aesthetic world of cartoonishness is used to represent a world in which elite networks have become decoupled from those dispossessed by postsocialist reforms, producing a situation in which these networks are able arbitrarily to exercise power over the dispossessed. Indeed, the very arbitrariness of the exercise of power is part of how this form of domination sustains itself. And yet, at the same time, *Dardubala* sustains the inherited socialist belief that the source of all social problems lie with the state, incarnated in the hapless cartoon figure of Eduard, whose attempts to save Georgia only destroy it further.

Dardubala presents a chaotic postsocialist order in which states do not serve the people, commodities do not interpellate consumers, and signifiers do not match signifieds. This crisis of representations is encapsulated in miniature in mock advertisements within the program. As mentioned earlier, all *Dardubala,* advertisements are for products made by, for, or from feral cats. The subtext is that the new postsocialist world of commodities displayed in the stores and supermarkets of Tbilisi, and the real world TV advertisements for them, might just as well be addressed to the actual myriad feral cats in the Tbilisi streets, given the inability of the impoverished population who watch these commercial advertisements to be interpellated by them as consumers. This is a chaotic world both economic and representational. It is against this endlessly refractory, nihilistic, and paranoid *Dardubala*-like logic of reception and representation that the student protests sought to maintain, in part through their own co-opting of *Dardubala*'s imagery, a representational logic of direct, sincere, transparent expression. Here, I return to the November meetings of 2001.

DAYS 3–4: CROWDS AND STREETS

The meetings of November 2001 lasted seven days, with only minimal student participation after the third day, by which time the most dramatic political changes, the dismissal of Shevardnadze's entire ministry, the resignation of the speaker of Parliament Zurab Zhvania to join the opposition, and the collapse of Shevardnadze's "monster" party "Citizen Union," which had dominated Georgian elections for seven years, had already been achieved. During these few days Georgian politicians and the Georgian press and media made endless commentaries on the protests. These metacommentaries often sought to reframe the physical presence of the crowd itself as being a signifier rather than a thing in itself, a signifier problematic both in form and content, having a hidden, rather than transparent, significance. That is, the crowds in the street could represent provocation, imminent violence and revolution, a basic lack of "European civilization," a "blind instrument" of hidden actors; or the crowds could in turn be sundered into multiple, different protests, some good, some bad.[20]

For some, the presence of the crowd was in an intertextual series with other protests that had occurred in the same place, specifically those of April 9, 1989, which spelled the end of Soviet power in Georgia, and those in 1991–92, which preceded the coup that toppled the Gamsakhurdia government and leveled much of downtown Tbilisi. Both of those protests had ended in bloodshed, something both the commentators and the protestors in 2001 were anxious to avoid, even as they sought in their rhetoric to align the existing protests with aspects of one or the other older ones.

For politicians of all stripes, the signifier itself was problematic in its very form: For Shevardnadze, the crowds in the street, obstructing traffic on one of the few navigable cross-town thoroughfares in Tbilisi, represented an "uncivilized form," masses out of place. Outside, in the street, was no place for politics.[21] Zurab Zhvania, too, even as he agreed with many others that the first days of the meetings represented an "apolitical" expression of civil society as such, argued that "mass oratory and street demonstrations," although effective, were not the proper form or forum for politics:

> The prognosis of mass oratory and street agitation is always difficult. I am really afraid of taking political processes to the street because in such a circumstance society always loses, street agitation can bring some kinds of changes to conclusion, but the price will always be unhelpfully high. [*Kviris Palitra* 2001:3]

Georgian commentators like Zhvania share with Western commentators (e.g., Samuel Huntington 1993) a strong commitment to an Orientalist spatial ontology that treats the opposition between Europe and Asia as a basic divide associated respectively with positive ("normal," "civilized," and "democratic") and negative ("violent," "barbaric," and "despotic") social and political characteristics (Asad 2003: ch. 5). Like many other places in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (Bassin 1991; Gal 1991; Yurchak 2006), Georgia's own position in this ontology is ambiguous, shifting, or perhaps multiple and overlapping, and is certainly debated by Georgians, Western pundits, and European Union officials alike (Cherchi and Manning 2002; Manning 2004; Manning and Uplisashvili n.d.). According to Zhvania, for example, in sharp contrast to Central Asian postsocialist societies, Georgian society is European and the state is Asiatic, yet there is something uncivilized, un-European, and therefore violent, Asiatic, about these protests and speeches in the street (*Kviris Palitra* 2001:3).

