We Were Always United, Except When We Were Not: Bivocal Memory and Georgia's Geopolitical Dilemma

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We Were Always United, Except When We Were Not
Bivocal Memory and Georgia’s Geopolitical Dilemma

by

Nino Batiashvili

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Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................................ iv

Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 1

Chapter 1: Situating the Study: In Search of a Georgian Mnemonic Landscape .................. 8
  1.1. Georgia: Time and Place Map .................................................................................. 8
  1.2. Memory: The Language of Argument ....................................................................... 20
  1.3. Field-site: Searching for Georgian Memory ............................................................... 25

Chapter 2: Stable Texts and the Unstable Order of the Past ............................................. 33
  2.1. Introduction ................................................................................................................ 33
  2.2. Stable Texts ................................................................................................................. 34
  2.3. Recurrent Motifs ......................................................................................................... 39
  2.4. Unstable Order of the Past ......................................................................................... 42
  2.5. The Dual Perspective of Georgian Memory ................................................................. 52
  2.6. Metanarrative and the “True-Self” ........................................................................... 54
  2.7. Conclusion: A Model of Bivocal Memory ................................................................. 64

Chapter 3: It’s a Poor Sort of Memory That Only Works Backwards The Value of “Historical-Memory” for the Future of Nationhood ........................................................................... 66
  3.1. Introduction ................................................................................................................ 66
  3.2. Hidden Power and “Rights on Memory” .................................................................. 69
  3.3. “Historical Memory”: A Looking Glass .................................................................... 79
  3.4. Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 88

Chapter 4: “Things Coded in Our Genetic Memory” ......................................................... 89
  4.1. Introduction ................................................................................................................ 89
  4.2. “Georgian Mentality” and Independent Reasoning .................................................... 94
  4.3. The “Scriptors” and The Multivocal Context ............................................................. 101
  4.4. Memory Maxims and Authoritative Discourse ......................................................... 105
  4.6. Self and Other ........................................................................................................... 113
    4.6.1. Pure Us and Polluting Others ............................................................................. 114
    4.6.2. What Is It That Attracts Tourists? ..................................................................... 117
  4.7. Conclusion: We Must Never Forget! ....................................................................... 119

Chapter 5: Memory Game: Voice, Counter Voice ............................................................... 124
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Introduction

Of the female Titanes they say that Mnemosyne discovered the uses of the power of reason, and that she gave a designation to every object about us by means of the names which we use to express whatever we would and to hold conversation one with another...And to this goddess is also attributed the power to call things to memory and to remembrance (mneme) which men possess, and it is this power which gave her the name she received.

Diodorus Siculus

We cannot know for sure why the Greeks believed that one mythical creature – the Goddess of Memory - should be the source of "power of reason", of authoritative speech (Hesiod's Theogony) and of the ability to call things to mind, but elements of this mythic cosmology impinge on the nature of cultural processes that are at the heart of this study.

On a chilly afternoon of December 2010 a group of ten Georgian intellectuals took a special trip from Tbilisi (Georgia’s capital) to Lake Bazaleti, where the Free University's off-campus training center is located. They gathered around the table in a small classroom and remained there for about five hours deliberating on the history textbook they were venturing to write. Their discussion concerned historical events spanning the last two hundred years and their goal was to think of a better way in which to tell a story of 200 years of Russian occupation. What this "better" implied has to do with a particular memory discourse and the political reasoning from which this memory discourse emanates; but it also has to do with how this group envisions Georgian identity, how it critically reflects upon "Georgian mentality" and how it foresees the "recovery" of the nation.

The discussion was sporadic, imbued with humorous tales about mothers and wives of Georgian kings, anecdotes of Georgia's daily political life, or sarcastic tales about Georgian

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3 Lake Bazaleti is located some 60 kilometers northwest of Tbilisi, with a surrounding recreation area and a village (with the same name).
historians who like to write "myths" about "how we [Georgians] survived because every single Georgian fought till the last drop of blood". For the members of this group these myths represented notions of “exaggerated Georgianness\(^4\)”.

“We have to finish this textbook as soon as possible “ said Kakha Bendukidze, the founder and owner of the university, a right-wing neoliberal, a venture-capitalist who made his fortune in Russia and came back to Georgia to serve as a Minister of Economy (for more on Bendukidze and the Free University see chapter 1). He urged the group to finish “because there is another group working on the same thing. Their version is how Georgians fought relentlessly, shedding blood and all that”, he noted with a glimmer of humor everyone enjoyed. “We have to distance ourselves significantly from the stereotype that exists which involves a confrontation of refined, God-loving, brave and educated Georgians with the savage and uneducated...”

“...rest of the world” Leri,\(^5\) a professor of philosophy in his 70s teaching at Free University, helped him finish the sentence.

“Yes, the rest of the world” agreed Bendukidze.

“So we are not writing a ‘mother-history’ [Georgian *deda-istoria*]”, queried Giorgi, a 27-year-old poet, founder of a renowned website for literature and poetry and someone who a few years later was appointed Director of Georgian National Library.

“Just like Argo mounting a siege of Colchis,\(^6\)” said Gaga, a psychologist in his 50s teaching at Free University as he took an even more humorous tone toward "mother-history.”\(^7\)

Everyone laughed.

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\(^4\) "Georgianness" (Georgian *kartveloba*) is a term of common use that simply would be translated as Georgian identity, but while identity is a neutral term, Georgianness is a value charged word that functions as a condensed symbol representing some essentialist notions on the character of the Georgian people.

\(^5\) While I refer to Kakha Bendukidze and few other individuals who appear in this study by a full name, I prefer to use only first names (or pseudonyms where stated) with respect to others even in cases where I have been granted permission to use their real and/or full names.
“Treacherously, the ship of Argo treacherously sieging the Colchis,” added Bendukidze, enjoying such caricaturization of the “stereotype” he brought up himself. A few minutes after entertaining the version of the ancient Greek myth on the Argonauts twisted in the spirit of “mother-history” Bendukidze continued: “The thing is if we don't employ some other angle, any one of troublesome events from the 20th century will turn out just as Temur said to me once. He was the head of the committee and gave me a small green book on history of Abkhazia and told me that this book is not only historically right,” and here Bendukidze paused briefly to accentuate the end of his sentence, “but politically right as well.”

A giggle and amusement went around the room, and he concluded: “...so we will end up with something like this.”

“You can't trust any of the books published by that government”, pointed out Lali, a professor of linguistics in her 40s, teaching a course titled “Georgian Language and the Georgians” at the Free University.

“So, how do we write a bestseller...”, said Dimitri, a historian in his 60s who had no affiliation with Free University and who seemed less in synch with the spirit of jesting “mother-history”, as he summarized somewhat dubiously the conversation.

“No, not a bestseller” responded Bendukidze. “How do we write truth or what is the truth, that is our challenge... and also how do we write truth so that it does not provoke bloody

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6 Colchis is the first proto-Georgian state on the eastern coast of the Black Sea established in Middle Bronze Age (see Suny 1988, Rayfield 2012)
7 "Mother-History" (Georgian deda-istoria) is a title of a historical novel by Levan Sanikidze that portrays the history of Georgia from ancient times till the 20th century, through the adventures of Georgians’ heroism and self-sacrifice, first published in late 1986. But “mother-history” is a term of common use that on the one-hand, signifies a particular vision of Georgia’s past, and on the other, expresses the notion that Georgia’s past (as portrayed in Sanikidze’s novel) is a birth-giver (hence a mother) of the Georgian nation. However, this group deploys the term as a way to satirize this particular vision of the past as an expression of “exaggerated Georgianness” (see more on this in chapter 5).
8 Abkhazia is a secessionist republic on the eastern coast of the Black Sea, recognized first by Russia and few other states as an autonomous republic. The conflict between Abkhazia and Georgia erupted in the early 1990s, and to this day it remains a disputed territory.
mass turmoil and attacks by bishops and by Marika all at the same time...” Marika was a renowned historian of Soviet intelligentsia generation, who was viewed by this group as an archetypical representative of the historians upholding the nationalist "myths," the historical "stereotype" as Bendukidze coined it – of the "confrontation of refined, God-loving, brave and educated Georgians with the savage and uneducated rest of the world."

Their semi-humorous, sporadic discussion went on for hours, but this fragment of conversation provides an entry point into a set of issues that is the concern of this study. To make some sense of this almost inarticulate dialogue, one should have answers to at least the following questions: What does Bendukidze refer to when he mentions "another group working on the same thing?" What is the "stereotype" they have in mind? What do the Argonauts have to do with “mother-history?” Why would "writing truth" provoke bloody mass turmoil and attacks from bishops and prestigious historians? And last but not least, why is this group writing a history textbook on 200 years of Georgia's occupation? What kind of true but "untold story" (Mink, 1978) do they think is waiting to be told?

These questions are specific, but answers to them speak to much broader issues on culture of memory and of memory debates, a socio-cultural web of meanings that are woven into the fabric of these debates, as well as political conditions that underpin endeavors such as the one in question. Answering these questions, then, requires not only peeling off several layers of socio-political landscape, but gaining deeper understanding of cultural semantics that is at the heart of this form of intra-cultural interaction.

This study examines two distinct but mutually constitutive discursive genres on Georgian identity: one based in the voice of self-idealization and the other in self-condemnation. These two genres are embedded in historical conceptions and enact public debate on the country's
geopolitical challenges. The vignette introduced above provides an entry into the politically strained discursive terrain that unfolds as a “game of memory” between two visions of Georgian history, Georgian identity and Georgian geopolitics. The Free University textbook project on 200 Years of Georgia’s Occupation enacts a hidden polemic (Bakhtin 1984) between two voices on Georgianness. It dialogically engages the self-idealizing and self-condemning voices to defy the former and re-emphasize the latter.

Throughout this study I examine how these two voices unfold through debates on historical memory and how they shape forms of political reasoning. On the basis of diverse textual and ethnographic material I suggest that in Georgian public discourse individuals employ “history” as a culturally meaningful, rhetorical resource to reflect upon “who we are” because memory functions as a fundamental symbolic form that speaks to the core of national consciousness. Georgians conceive of their past in a way that presupposes the co-existence of two contradictory registers of “Georgianness”, and framing the past in historical narratives reflects what I shall refer to as the bivocal nature of both Georgians’ memory and their way of thinking about themselves. This is a bivocality involving mythically idealized terms, on the one hand, and critical self-condemning terms, on the other. I argue that two contradictory voices that articulate Georgia’s past and Georgian identity belong not so much to distinct speakers as to discursive domains that exist within, as well as between speakers. Whether it is a casual communicative exchange or critical debate in which Georgian memory enters the discursive realm, it can sustain two distinct, but mutually interdefining discursive modes on Georgia’s past and Georgian identity.

This bivocality of discourse is something that I have come to appreciate through my personal experience. Namely, I came to realize that every Georgian I knew could talk two different
“talks” while hardly ever reflecting on the contradiction between the “truths” that each “talk” embodies: in one moment Georgians can admire how “We” have always been able to unite to stand heroically in the face of all difficulties, but then in a split second exclaim how cursed this “self-betraying” and constantly “divided” nation was. My study shows how the voice of self-idealization is resisted on some occasions and how in others it is reinforced for certain political goals.

In chapter 1, I begin by mapping out Georgia’s socio-political landscape since the early 1990s to outline major discursive trends that have been shaping the public sphere for the last decades. These trends have direct relevance for the ethnographies presented in this study. In this chapter I also situate my study within scholarly literature and summarize my approach to memory in general terms. Subsequent chapters provide more detailed and case-specific theoretical frameworks.

Chapter 2 examines historical textbooks published in three different periods: a) in the 1970s during the Soviet era, b) in the 1990s, immediately after Georgia gained independence, and c) in the 2000s when Georgia was an economically impoverished country with an inept state apparatus. My analysis of these texts is oriented toward exposing a set of paradigmatic categories, what I refer to as memory maxims that shape historical conceptions and sustain discursive modes on Georgia’s past and Georgian identity. It is here that I arrive at a conclusion that memory maxims can enter the Georgian discursive realm on national identity with two distinct voices: one that focuses on self-idealization and one that can potentially sustain a critical discourse of self-condemnation.

Chapter 3, builds on the analysis of the previous chapter and looks into how “historical memory” as a culturally meaningful category shapes contests over a nation’s present and future.
At the same time, by a combined analysis of ethnographic and textual material, I seek to demonstrate that a discursive tradition in which two voices on Georgianness are employed for reflecting on the past and present and a particular memory image that is posed to define nationhood has its antecedents in 19th century emergence of nationalism and the founding texts of that period.