This partly reflects another tendency in Western political discourse, evident in the arguments of self-styled "deliberative democrats" like Habermas, for whom the classical form of democratic discourse, oratory, is unfavorably compared to forms of political discourse and deliberation based on conversation or dialog (Remer 2000:68). For Habermas, oratory not only fails to be truly democratic in its characteristics as a form (inequalities between speaker and audience, appeal to passions, lack of extemporaneity, etc.) but, much more importantly in this case, also in its characteristic forum: the street. The spatial, indeed orientalizing, division of the political between parliament and the street is familiar, too, from Western journalistic commentary and punditry on the Middle East, where the "Arab Street" is often invoked metonymically to represent an unpredictable, emotional, or unmanageable material political force. This spatializing division of genres also echoes Western political metadiscourse, notably Habermas, in whose political ontology "the street" is an antipublic. It stands as (perhaps manipulated) material coercion applied to the disembodied reason of the public sphere, in the same way that the passions of street oratory are the opposite of dispassionate, reasoned communication. As Warren Montag has recently characterized Habermas's position:

> In fact, the street doesn't speak insofar as it is a materialization of critique, critique become force. . . . The street moves or produces effects through the force of its weight, its mass. The words of the group for which "the street" is a metonym are always embodied, immanent in material force. Even its use of language does not constitute communicative action in the rational sense: it does not discuss, it demands. (Montag 2000:143–144)

Masses, considered as mere material signifiers, can be manipulated. Virtually every report in the Georgian press and rumor mill included some remark, with varying degrees of editorial endorsement, that behind the meetings stood "specific political forces," who organized, controlled, and financed them, in the pursuit of their own private interests. Rumors abounded and were reported in the press to the effect that the student leaders had been paid $30,000 dollars, or, alternatively, 30 Georgian lari. The price was always in multiples of the price paid Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus.[22] The insistent use of dramaturgical metaphors—of unseen directors, spectacles, shows, and farces—in the press undermined the unity of conception and execution of the protests. This theatricalized logic of reception allowed the students to be seen, and eventually see themselves, as innocents whose apolitical "social" demands in the general interests of society had been "used" as "blind instruments" for specific, private ends, for example, that of Saakashvili or Zhvania, or Russian or other moneyed interests; some even saw the meetings as a "virtuoso" performance staged by Shevardnadze himself.[23] As often as not these interests were left unnamed.

Last, with the departure of the majority of the students for their homes on November 3, the continuation of the protests, still led by a self-described "Student Initiative Group," allowed the surmise that there really had been two separate meetings, the "apolitical" student meetings of October 31–November 2, and the "political provocation" of the meetings from November 3–7. Speaking when these meetings were still ongoing, the late Zhvania opined that,

> today these meetings are already of a completely provocative character, they have nothing to do with the sincere protests of the students, which neither [opposition leader] Saakashvili nor Zhvania nor any other politician would have been able to organize, because the students are apolitical.[24]

The press spent little time reporting on these latter meetings, claiming alternately that the crowds had already dispersed, or even that it consisted of an "army of drunks and beggars, or psychotics."

In these deconstructive metarhetorics, the crowd as form, as an amorphous material object, a potential signifier, not floating but at least wandering about, smoking, talking and yelling, is rendered problematic. It serves as a kind of irrational material coercion of "the street" relative to the disembodied reason of the constitutional order (allegedly) embodied in parliament. Almost equivalently, the irritating persistence of the crowd in the street was an index of a lack of Euro-American civilization, an obtuse backward oriental element in Georgian society, or was viewed dramaturgically as a blind instrument of an unseen will, or even as several distinguishable

protests that, although continuous to the untrained eye of the outsider, needed to be carefully segregated to grasp their quite distinct meanings, that is, "good" apolitical meetings of the students, and "bad" political protests of the "army of drunks and beggars." As has been a problem confronting mass protests since the 19th century (Plotz 2000), students and others could present themselves as a mass, a crowd, in the street, but the project of representing themselves as standing there for some cause eluded them.

DAYS 4–7: "THE TRIBUNE OF FREEDOM"—THE METARHETORIC OF DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURE

Student participants found this set of criticisms irritating, patronizing, and sometimes persuasive. Interviewed in the press, one student testily summed up the student position by articulating an opposite metarhetoric logic of presence, emphasizing that the protests were an expressive unity that was transparent, genuine, and sincere, and not theatricalized. As one student explained, "This action was not organized by any forces, we expressed our own will. No one pushed us into this, we expressed our own position."[25]

Such a rhetoric of presence, stressing immediacy, sincerity, and "transparency" of communication, is possible when a plurality of students are in fact present. Likewise a rhetoric of unity is easily produced by shouting in unison, but with the departure of the majority of the students after the third day, the Student Initiative Group faced even more pressing problems: how to maintain an expressive unity out of so many diverse and discordant voices; how to maintain the studentness of the protests in the absence of a plurality of students. This was crucial because so many voices, from Zhvania to the press, had sundered these meetings from the "sincere protests of the students."

The student response in the last days was to rely on a procedural metarhetoric that turned the meetings themselves into an instantiation of democracy through their form. A skeleton crew of the Student Initiative Group remained throughout the protests, constantly reminding the crowd that the focal members of the action were the students, and that the meetings belonged to the students, regardless of how many students were physically present. The members of the Student Initiative Group framed, introduced, and punctuated the remarks of speakers from the crowd, establishing themselves as metacommentators whose focus was to constantly characterize the formal parameters of the meetings as having certain "democratic" properties, namely, that they were creating a formal space for freedom of speech. To carry this out, the students constantly emphasized formal, procedural aspects

of the gathering, insisting that what they offered was a place to speak, even for those with discordant views. And there were speakers with discordant views. By this point the crowd included numerous older, nonstudent speakers, many of whom were Zviadists, who, of course, characterized the student movement in their own terms.