In chapter 4, I examine over 200 essays written by Georgian students on the topic of tradition and modernity for a writing competition (more on this chapter 1 and 4) organized by the Free University. While this analysis serves to substantiate my claims on the discursive function of memory maxims and on the rhetorical value of the past, it also demonstrates how these symbolic forms can anchor contesting ideologies that shape Georgia’s socio-political landscape. Furthermore, the students’ essays present a case in which only one of two contradictory memory voices is employed, revealing a particularly one-sided form of discourse sometimes found in the public sphere. Namely, for the purpose of their argument the students engaged the voice of self-idealization as a structuring element of their texts.

In chapters 5 and 6 I focus on the two history textbook projects on Russian-Georgian relations and situate them in the wider sociocultural and geopolitical processes that have shaped Georgia’s discursive landscape and triggered production of the textbook on Russian-Georgian relations. I show how the struggle over Georgia’s geopolitical belonging and the resulting disputes on national identity and national politics are reflected in the public sphere where liberal intellectuals vie with the members of the Soviet generation intelligentsia to re-chart the history of the last 200 years. This involves looking into ways in which the hidden memory polemic between intellectuals and intelligentsia historians enacts the dialogism between the two voices built in Georgia’s memory paradigm.
CHAPTER 1: SITUATING THE STUDY: IN SEARCH OF A GEORGIAN MNEMONIC LANDSCAPE

1.1. GEORGIA: TIME AND PLACE MAP

In the wake of post-Soviet (or even Soviet) nationalism, making or re-making "national histories" became one of the most important instruments for sustaining claims of political legitimacy (Hirsch, 2005; Yurchak, 2006; Uşakin, 2009) and strengthening, if not altogether "inventing traditions" of peoplehood (Hobsbawm 1983). The mobilization of historical memories
served states to consolidate populations around nationalist goals, to draw or redraw national boundaries, while at the same time sustaining the discourse of resistance and dissent within and between states. Specifically in Georgia, a nationalist ideology "was built on the idea of defying imperial domination" (Khalvashi & Batiashvili, 2010) and empowering categories of national identity such as the Georgian language and Orthodox Christianity. Such markers of collective identity sustained a discourse of resistance and claims of independence.

While in Georgia, a discourse on the "common past" as a symbolic marker of the nation has its precursors in the 19th century intellectual landscape, in the 1990s (after the disintegration of the USSR) a revived historical consciousness became integral to a nationalism of a certain type. Nationalist discourse of the 1990s was employed not so much for marking Georgia off from Russian space, but for shaping cultural and political conceptions of what a Georgian state should represent in terms of its historical mission and cultural belonging. Collective images of nationhood that under the Russian domination had gained cultural legitimacy for enabling individuals to transgress and subvert the Soviet state's official rhetoric, were mobilized by the political leadership of independent Georgia and inscribed into the hegemonic discourses on the Georgian state and "Georgianness" (Batiashvili, forthcoming). Ronald Grigor Suny has written extensively on the role of memory in Armenia’s as well as Georgia’s and Azerbaijan’s primordialist discourse that essentializes notions of nationhood and reifies national identity (Suny, 1993; also see Garagazov 2008).

Nationalism, as Bruce Kapferer has put it "makes the political religious and places the nation above politics" (1988, p 1). In Georgia this came to be realized in a most literal sense, as the Georgian Orthodox Church institutionalized the ethno-nationalist doctrine into its orthodox practice, thus making religion political. In Viktor Shnirelman’s (1998) words since late 1980s
Georgian nationalism emphasized the role of Georgia as a “stronghold of Christianity” in a hostile Muslim environment (p. 58). Not only did nationalism become a hegemonic ideology, but in subsequent years religious essentialization of such elements of collective identity as ethnicity and faith fed into social and political frictions, struggles for power, and eventually resulted in a civil war and multiple ethnic conflicts (see Pelkmans, 2006). Because ethno-nationalism has no basis without claims on the past, memory debates were integral to most political contests, and became even more so to the ones about disputed territories. Historical myths played a crucial role in substantiating political claims, while historiography became both an instrument and a site for contesting legitimacy on the territorial claims (Shnirelman, 1995) and stiffened the friction between the parties (Shnirelman, 1998).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in an attempt to reverse seventy years of isolationism many post-Soviet states resorted to the idea of the “West” as a terrain of renewed belonging. As Katherine Verdery (1999) has pointed out, post-socialist transformation involved “a reordering of people’s entire meaningful worlds” and this open-ended process entailed rewriting history, forming new political arenas, redefining morality and basic values” (p. 35). In Georgia such realignment came to be most radically experienced after the young reformists led by Mikheil Saakashvili ousted President Eduard Shevardnadze, a former foreign affairs minister of USSR, who returned from Moscow to lead Georgian government in 1991 (see Way, 2008). The government that came to power as a result of 2003 "Rose Revolution" adopted a new transformative politics geared toward Georgia’s modernization and Euro-integration (see Wheatley 2005, Jones 2010, Mitchell 2012). Throughout 2004-2012 discussions of “the West” and “modernity” gained centrality in the public discourse as both espoused and contested ideas.

Most of the scholarly literature has approached modernity as a condition inseparable from
western colonialism, defining it as “a marker of Europe’s right to rule” (Brubaker, 2005, p. 115) that produces concepts and categories entrenched in Europe’s intellectual and theological traditions (Chakrabarty, 2002). Others have asserted the role of capitalism along with Western imperialism in bringing about modernity (Giddens, 1991; Rofel, 1999). Georgia’s experience is external to the historical conditions that these scholars define as crucial for understanding how modernization is occurring in different places. Although communism, as a negation of tradition, can be regarded as a version of modernity, Saakashvili’s administration and the Georgian elite appropriated the notion of “modernization” as a principal instrument for ideological detachment from the Soviet past and projected this goal not in terms of western “universalizing forms”, but in terms of the national interests that were entrenched in Georgia’s historic path of development that was disrupted by Russia.

The revolutionary government's rhetoric consolidated a new narrative of Georgia's future with a re-projection of its past, reinventing the country as a European state and culture. Such a re-alignment of Georgia's place in the world was in no way detached from memory politics. Rather, the state vision of the nation’s future embodied a conception of the past that situates Georgia within European civilization, as one of its legitimate members.