The place established for this metarhetoric was a tribune that had been set up in front of parliament from which speakers, self-selected from the crowd, could address the crowd freely on any topic they wished in any language (in this case Georgian or [infrequently] Russian) or genre (incl. speeches, harangues, rants, poems, prayers) they wished. The students set themselves up as guarantors and arbitrators of this "tribune of freedom": their role was to characterize and constitute the space of the tribune as a sacralized locus of the freedom of speech. Of importance, then, was neither the formal nor substantive properties of the speeches (as long as they were peaceful) but the formal fact that they expressed their will individually and sincerely in a democratic fashion:

> For this reason we proclaim, for all to hear, that our movement will always have a peaceful character, until our demands are fulfilled. Aside from this, we necessarily give our support to clean and intelligent persons, who have unblemished reputations, the right and ability to speak the truth; our doors are always open to such persons.

The students exhorted the crowd to speak in their support, indicating that it was not decorated speech or oratory that was needed but rather the expressive immediacy of speech straight from the heart:

> Dear people! Please, show more initiative! We need your opinion, so that we students can be convinced, that the people really stand with us. We can say all sorts of words, even decorated, but this means nothing. A simply expressed speech, straight from the heart—we prefer this, so more actively.

In this way, by a certain procedural alchemy, whatever the speaker might say in substantive terms was metarhetorically encompassed and transformed into an expression of democratic freedom of speech and support of the student actions. Whatever the specific demands of the speakers, and however it was expressed formally, the very fact that they spoke here freely and sincerely could serve as a reminder that freedom of speech was, after all, what the student actions had been about.

DAY 7: ICONS AND FLAGS—NATIONAL AND ORTHODOX SYMBOLS

The formal space carved out by the students' metarhetoric and incarnated in the tribune itself should not be confused with a purely secular civic space, for it was at the same time imbued with an aura at once national and sacred by the addition of two icons, one of Saint George and one of the Mother of God. On the last day, these religious icons, placed on a draped Georgian flag, converted the tribune into something like an altar in an (Georgian) Orthodox church, which is fronted by an iconostasis that converts a secular space into a sacred one. In Orthodox theology, icons are at once signs (likenesses) and real presences. Perhaps because of this, the student who placed the icons on the tribune stressed the "symbolic" character of the icons (suggesting their national significance), even as he emphasized their sacred efficacy as a real presence, a conduit of grace.

> It is symbolic dear friends. Our country is the allotted country of the Mother of God, and today, in the most critical time, exactly that, this icon has come to you and we will have her grace. May God not disturb her grace. I bless you again on a historic day.

The student's remarks drew attention to unresolved ambiguities about the visual register these images were intended to be seen in. These icons were selected from many possible icons on the basis of their political significance, underlined by being placed on top of a Georgian flag. This strictly national symbolism is presumably what the student meant by referring to them as "symbolic." Yet immediately thereafter the same student invoked these images as actual icons, placing them as one might place an icon in a church or a house, and invoking a set of devotional practices appropriate to icons, and not national symbols, thus sacralizing the secular space of the tribune.

The ambivalence of these icons, hovering somewhere between a secular "symbol" of the nation and a sacred "icon," seems to point up the way that Georgian liberalism is aware of its own asymptotic, defective, "not quite Europeanness." For surely, from the perspective of a Eurocentric "secularization thesis" that secularism is an indispensable attribute of modern liberal publics, the Orthodox sacralization of the tribune of freedom seems to produce an impermissible, un-European, hybrid of secular and sacred public spaces. Such hybrids provide further fuel for arguments that liberal categories like "public" are properly understood only in Europe and not Asia (incl. Orthodox Europe, as explicitly argued by Samuel Huntington and implicitly by authors like Jurgen Habermas and Charles Taylor), even though, as

Asad and Van de Veer argued, the proposition that Western liberal publics have exclusively secular origins is itself historically groundless (Asad 2003; Van Der Veer 2001). Still, the student seems to hesitate between categorizing the icons as "symbols" of the secular or mimetic incarnations of the divine. It is as if he is making a sideward glance at a Huntingtonesque "clash of civilizations" between "Western" political cosmologies that putatively compartmentalize strictly the state and religion, secular public and the private religious spheres, and a "Byzantine" political cosmology in which secular and spiritual hierarchies are commingled as part of Orthodox Christian imperium (Asad 2003:164 n. 10; Gvasalia 2005:171).

At face value, of course, there is indeed a "clash" here between irreducibly different political cosmologies. However, as cosmologies—in which the phenomenal world of presence appresents a world of unseen political hypostasized fetishes—they have much in common. In both cases the very terms of political discourse—whether Western discourses of "civil society" of the new elites or the old cultural teleologies of the "nation" *(eri)* and the "people" *(xalxi)* prized by the secular socialist intelligentsias or hypostasized entities operative in both systems, like the state (Abrams 1988; Manning 2005)—involve the invocation of transcendent cosmological orders as a source of authority in secular political discourse, leading to secular forms of "occult cosmology" (Sanders and West 2003). To continue this analogy, there is further a certain homology of rhetorical "transparency" between the "Byzantine" mimetic (Platonic) theology of presence of the divine in the material, instantiated in Orthodox icons (Kenna 1985:348–350), which seeks to bridge the cosmological divide between divinity and humanity, and the "Western" metaphysics of presence embodied in expressivist rhetoric of the students (Taylor 1989:ch. 21), which similarly sought to mediate the divide between conception and execution, transcendent inner self and material outer expression (Keane 2002).

Much more straightforwardly, the ambiguous deployment of the icon also indexes the way in which the rhetoric of the student movement and the National Movement part ways with the relatively secular nationalist rhetoric of earlier postsocialist protests of 1989, for among the young people of Georgia, Georgian Orthodox belief and practice is a resurgent ideological factor whose relevance is not circumscribed to any one sphere, and it seems clear that the Orthodox Church itself has aggressively asserted itself as being central to defining the discourse of the Nation (see Manning n.d.). The ambiguities do not end there. Gocha Gvasalia has noted the Rose Revolution and its aftermath was also permeated by all manner of such secular–sacred doublets of "Western Liberal Republican" and "Byzantine Imperial" political cosmologies: Protestors carried both Orthodox icons and banners

bearing the French Revolutionary slogan "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité" (Gvasalia 2005:154); Republican president Saakashvili swore his oath of office on the grave of a Georgian King (Gvasalia 2005:163); the official seals and heraldry of the republic of Georgia bear crowns symbolic of monarchies and normally antithetical to republican heraldry, and so on. As Gvasalia notes, taken at face value, these are ambiguous, antithetical, or even incomprehensible gestures, and remain so, inasmuch as virtually no one has seen fit to explain them (Gvasalia 2005:154, 163).

Emergent tendencies to conflate the nation and the Orthodox Church appear elsewhere, notably flags. The November meetings featured two versions of the Georgian flag, one the actual flag of the nation at that time (maroon field with black and white bars in the upper left corner), based on the flag of the first independent republic of Georgia, a Menshevik social democracy that emerged after the 1917 revolution; the other a flag, white with five red crosses, putatively as old as the 12th century Queen Tamar.[26] In the November meetings these two flags, one secular and republican in symbolism, the other sacred and monarchist, typically stood side by side as more or less equivalents of the nation in opposition to the state. Occasionally, however, students opposed the two flags by lowering the existing maroon flag and raising the new five-cross one in its place on a flagpole in front of parliament, so that the actual flag of the republic became identified with the existing state and status quo, the new unofficial five-cross flag with the nation and revolution.

This potential opposition between the two flags hardened in the two years leading up to the Rose Revolution, in which the five-cross flag became associated, almost like a trademark, with Saakashvili's National Movement in opposition to the State symbolized by the existing flag. This new five-cross flag was quickly adopted as the new flag of Georgia after the revolution. The new flag, replete with the obvious, redundant, and insistent Christian symbolism of five crosses, significantly, was also consecrated by the patriarchate at the church of Svetiscxoveli, the ancient church of the erstwhile royal capital of Georgia, on its adoption.

The deployment of icons at the students' tribune of freedom in 2001 illustrates their use of a visual language stratified, sometimes ambiguously, into stylistic registers. Different kinds of images, drawn from opposed visual registers, hieratic and grotesque, icons and cartoons, were used in the early and later parts of the protests. The protests began with defamatory images and ended with devotional ones, moved from secular grotesques to sacred hieratic icons, using these discrete visual registers to oppose the "state" (incarnated in *Dardubala*) to the "nation" (incarnated in the icon of the Mother of God, of Saint George).

TWO YEARS LATER: THE ROSE REVOLUTION

The November meetings of 2001 ended in a somber mood, with a general sense of uncertainty as to what exactly had happened. But they had born some fruit: The burgeoning National Movement headed by then-opposition leader, now-president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili. The Student Initiative Group behind the November Meetings of 2001 had also, by April 2003, become a full-fledged radical political organization *Kmara!* ("Enough!"), thanks to funding from George Soros and the model of the Serb student movement *Otpor,* which deposed Milosevic. But until November of 2003, all this seemed muted against the general backdrop of chaos and decline, and the inevitability of more of the same.

But, in November 2003 after parliamentary elections were demonstrably falsified, Georgians did again take to the streets. In even larger numbers opposition demonstrations were met by progovernment demonstrations until the final days. November 22 was the fateful one for Shevardnadze. On this day, parliament convened without quorum and rose-bearing supporters of Saakashvili rushed the parliament where Shevardnadze was speaking, took over the chambers, and declared Shevardnadze deposed. The speaker of parliament, Nino Burjanadze, became acting president. Shevardnadze resigned the next day.

Tbilisi erupted in celebration. Everything, it seemed, had changed. Immediately, people began talking, and some are still talking, of a "new reality," in which nothing would be as before, everything would change for the better. In a classic moment of Durkheimian collective effervescence, Georgians began to dance and hug one another in the streets. Friends of mine said for the very first time in their lives they felt proud to be Georgian. In one stroke, the revolution seemed to eradicate the inherited postsocialist cynicism and nihilism, at least for the moment. The Rose Revolution seemed to be not merely a circumscribed political revolution, but a social one as well, as one might expect when social problems are perceived to be the result of political ones, where there is no popularly accepted ontological demarcation of the social whole into a "state" and a "(civil) society." I heard rumors that the police had stopped taking bribes, and that student activists as well as other citizens set about cleaning up the streets of the city. The new reality would be one in which culturedness and civilization returned to public life. Corruption and filth, moral and material pollution, would both be swept away by the moral power of the new cultured and civilized reality.