On the one hand, the principal rationale behind inscribing national interests into the landscape of European civilization was essentially entrenched in the desire to dissociate Georgia from the Soviet sphere and to divorce itself from Russia's political orbit. This political orientation was not articulated as an uprooting of the country from its origins; instead it was presented as Georgia’s historically determined mission to “regain its place in Europe” (Wheatly 2005, p. 37). President Saakashvili continuously asserted to his local and global audiences that "When we speak about the European future of Georgia, we must understand that this is not only
today's choice; our ancestors chose Europe from ancient times and defined it as our compass. European and Georgian civilizations are so intertwined that it is difficult to determine whether Europe is our roots or on the contrary." (quoted in De Waal, 2011 p. 31)

Most state performances of the time were defined by triangulation of its three distinct publics, in that almost any political and speech act was addressed to: a) its immediate audience—the Georgian people, b) to its desired ally—the West, and c) to its enemy—Russia. The relationship with the West and its globalizing power played a crucial role in both how the state orchestrated its priorities and how Georgians "imagined" their national community (Anderson, 1991). But the imagining had to do both with how some individuals employed the language of "modernity" and "Europeanization" to re-articulate Georgianness, while others contested and defied the new symbolism of globalized nationhood imposed by the official rhetoric (see more on this in chapter 4). In fact, this globalizing rhetoric posited a new imperative upon Georgian political consciousness and a new cultural paradigm.

Regardless of Saakashvili's attempt to inscribe "Europeanization" into the nation's memory and define Europe as Georgia's natural historical landscape, predetermined by the nation's ancestral "compass", for many Georgians the “West” was (and is) an unfamiliar cultural terrain (see chapters 4 and 6). The idea of cultural relatedness to some “other” went against a nationalist cosmology that emphasized Georgia's cultural unbelonging, its immutably sharp boundedness. Many Georgians had been in the habit of acknowledging a singular form of relationship to the rest of the world, and it was not one of "belonging" to somebody else's civilization, not of being similar, a borrower. Instead, it is one of dissent and difference, maintaining cultural singularity through resistance and dissension.
Crucial to heightening the ideological tensions between Saakashvili’s modernizing project and nationalist agenda was the rhetoric of the Georgian Orthodox Church, possibly the most influential institution in the country. The church led a campaign that fused religion, nation and Georgian statehood in a single indissoluble whole, expressed in statements like: “Orthodox faith is the spine of our national body” by Patriarch Ilia II (Easter Message, 1992). By usurping and consecrating secular spaces and discourses, the church asserted its ownership over "Georgianness" as a category of its authority and inscribed it into Georgian Orthodoxy. Georgia's Patriarch has promoted ideas on the “purity of Georgian culture” with a veiled anti-Western sentiment, from as early as the 1990’s. The following excerpts from his speeches are illustrative:

High culture and developed technology are not sufficient for people's happiness. There are values which are formed in a nation's life over the centuries, and losing them is a crime. For us such is Orthodox Christianity: bestowed by disciples, music that astonishes everyone [he has Georgian folk music in mind], our language and script filled with mystery and majesty, spectacular art, iconography, architecture, our beautiful customs. Which traditions of East and West can be compared to this? Unfortunately, we have not yet fully comprehended the treasure we own (Patriarch Ilia II, Christmas Message, 1994-1995).

Today the times have changes and with that the methods of evil, too. Today nobody uses force to disgrace national pride and impinge upon religious beliefs. Degrading our traditions and ways of life is accomplished through different methods…So today every one of us is facing a choice: abandon the normal path of the homeland or internalize imposed false culture? Resist informational pressure (he implies the internet) or preserve the heritage of our ancestors and enduring values? (2008)

As Kapferer points out, when "made into a religious object, culture becomes the focus of devotion. It can have the character of a religious fetish, an idol, a thing which has self-contained

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9 Patriarch Ilia II, “Epistles, Speeches, Preachings” Volume 1, Tbilisi 1997
magical properties capable of recreating and transforming the realities of experience in its image" (1988, p 2). In the practice of religious nationalism, culture becomes an accessory to power when a "threat to culture" is invented and some “other” is construed in terms of the threat. In the Patriarch’s words trading the "national treasure", which includes Orthodoxy as its defining element but is not its singular denominator, for the West with its "high culture and technological development" is "a crime". This statement sets up a conflict in which the Georgian language, folk music, traditional culture, and art are endangered by the “other’s culture” which cannot even "be compared" to the Georgian one. His dictum is clear: Georgians need no model to which to aspire, what it needs is to preserve the "treasure" it owns, the cornerstone of which is Orthodox Christianity. As the Patriarch related on a different occasion "In our ancestors' consciousness, love for religious belief and love for the homeland were as undivided as was the divine and human nature of Christ". Such statements inscribe both Georgian identity and patriotic duty in the domain of Orthodox Christianity; Georgianness becomes indissolubly attached to Orthodoxy while the church acquires unquestionable authority in both secular and sacred dimensions of nationhood. With such sacralisation of the secular and secularization of religious, the church has attained two-fold power and become a major rival (if not superior and hegemonic) vis-à-vis the state. The photograph below taken at one of the Tbilisi’s private schools provides an example of the social ramifications of this rhetorical fusion of sacred and secular.

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10 www.orthodoxy.ge
The discourse on Orthodoxy is significant not only as part of cultural identity, but in terms of its capacity to have geopolitical implications. Namely, the issue with the Orthodox imperative is that it implicitly entails favoring the Orthodox “familiar-neighbor” Russia over the non-Orthodox “stranger” West. Such a breach between state rhetoric and the country's most authoritative institution's ideology has hardly ever played out in the open, but it did create a subterranean tension and a sense among many that Russia, after all, may not be "that much of an enemy". Conversely, Saakashvili’s elite, especially the liberal intellectuals labeled the Georgian church Russia’s “Trojan horse” that has served its imperialist agenda since the Tsarist regime.\(^\text{11}\)

In August 2008 a five-day war broke out between Russia and Georgia (see Asmus, 2010; Toal, 2012). The conflict over a small secessionist territory of South Ossetia (Russians refer to it as South Ossetia while Georgians call it Samachablo as a land of Machabelis aristocratic clan)

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\(^{11}\) I have encountered reference to the Georgian Church as a “Trojan horse” in several forums: during informal conversations, but mostly in my discussions with liberal intellectuals as well as old generation historians. The right wing liberal magazine “Tabula” featured a column *The Law of Russian-Georgian Eternity (qartul rusuli maradisobis kanoni)* outlined the long history of relations between Russian and Georgian churches in a section “Trojan Horse”, which included the following quote: “...in reality, this naive hope in a common faith (*ertmortsmeoba* in Georgian literally is commonfaith-ness) played the role of a real trojan horse in the preparation for [Georgia’s] occupation and annexation" (February 22, 2013).
led Russian troops to invade these territories and come as close as twenty kilometers to the capital of Georgia (see Figure 1.2.). The question "Who started the war?" remained at the center of international media discussions and political debates for months if not years after the event. The Georgian side maintained that Russia invaded Georgia to interfere with its aspirations of European integration and to prevent the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the region of South Caucasus. In contrast, Russia asserted that the Georgian state initiated military actions and that they, in turn, had only acted as a protector of South Ossetia's autonomy and defended the security of Russian citizens in the territory.

The history of this territory is complex. The ethnic conflict that first erupted in the 1990s has its roots in the strategies of Soviet regimes and Russian Imperial rule as well as in the earlier history of Georgia's political landscape (see Grant, 2007; Horowitz, 2005). However, it is beyond the scope of this study to explore either the historical conditions of this complicated conflict or its political precursors. Rather my concern is to treat this war as a pretext for a discursive tension that reached a tipping point in the aftermath of the war (see chapter 5).
It may have seemed inconceivable that shortly after the war, references to Russia as an Orthodox friend-neighbor could still surface in public discourse. Yet they did. This was made possible, in part, by the view that "the West won't be there for us anyway". A taxi driver pointed out to me once, "America is not going to engage in a war with Russia for a small country like Georgia. What other choice do we have left other than negotiating with Russians?!"

The “big bang” caused by the five day war seemed to have consolidated the Georgian nation in ways that a common enemy unites people almost anywhere, but in the aftermath of the war public opinion has evolved into a multivocal national debate with contested interpretations of what had happened and who was to blame. Shortly after these dramatic events, a series of public projects was initiated by the state. "The Museum of Soviet Occupation", established in 2006, once again gained centrality in the state's rhetoric against Russia. One year after the war, an open air exhibition was held in the city center of Georgia's capital where over two dozen large posters displayed archival sources, (official documents, photos, biographical notes, etc) documenting the last two hundred years of Georgia's history with the sharp emphasis on the adversities of the "Russian occupation". On August 5, 2010 by official decree of President Saakashvili the “State Commission for the Assessment of Historical Truth” (Georgian: istoriuli simartlis damdgeni komisia) was formed. Its sole purpose was to produce an official document unveiling the “truth” about 200 years of Russian Georgian relations. It was officially stated that the aim of this project was to study “19th-20th century historical memory, 200 years of Russian imperialist policy and its consequences” and to prepare a report “based on academic research
which fully describes the acts of violence inflicted upon Georgia by Tsarist and Soviet Russia."

The same year the Ministry of Education declared that the new subject "200 Years of Russian Occupation" will be integrated in public school curriculum (high school).

From an outsider's perspective it may seem that in all these instances the Georgian state was making a clear statement addressed to Russia and/or possibly to an international community on behalf of the entire Georgian nation; that it sought to assure the rest of the world that the war in 2008 was just another instantiation of Russia’s attempt to realize its historically shaped imperial goals of expansion. But state initiatives were not conceived as the word of the entire nation intended for distant communities, they were not statements made on behalf of the Georgian nation. On the contrary their designated audience was the Georgian community itself. The word was to have an impact within the intimate landscape of national boundaries. It addressed its own internal alterity, like that found in the taxi driver mentioned above.

But a question one might ask is: Why should one engage the remote history of the last 200 years in an attempt to redefine interpretations of the events that are immediate both in time and in space? This is one of the questions that my study seeks to address, and the answer speaks to the cultural significance, function, and use of memory as a symbolic resource. In answering this question, I show how the memory debate becomes an active and culturally intimate battleground for subverting and/or reinforcing categories of cultural and political belonging as well as forms of national self-identification. The people I studied understood contests over memory-making as exercises of agency and autonomy despite wider geopolitical constraints. I show the instances where the idiom of memory is valorized when political thinking is problematized. As such, these ethnographies of memory-making are significant for understanding the forms of social poiesis that are rooted in the culturally predefined meanings,

12 Information obtained from Georgian Ministry of Culture in 2011
even while being shaped by the political processes that are globalized and globalizing both in their conditions of existence and their collective anxieties and desires.

On September 25, 2013 President Saakashvili delivered one of his final speeches at the United Nations. In it he spoke of Russia’s aggressive politics and the threat to freedom in the face of the Eurasian Union. An excerpt quoted below demonstrates that individuals employ memory as a symbolic language to imbue an utterance with words that have emotional impact within the intimate space (Herzfeld, 1997) of a “mnemonic community” (Zerubavel, 2003). During his speech, Saakashvili spoke to his immediate audience, leaders of the Western World. But in the middle of his address, he said:

Strangely, in recent years and even more in recent months, we hear in Tbilisi, Kiev, or Chisinau the same ugly music that was first orchestrated in Moscow. We hear that our traditions are collapsing under the influence of the West, that Christian holidays will be replaced by gay pride events, and Churches by multicultural Disneylands; we hear that our Orthodox identity is under threat.

And after all—here we come—we hear that we share with our former masters a common respect for decency and traditions.

Are we so naive to believe these lies of Putin and the others, as other generations did, allowing our sovereignty to be kidnapped?

Are we so unfair to our ancestors to think that their memory would be honored by attacks on mosques or some pogroms? Are we so unaware of our own history that we allow it to repeat itself endlessly?

When we hear the fake music of the Orthodox brotherhood sung by Russian imperialists, can't we hear the true voice of the Patriarch Kirion, who was assassinated, or the eternal voice of the Patriarch Ambrosi Khelaia, who was tortured during days and weeks only because he appealed to the Geneva Conference against the invasion of his country? And he told his Russian interrogators: 'You can have my body, my flesh, but you will never have my soul.' Are we so deaf as not to hear the voices of the killed bishops and priests, tortured by Russian imperialists and Russian communists? Are we so uneducated that we do not recall who has repainted our churches and erased our sacred frescos?

Are we so blind today not to see the destruction of our churches by the same people, who erased our churches in [inaudible] now in the occupied territories?
We need to know our history. And our history teaches us that tolerance is the basis for sovereignty in our region. It is not only a moral duty: it is an issue of national security.

We need to know our history to understand that the same old imperialistic principle of divide to rule is applied today as it was two centuries ago.\footnote{Full transcription (in English) on www.civil.ge}

It seemed as if Saakashvili suddenly code-switched while continuing to speak in English. For a Western audience, neither Patriarch Kirion, nor Ambrosi Khelaia rings any bells, let alone has any weight for the kind of moral argument Saakashvili was making. In making his point he deviated from what the imminent, immediate issue was, to speak of what was temporally distant and conceptually remote from his immediate audience, yet what he spoke of was at the heart of his nation's "webs of meanings" (Geertz, 1973). The language of memory was a way to demarcate his words when he spoke of his people from his words to his people. For Georgians, ancestors’ memory, repainted churches, erased frescos, the principle of divide and rule, and knowing history index what is at the core of their nation's self-defining symbolics. Saakashvili's speech is just another instance of how memory as mythical language is devised for an utterance that is intended to produce an affective imprint and a conceptual shift in perceiving the self and reality.