This sense of a radical break from the past represented in *Dardubala* gave a sense that all was changed. At a time when the revolution still lacked an official name, and was still provisionally being called a "velvet revolution," reporters roved the streets

asking those present "What are we going to call what has happened?" (Mikiashvili 2003). In dramatic contrast to the meetings of 2001, virtually everyone agreed that the revolution was a direct expression of popular will, and that the people, in more of a civic than national sense, had become manifest in the crowds in the street. Moreover, the peacefulness of this manifestation of popular will showed that Georgians were, after all, civilized and cultured, perhaps even more so than Europeans or Americans. Many Georgians noted that if there had been 100,000 people in the street anywhere in Europe or the United States, there would have been rioting and looting. But nothing of the sort happened. Finally, after so many coups and so much violence, the Georgians had redeemed themselves in the very form of their revolution.

But perhaps even more important to many observers was that in this perceived manifestation of the popular will, in the massive crowds in the streets, the people themselves had been recreated or reconstituted as a totality, a whole, a unity. There had been a rebirth of the category of publicness and peopleness in a country that had for ten years or more known only private interests, and for whom the world outside the doors of their homes was synonymous with material filth, moral corruption and a complete absence of notions of general interest or public will.

In contrast to earlier meetings, fewer and fewer people greeted the public manifestations with the hitherto perennial questions of "Who is financing this? Who is controlling this?" On one Georgian webpage, an impatient blogger retorted to the nay-saying cynicism forcefully:

> People! Haven't you gotten tired with talking about who financed or planned this revolution? Or whether it is a spectacle or not? Or whether the revolution should have happened or not? Or who is an Armenian and who is Surinamese? We made this revolution happen, whoever doesn't like it and doesn't believe this, go bring people into the street. Try it and if you manage to gather 50 people that will be good, [because] all of Georgia wanted to overthrow Edika [Shevardnadze] and he was overthrown and that is that.[27]

At least at that moment, the Rose Revolution somehow managed to escape the deconstructive cynicism of postsocialist reception that endlessly cleaves signifiers from signifieds, and locates the origin and meaning of public events in private scheming. Social life in postsocialist cynicism is viewed theatrically, as a sham or spectacle. The Rose Revolution restored authenticity, transforming Georgia from an uncultured and uncivilized postsocialist chaos parodied in *Dardubala* to a civilized

and cultured universe. In the Georgia of Roses, *Dardubala* itself was to become a children's cartoon. The new reality would be civilized and cultured because the Rose Revolution itself was civilized and cultured in its very form. As a ritual, it was a likeness or icon of its intended performative effects on the social whole (Tambiah 1985). Unlike previous coups, such as the one that brought Shevardnadze to power in 1992, here there were no weapons other than roses in hands and voices in the street. In destroying the regime of Shevardnadze, who came to symbolize the chaos of postsocialism, Georgians reconstituted themselves as a people and a public.

Or maybe not. The Rose Revolution was a revolution that fed on revolution itself. Saakashvili won an early victory by deposing Aslan Abashidze, the "little Pasha" of Adjara, but the same pattern of permanent revolution foundered on the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The new government's successful policies of capturing old government leaders and holding them for ransom against stolen money turned into unpopular neoliberal policies of selling off Georgia's natural resources, much as the old regime had sold off Georgia's industrial base for scrap. Aside from a project to begin painting the buildings of Tbilisi (begun in preparation for George W. Bush's visit in 2005), especially along the route downtown from the airport, paving some of the worst roads, and reforming the police to reduce their numbers, raise their salaries (to reduce the bribe taking) and give them patrol cars, it is difficult to pinpoint visible "achievements" of the Saakashvili regime. Ironically for the government brought in by the first "color revolution," even the colors chosen to paint these buildings, mostly a selection of different light pastels (including rose!), raised the ire of various of my friends, who claimed that "they were not Georgian colors."[28]

In fact, many Georgians now fear the new regime in ways unimaginable under Shevardnadze. Not only has the regime engaged in violent repression of dissent on the very streets of Tbilisi that ushered in this "velvet revolution" but also increasingly engages in exaggerated violent repression of peripheral publics as well (particularly certain ethnic groups located in the mountains, such as the Muslim [Georgian Chechen] Kists of Pankisi Gorge or irregular Svan fighters [called the "Hunters" in Kodori Gorge]). When it was revealed in this latter case that the government routinely listens to cell phone calls, many Georgians have become for the first time reluctant to discuss political matters on the phone, or, indeed, in public settings, such as restaurants.

And there are reasons to be afraid, as shown in the very different fates experienced by erstwhile allies of Saakashvili's National Movement, especially in the

media. Members of such opposition NGOs as the Liberty Institute, who along with Kmara played central roles in organizing the Rose Revolution, have moved from the critical margins directly into government positions for greater or lesser terms, their empty seats at the Liberty Institute (by now an NGO only in name) now filled by leaders of the Kmara movement. The television station Rustavi 2, in whose defense the student actions of 2001 were organized, has become, after a change in ownership, in effect, a progovernment station. In fact, in sharp contrast to the relative freedom of the Shevardnadze period, there is little open criticism of the government on any television channel. Postrevolutionary Georgia seems to be following the Russian model of literal freedom of the press, that is, freedom for the print press, but not the television press, part of what Georgian commentators sometimes call a process of "Putinization" *(Putinizacia)*. This "Putinization" includes punitive actions against the print press as well, for example a "cost-cutting measure" forbidding any government agency from subscribing to any Georgian press publications (Rezonansi 2005). This is an ironic end for a revolution that was begun as a spontaneous defense of the freedom of the press, and Rustavi 2 in particular.