1.2. Memory: The Language of Argument

At least since the time of Ernest Renan's classic 1882 lecture “What Is a Nation?” scholars have discussed the role of a "daily plebiscite" (1990 p. 19) in creating a nation and the importance of remembering and forgetting that this plebiscite entails (Connerton, 1989; Stoller, 1997; Werbner, 1998). As distinct from “formal” or “analytic history” (Halbwachs, 1980; Nora, 1989; Wertsch, 2002, Wineburg 2001, Ginzburg, 1980) collective memory is closely linked to
the group’s identity project (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008) and plays an important role in fostering a group’s “we-image” (Assmann, 1995). Wertsch and Roediger (2008) have noted that at least on a conceptual level the distinction between “memory” and “history” needs to be maintained. Memory, unlike history a) involves an identity project (usually based on a narrative of heroism, a golden age, victimhood, etc.) b) is impatient with ambiguity, c) ignores counter-evidence in order to preserve established narratives, d) relies on implicit theories, schemas, and scripts that simplify the past and ignore substantiated findings that do not fit the narrative, and e) is conservative and resistant to change (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). By virtue of these tendencies, collective memory creates what Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg (1980) calls the “sense of proximity to people of the past”, whereas “the historian’s task is just the opposite of [that] …he must destroy our false sense of proximity to people of the past because they come from societies very different from our own” (quoted in Wineburg, 2001, p.10). Hence, while this distinction is important on a conceptual level, we will see throughout subsequent chapters that individuals (including the historians I discuss) employ the terms “past”, “memory,” and “history,” interchangeably and engage in “history” writing as a socio-culturally and politically situated agents rather than as unprejudiced scholars.

Scholars in memory studies have emphasized the role of material culture such as memorials (Brüggermann & Kasekamp, 2008) and museum exhibits in which public memory is encoded (Connerton, 1989; Taussig, 1993), and they have shown ways in which people actively respond to such “mnemonic devices” (Rasmussen, 2002) in some cases resisting or modifying them (Rowe, Wertsch, & Kosyaeva, 2002). By employing Bodnar’s (1992) distinction between “vernacular” and “official” culture some have argued for a two level analysis of collective memory (Wertsch, 2002) especially (but not exclusively) when looking at strong authoritarian
regimes where unofficial versions of the past operate as “hidden transcripts” (Scott, 1985) against official narratives imposed from the state (Wertsch, 2007). My study builds on this scholarly tradition, but my analysis provides a different vantage point on the interplay between alternative modes for representing the national past and national self.

Most of the ethnographic material presented in this study serves to demonstrate that memory is a cultural resource. There is a certain truism to this claim, but my argument has several provisions. First, I argue that more than anything else memory is a rhetorical resource that is made use of as a powerful speech genre. The origin of the English word resource is from 17th century French ressource, meaning “to rise again, recover” based in Latin word surgere – “to rise.” The Oxford dictionary defines resource (among several versions) as “a stock or supply of money, materials, staff, and other assets that can be drawn on by a person or organization in order to function effectively”.

In comparison with individual memory, collective memory is a cultural phenomenon that requires constant effort to maintain and reproduce. As any effort toward accumulation of resources has its purpose so does the effort to sustain cultural memory. This is not to invest cultural processes of memory-preservation/formation with some teleologism, but to point out that memory can be drawn on by members of a community to function effectively from a culturally bounded perspective. My focus thus is on the cultural practices by which individuals or groups of individuals resort to their memory tool-kit to recover from their socio-political entanglements or to function effectively toward certain goals.

Because they speak to “who we are,” memory narratives sustain certain registers of political and social morality. When these registers of morality put social order at risk or are in breach of designated political ideals, memory narratives become targets of critical reflection. When this
happens, it is not the past that some fear to be at stake, but the future they have decided to aspire to. Memory to Georgians, is not merely an aspect of their experience, not only a medium for conveying reality, but an organ of self-conception, self-realization and self-reflection. At times, it may seem that for Georgians memory is like a magical widget, because the way they engage this metaphor bears resemblance to the belief in a witchcraft: one can alter the subject by remolding the metaphor that stands for it. This is why memory discourse is valorized whenever “identity is problematized” (Kansteiner, 2002 p 184).

To draw an analogy, the past to Georgians, is almost what the Declaration of Independence is to Americans. However polarized they are, few Americans dispute the authority and legitimacy of the text itself. When they debate issues, when Republicans and Democrats battle over political decisions, both parties may try to frame the correctness of their arguments in terms of this authoritative text, and it is within the confines of this text that divergent interpretations mediate their unresolvable world views. As a common cultural ground, memory binds nation together, but not because of some homogeneous, standardized version of the “historical past,” but exactly because of and through the multiple voices that can emerge out of the shared “memoryscape” (Cole, 2001). Georgians imagine their national community in terms of the dialectics between sub-cultural alterities in which what differentiates “us” from another version of “us” - our internal other, is a particular reading of the past and hence particular belief in who we are. As Edmund Leach has noted “myth and ritual … is a language of argument, not a chorus of harmony” (1954, p. 278)

Second, I argue that while memory is a “language of argument”, the memory debates of Georgia are governed by culturally predetermined rules. This claim is in line with Arjun Appadurai’s point that “past as a scarce resource” has its “rules of debatibility” (1981). Hence,
while memory-making, especially for political goals, involves attempts to adjust the “past” to meet the present needs (Middleton 2002; Rowe, Wertsch & Kosyaeva 2002; Rasmussen 2002), I argue that such remaking has its limits. To be more specific, I approach memory debates as rhetorical “games” in which men and women employ the “past” as a rhetorical strategy because of its culturally assumed power. The term “game” echoes Wittgenstein’s notion of the “language game” (1958), the communicative process that reflects upon given social relations and is shaped by the rules that mark the boundaries of the game and make “moves” meaningful within and only within those boundaries. Unlike just any language game, the memory game is intended to produce social shifts, to transform the “mentality” of its addressees. In that, its ability to infringe upon social consciousness, to move and emotionally excite addressees is predicated on: a) a shared symbolic value of the past, b) an underlying framework—a code text or a codex—on which semiotic action that I am calling a memory game depends, and more importantly c) on the existence of a “mnemonic community” (Zerubavel, 2003) in which a “collective framework of memory” (Halbwachs, 1980) is a pervasive symbolic construct and memory narratives are widely shared cultural texts (Assmann 1995).