The ironies do not end there, of course. One of the few remaining television stations that is felt to be truly critical of the government is the international award-winning channel 202, the brainchild of Shalva Ramishvili, the creator of *Dardubala* (Media.ge 2005b). After this station announced plans to create more critical news programs and in particular a new *Dardubala* series (currently being broadcast) aimed at the postrevolutionary government (with president Saakashvili making his debut as the main character), the station has experienced pressure from the government. On August 27, 2005, Shalva Ramishvili and another executive (Davit Kokhreidze) of Channel 202, were arrested on "corruption" charges on a pretrial detention warrant that was due to expire on November 27, 2005 (Corso 2005).[29] Ramishvili and Kokhreidze remained in jail after the expiration of the detention warrant, and in late March 2006 were sentenced to four and three years in prison on charges of extortion, respectively (Media.ge 2005a). The blow was apparently unexpected. Just weeks before, in an interview (July 7, 2005) concerning the government's crackdown on the press, including veiled or open threats against other television companies, Shalva Ramishvili was asked whether he had experienced any direct threats from the government. He answered, "No, such a thing has really not happened. Personally I have a very normal relationship with government representatives."[30] Currently Shalva Ramishvili is in prison, and my requests, as of August 2006, to have an interview with him were denied.
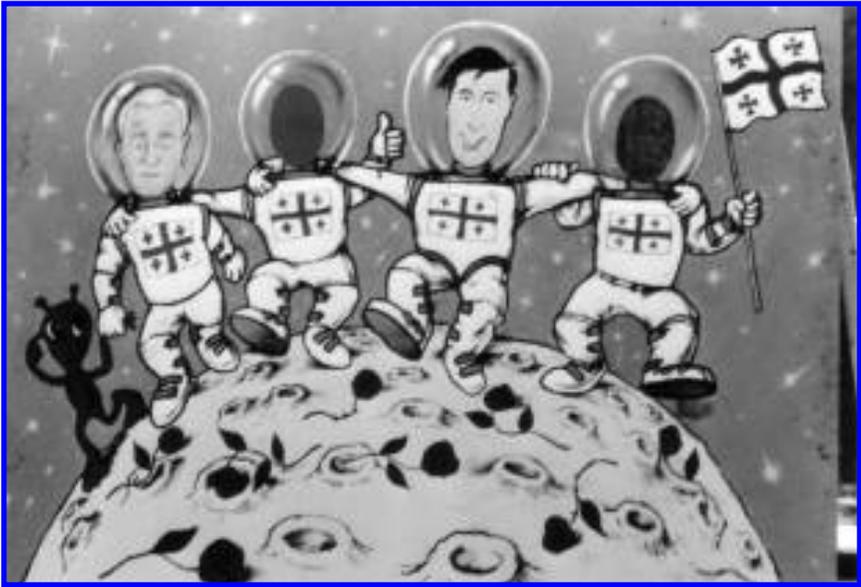
FIGURE 11. George W. Bush, Mikheil Saakashvili, and an alien strike a kitschy pose on the moon.

CONCLUSION: COLOR REVOLUTIONS AND CARTOONS

What kind of regime is most afraid of cartoons like *Dardubala?* Probably a regime itself founded on kitsch. After all, the Rose Revolution was the first "color revolution," the first in an international series of branded "kitsch revolutions." Like all kitsch, its essence lies at the surface, a shiny "bourgeois repackaging" of the nationalism inherited from the socialist period, orchestrated public displays of Durkheimian collective effervescence, colors and flowers as distinctive trademark symbols, revolutionary "brands" within a broader international franchise of "color" or "flower" revolutions. As noted above, the Rose Revolution and postrevolutionary symbolism has been characterized by a veritable mish-mash of contradictory legitimating symbolism and images drawn from Liberal, Byzantine, Orthodox, Zviadist, Republican, and Monarchist registers of symbolism. As Gvasalia (2005) has noted, it is hard to imagine what possible noncontradictory political significance could be assigned to a republican president swearing an oath of office on the grave of a Georgian monarch, for example. Unless, of course, it has the contentless significance of kitsch.

But the relationship is not merely a metaphoric one, resemblances between the Rose Revolution and *Dardubala* captured under the sign of "kitsch," but also a metonymic one. As we have seen, *Dardubala,* wittingly and unwittingly, supplied

FIGURE 12.   In a parody of the new Georgian government Saakashvili as Sultan presides over his harem. (Image courtesy of Telecompany 202, Tbilisi, Georgia)

the Rose Revolution with some of its most rhetorically effective iconography and images. But therein lies the problem, for the continued survival of *Dardubala* after the Rose Revolution points to all the ways in which everything about the Rose Revolution resembles cartoon kitsch. The sometimes unwitting kitschy parallelism between revolutionary and cartoon iconography is summed up by a painted board created for the Bush visit, the sort of board that has holes in it so that one can insert one's head and be photographed against the scene depicted on the board (see Figure 11). In this case, the board depicts Mikheil Saakashvili, George Bush, and a little green moonman, with arms linked in space suits imprinted with Georgia's new flag, on a moon littered with roses.