So why is the memory game rhetorical? And why is it a game? It is rhetorical because memory serves as a communicative resource of most culturally inter-subjective nature. People resort to this resource as to a language of special rhetorical faculty that can infringe on social consciousness from its core. When they think plain speech may go in one ear and out the other and evade reason, speech based on memory will go to the core of a nation’s self-consciousness. This is so because memory as a mythic form of ideation “is not something superadded to certain elements of empirical existence,” as Ernest Cassirer noted, “instead, the primary ‘experience’ itself is steeped in the imagery of myth and saturated with its atmosphere.” (1953, p.10)
The term “game” is not meant to deprive memory debates of gravity and a serious nature. Rather I want to point to the rule-bound form of interaction that memory debates represent. Any game is a goal-oriented, structured form of interaction in which two or more parties challenge each other. The activities or “moves” they can make toward designated goals is bounded by a set of rules. As in a chess game players make moves with a set of pre-given pieces and each piece can make limited set of moves. Likewise in memory debates what is played is a set of pre-given “memory maxims” and the game enacts the dialogue of two counteracting voices on Georgian identity.

At its most basic level, this study addresses two issues. First, I examine certain modes of discourse that the idiom of memory sustains as a culturally meaningful symbolic vocabulary. In other words the focus is on the semantics of memory; it is on the discursive tradition in which memory is both an object and a medium for producing meanings shaped by a given context but rooted in the pre-given symbolic vocabulary. Second, this study is about a specific memory polemic in which the past is re-charted and made use of as a rhetorical resource to produce a mental shift in the Georgian public. This particular memory debate on the history of Russian-Georgian relations is unleashed in the context of a political crisis and seeks to resolve both the political crisis and a “problematic” identity.

1.3. Field-site: Searching for Georgian Memory

Memory is omnipresent in Georgia. It can surface in almost any conversation, regardless of whether the topic of discussion is politics, culture, religion, language, landscape, or urban
planning. Even complaining about the traffic in Tbilisi can lead to *remembering* King David the Builder of 12th century Georgia. This makes researching memory in Georgia easy and difficult at the same time. It is easy because one can come across these discussion anytime, but methodological hardships arise when you begin asking questions about the past and try to forcefully evoke something that in its organic setting functions by default. For me, a Georgian researcher, this task at first presented even greater obstacles, because I had to impersonate non-Georgianness. This usually confused my respondents, because no one can act as if you are coming from no perspective when the topic of discussion is Georgia’s past and when someone asking a question is a Georgian herself. At the same time, I constantly sensed my awkward positioning and at times it felt like Reza Aslan during his interview with the Fox News: in continuous struggle to establish your status and reassure your respondents that the source of your question is not certain sub-cultural bias but extra-cultural scholarly practice.

After some time I gave up. I conceded that no Georgian will ever talk to me as if I am not Georgian myself, as if I have no embedded social status, and as if they do not preconceive my conceptual horizon. I understood that I could never re-direct addressivity in these acts of communication. Most of the interviews I conducted, thus, rested on a certain base of cultural intersubjectivity. My respondents did not so much tell me things, but rather positioned themselves with respect to the topics (this is evident in the interview excerpts in chapters 5 and 6). In some cases, my respondents and I assumed we understood each other’s positioning and there was almost no information to be exchanged. Instead, there was only a game, a rhetorical, discursive one, to be played. My conversations most of the time were half way between my wanting to gain some insight into another’s perspective and my engaging in a socially driven, pleasant, self-entertaining dialogue. Some days it felt as if I had to juggle two distinct “I”s, at
times none of which felt truthful.

In time I learned that I had to employ what Kusenbach calls the “go along” method (Kusenbach, 2003) in order to access memory as it occurs in situ, and this in Georgia meant I had to enter a debate. Memory as noted earlier is a language of argument and it enters the discursive realm when a point needs to be proved, when someone needs to be persuaded of something. This is why I chose to focus on the history textbook project that was predicated on a mission to “persuade” the Georgian public on a politically and ideologically critical matter.

This approach also helped me engage in countless informal conversations with different individuals, including complete strangers. Most of these conversations were not audio-taped. This was first of all because audio-recording confused my respondents (although, each time I asked for approval to use their comments in my research). And second, many of the conversations occurred spontaneously, sometimes in the most unlikely of contexts.

Throughout my three years of fieldwork I generally observed: a) how collective memory plays out in everyday discourse, b) how political events act upon memory narratives and how in turn these narratives play into unfolding political debates, c) how state mandated changes in history curriculum fit into wider political landscape and spur conflicts/debates/discussions in the society. However, apart from observing these general trends, my main focus was fixed on the bounded discursive domain concerned with the production of history textbook on Russian-Georgian relations.

The project I observed originated at the Free University of Tbilisi, Georgia’s top ranked private institution that was founded in 2007 by a venture capitalist, a millionaire who had served as a minister of economy during the term of Saakashvili’s government. He was pronounced simultaneously a “Judas” and a “guru of the Georgian economy”. He acquired most of his capital
as a businessman in Russia (where he started his career as a biologist). In 2005 he was asked to join the government of Georgia to serve as a minister of economy in an economically degraded and impoverished country.\footnote{“Bendukidze’s reforms” as Georgians refer to it, resulted in an increase in Georgian state budget from approximately 400 million US dollars to 4.5 billion US dollars.}

Upon his arrival in Tbilisi from Moscow, one of the first things Bendukidze declared to the press when asked about his vision of economic policy was, “You cannot sell conscience, everything else that is made of rock and brick can be sold” (personal communication with the journalist who asked him the question). This was a dramatic statement in a country with laws regulating “units of special importance and strategic significance”. Georgian law defines these as “units (building constructions) that in functional and strategic terms influence the country’s defense and security, territoriality, cultural heritage, economy, environment and natural resources” (e.g., hydroelectric stations, pipelines, or medieval cathedrals).\footnote{The legislation was amended in 2010 and has been since inactive as per Georgian Legal act N2911 (information obtained from the official webpage of Georgian codex \url{www.codexserver.com})}

But in the eyes of Bendukidze, a right wing neoliberal venture capitalist, investments from any source were more than welcome. It came as no surprise that a man who had been living in Russia and made statements of this sort, and who went so far as to express cynicism toward nationalist sentiments, became mythologized as a Goliath who would clandestinely sell Georgian rivers and mountains (in fact one of the respected talk show host actually asked him this question: “Did you sell rivers and mountains?”). He was called Judas in some circles and in fact had permanent protestors, rallying and shouting “Judas” outside of his office windows for months.