And of course, the road from such an unwittingly silly image to a deliberately parodic one is not so far to follow. In the new *Dardubala* series, as in this picture, actual revolutionary symbolism (flags, roses, the "special relationship" with George W. Bush) are juxtaposed and combined with absurd parodic elements. In one scene, the clownish, giggling, womanizing, and yet dangerous Saakashvili might be attended by his actual revolutionary symbols—roses, or the new five-cross flag, presiding

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over real (but absurd) government initiatives. In another scene Saakashvili might be likened to an oriental sultan in his harem (see Figure 12).

But finally, it is not cartoons, but the grinding effect of the real that has erased the optimism of the revolutionary period. I had been assured during the revolutionary period that all the old rules were broken, all the old hierarchies upset. When I arrived in Tbilisi, months later, the first anxious question from many believers was "How do you like the 'Georgia of Roses'? Do you see the difference?" Others, by now the majority, no longer had the patience or the hopeful imagination to see roses blooming in the scrap heaps of Georgia.[31]

ABSTRACT

The Georgian "Rose Revolution" of 2003 was preceded by events in November 2001, in which students protested against a government raid on a popular TV station, Rustavi 2, and forced then-President Shevardnadze to request the resignation of the Georgian cabinet as the students demanded. This article describes these events in detail to show how political transition in Georgia has been carried out and exemplified by new political rhetorics and metarhetoric that expressly confronted entrenched logics of reception. The article illustrates how shifts in state formation, in postsocialist contexts in particular, are tied to shifts in representational modes.

Keywords: political oratory, images, postsocialism, revolution

NOTES

1. Notes on transcription of Georgian:
   For simplicity's sake, I use a simplified transcription system for Georgian throughout that ignores phonemic oppositions between glottalized and aspirated series of voiceless stop consonants because these are usually indicated by a cumbersome diacritic, an apostrophe that is also used to indicate a very different phonological feature in the transcription of the completely unrelated Russian language (also omitted.)

2. The use of the slogan *kmara!* (Enough!) for the student movement, as well as the student movement itself, then called the "Student Initiative Group," seems to have begun as an unofficial slogan on signs in the November meetings of 2001 (Photo in *Alia* 2001:17). The name began

to appear in graffiti in white or rose colored paint in downtown Tbilisi on April 22nd 2003, around the same time the group had begun to arrange routine protests under that name. Many of leaders of the Kmara movement have since occupied positions in the Liberty Institute, their "parent" organization, as members of the Liberty institute entered power with Saakashvili (Wikipedia.org 2006).

3. The choice of name for this revolution appears to be the "export version" brand name of the Lebanese revolution, never having any great currency within the country; the domestic version was labeled instead as the "Independence Uprising," see Noureddine and King-Irani (2005). According to Vinciguerra (2005), the Cedar Revolution was initially dubbed by some a "Rose Revolution."

4. I owe this observation to an anonymous reviewer. On November 24 (the day after the revolution) it was possible to find articles using either "velvet revolution" *(xaverdovani revolucia)* or "Rose Revolution" *(Vardebiani/vardebis revolucia)* within the same Georgian newspaper. The term *velvet revolution* was also used frequently in the press in reference to the November meetings of 2001.

5. I am using *ritual* and *revolution* in a somewhat idealized way to point to different aspects of the performative effects of political performances on their corresponding social imaginaries (implying an analysis of ritual broadly indebted to Tambiah 1985). *Ritual* here denotes primarily those that seek to reenact or maintain those imaginaries, and *revolution* here denotes those that seek to transform them, corresponding respectively to what Silverstein has called "presupposing" and "creative" indexicality (e.g., Silverstein 2003:195–196).

6. A phrase that kept on appearing insistently in accounts of the revolution.

7. For an example, see Hume (2002).

8. Partly because it would amount to pure speculation, and partly because it would deflect attention from the focus of this article, I refrain from any attempt to ascertain what agencies may have in fact been involved in organizing or financing which revolutionary action, or whether or not the student actions of 2001 were sincere and spontaneous, or not.

9. It is difficult to say exactly how many newspapers come out weekly in Tbilisi, much less who owns them, how they are financed, or what political programs they represent, if any. The figure "about 200," given to me by a journalist acquaintance, is not to be taken as an authoritative statistic, but almost 100 can be found on the web (73 can be found currently at Georgian Newspapers OnLine 2006).

10. Not only students I myself talked to but even a letter signed in the name of the Student Initiative Group seemed to come to the conclusion that (unnamed) politicians had attempted to use their sincere protest as a "blind instrument" (Sigua et al. 2001).

11. When I say that transparency and conspiracy both share an underlying ontology of power, I am saying that for all their apparent difference they share basic commonalities based on a set of unstated presuppositions about what sorts of things exist in the universe (an *ontology*) and how the universe itself is ordered (a *cosmology*) (Sanders and West 2003:6). Both represent *semiotic ideologies* (Keane 2003:419) to the extent that they represent "basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world." What I am calling a "social imaginary" (following Taylor 2002, 2004) is much like a social ontology or cosmology, involving the "ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others . . . the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (Taylor 2004:23; see also Taylor 2002).

12. Following Keane, I use the term *representational economy* to denote "the dynamic interconnections among different modes of signification at play within a particular historical and social formation. For instance, how people handle and value material goods may be implicated in how they use and interpret words, and vice versa, reflecting certain underlying assumptions about the world and the beings that inhabit it" (2003:410).

13. See Yurchak (2006) for a sensitive ethnography of this period.

14. Eduard Shevardnadze served as minister for internal affairs in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in charge of a fierce campaign against corruption (this is referenced in the *Dardubala* cartoon with mention of his secret "corruption virus"

experiments in the 1960s). This established a reputation that allowed him to join the Central Committee and eventually the Politburo, becoming under Gorbachev the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

15. The new government has changed the parliament building so that this area is a fountain, as part of a large campaign to construct fountains all over Tbilisi (in 2006). A by-product of this fountain-building campaign is that it would be impossible to hold protests of this sort in front of Parliament in the future.

16. These images are taken from *Axali Versia* 2001.

17. This is apparently intentional, as is the politically subversive thrust of the series: Gia Chanturia, one of the *Dardubala* creators and the voice of the character "Eduard" (developed out of his popular deejay persona of the same name), sees the heroes of *Dardubala* as representing the "entire political elite, under the leadership of the country's president," with many characters standing for their real life counterparts (*Ganaxlebuli Iveria* 2001). Elsewhere he noted (with some humility) that "One episode of my [*Dardubala*] cartoons was more effective than a demonstration in the city center. . . . Even though I thought they were nothing special" (Iskenderov 2005).

18. And the boundary between which of these threats is fact and which are fantasy is equally hard to draw. The April earthquakes that shook Tbilisi in 2002 were popularly attributed to Russian earthquake machines, and not a few newspapers placed the possibility of Russian-produced earthquakes on their front pages, attesting to the tendency to seek mysterious human agencies behind even what we would consider natural events (*Axali Taoba* 2002, *Axali Versia* 2002).

19. Georgian does not make the Russian distinction between *Kultura* (best translated as "high culture," such as the poetry of Pushkin) and *Kulturnost* (a "middle brow" sort of culturedness with resonances of kitschiness; e.g., a nicely bound but unread volume of Pushkin prominently displayed); see, for example, Dunham (1976), Fitzpatrick (1992:216–237), Boym (1994), and Kelly and Volkov (1998).

20. There is a certain homology between the nihilistic, theatricalized, logic of reception here and the equally schizoid logic of production of signs typified by the genre of *anekdot* discussed in Yurchak 1997.

21. Interviewed in *Alia* (2001:4). Many of my informants connected the tendency to see the meetings in theatricalized terms to a semiotic habitus formed under Soviet power, in which all public displays were arranged by the state and public life took on the specific characteristics of theater in this sense.

22. For an example, see *Droni* (2001a:7).

23. Giorgi Qorghanashvili, interviewed in Kotsotsashvili (2001:9), attributed this view to sources in the Russian media, but I have heard Georgians alleging the same thing.

24. Zhvania, interviewed in *Kviris Palitra* (2001:3).

25. Student Ira Murghulia, interviewed in *Droni* (2001b:8).

26. The "symbolic character" of "Tamar's flag" was pointed out in the press at the time, for example, Gogorishvili (2001).

27. Comment authored by "White," taken from Liza.ge 2006.

28. Most of these initiatives come from the Tbilisi Mayor's office. The reason for the colors chosen was either historical or to hide the presence of laundry being dried in the front of the building (Dvali 2005).

29. One of the many unclear issues in the case is whether the term *corruption* is the applicable term in a case that involves charges of bribery involving the private media.

30. He adds Giga Bokeria, a major Liberty Institute stalwart, Rose Revolution–organizer and subsequent pro-Saakashvili MP, who later emerges as one of his prime accusers, as one of those with whom he had "normal relations" (Mchedlishvili 2005).

31. *Editor's Note: Cultural Anthropology* has published a number of articles that examine various forms and legacies of socialism. See, for example, Jessica Winegar's "Cultural Sovereignty in a Global Art Economy: Egyptian Cultural Policy and the New Western Interest in Art from the Middle East" (2006); Alexia Blochs's "Longing for the *Kollektiv*: Gender, Power, and Residential

Schools in Central Siberia" (2005); Judith Farquhar's and Qicheng Zhang's "Biopolitical Beijing: Pleasure, Sovereignty, and Self-Cultivation in China's Capital" (2005); and Alaina Lemon's "'Your Eyes Are Green like Dollars': Counterfeit Cash, National Substance, and Currency Apartheid in 1990s Russia" (1998).

Cultural Anthropology has also published a number of articles that examine how political and media developments entwine. See Gregory Starrett's "Violence and the Rhetoric of Images" (2003); Ulf Hannerz's "Reporting from Jerusalem" (1998); and James H. McDonald's "Whose History? Whose Voice? Myth and Resistance in the Rise of the New Left in Mexico" (1993).

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