Today that nickname simultaneously embodies remnants of distrust toward him but also a humorous take on that sentiment, something that reflects a major shift in his public activity and
public perception. In 2007 Bendukidze quit politics and by acquiring and merging two institutions—the European School of Management and the Institute of Asia and Africa—founded a new private university: Free University of Tbilisi. Eventually he established four additional undergraduate programs (in physics, social sciences, law, and math & computer sciences), all of which ranked at the top of the list each year among 600 undergraduate programs in Georgia.\(^{16}\) That the Free University is top ranked is probably one of the very few undisputed things in Georgia. As a result, the perception of Bendukidze’s image as a Judas fell short of his charitable and socially beneficial investments as he placed his private funds into a university foundation and spent millions of dollars on students’ scholarships.

In 2010 at the time of my field research, the university was housed in an old, but remodeled school building on top of the Nutsubidze Plateu, some 5 miles from Tbilisi city center. I came to know about the university through a TV commercial\(^ {17}\) that advertised the university’s student loan program, called “learn today, teach tomorrow.”\(^ {18}\) One of the promises, the university made was that after graduation a job was almost guaranteed.\(^ {19}\) The university made special effort to recruit students from all regions across Georgia. In fact, some sense of anti-elitism guided its set of policies and practices, including: a) extensive information and PR campaigns in all of the provincial regions;\(^ {20}\) b) no emphasis on English language requirement\(^ {21}\) and c) funding and

\(^{16}\) The ranking is calculated on the basis of: a) students’ top choice of a university to attend, b) scores on national exams of the students who are accepted, and c) the number of students applying.

\(^{17}\) As I looked up their webpage one of the first things I came across was a video of a professor from Washington University in St. Louis giving a guest lecture for the students.

\(^{18}\) The university gave opportunities to every student to complete the undergraduate program without paying any tuition and then pay back, or as they termed it, fund another student after graduation. The commercial made the point that every student at Free University gets a job and their average salary exceeds the amount they have to pay toward a student loan. In 2011 every other student signed up for this financing opportunity.

\(^{19}\) In many instances this promise would be followed by a partially humorous provision: “It’s guaranteed unless the country collapses or war breaks out”. Expectations of destabilization are always present but held at an arm’s length in Georgians’ imagination. It is a country, after all, that has gone through several civil wars, revolutions, public upheavals, and war with Russia over the course of little more than a decade.

\(^{20}\) Each year the entire university staff is immersed in the extremely resourceful and intensive campaign. It was not just the group of administrative staff or PR managers who travel to around 500 schools across
The recruiting process was tough. In most of the schools in regions, the promise “you can study at Free University even if you are poor and you will get a job with major in physics or math after graduation” went against established imaginaries of the social order. For generations, Georgians have learned that you could get into any decent university only if your parents have an acquaintance or two somewhere “up” there.22

Among the university’s wide-ranging initiatives were “olympiads” - five different writing competitions for prospective students (math, physics, short writing, independent reasoning, law). Olympiads would draw students from the entire country, and the university would conduct the first rounds of competition in Tbilisi as well as in Kutaisi (the second largest city of western Georgia) to make sure that students in western regions had the opportunity to participate. The winners of the competition would receive a full year scholarship provided that they applied and

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21 While knowing English is crucial to getting a degree in any of the specialties taught at Free U (it’s virtually impossible to learn anything up to date otherwise, not to mention that knowing English is an absolute requirement to get a job in Georgia, as in many other countries), Free University accepts national exam scores in any foreign language. As Bendukidze once explained: “there might be a potential genius up there in mountains, living in a small village with 20 families. Where would she/he learn English? His or her family most probably does not make enough money to hire an English instructor. With English requirement this genius will slip through our hands and s/he will never make it to any proper educational institution...we have to look for such kids”. So the university designed a curriculum with intensive English language instruction for the first two years. This also meant, that in some cases when a student would be admitted from some provincial region from a poor family, a student who could study “for free” but could never afford to live in the capital, the university would offer him/her part time jobs in administration and pay almost enough money to support their living expenses.

22 Olympiads were not connected to entrance examinations. Education reform that unified the entrance examination system was aimed at uprooting corruption by centralizing the system and leaving universities out of examination procedures. Yet persuading prospective students that they could get a free loan from a university owned by a millionaire, was tough (“Why would Judas give away money for nothing?”). It made no sense to many of the young Georgians, let alone their parents. But students were interested by the opportunity and their passion in many cases outweighed their skepticism. I participated in these campaigns, and this was one of the most thrilling and rewarding experiences of my life. I would come across brilliant and talented high school students who would realize in front of me for the first time that their future could be drastically different from what they had imagined living in a rural area of the country. It was striking to me that students from Tbilisi schools, although much more informed, were less motivated and more skeptical.
were accepted to the Free University\textsuperscript{23}. The Olympiads had a two-fold purpose. On the one
hand they provided a productive and very targeted method of campaigning, through which the
university accumulated extensive data on prospective students and could trace their
accomplishments, as well as choices they made for application, once the national exams were
passed. The olympiads also gave the university a way to give scholarships to talented students
without necessarily basing scholarship programs on GPA results\textsuperscript{24}.

It was during my work at this university in January of 2010 that I found out that Bendukidze
had organized a group to write the history textbook on \textit{200 Years of Georgia’s Occupation}. Given his peculiar stance toward nationalist endeavors (and history projects in Georgia generally
fall under this category), I was surprised to learn that he would concern himself with a matter of
this sort. The group he initially put together mostly included university faculty. But from time to
time as complexities of textbook writing were encountered, Bendukidze would invite some well-
known intellectuals, people of different background, with affiliations beyond Free University to
participate in the discussion and contribute to the writing process. As a result the composition of
the group changed on several occasions and in some instances these changes were preceded by
dramatic debates and heated disagreements over the content and essence of the textbook. As a
participant-observer I attended and recorded all meetings from December 2010 till October

\textsuperscript{23} The National Exams take place in June. Hence at the time that Free University held its first round of
competitions students would have filled out their registration preferences but would not have gone through
the examination process.

\textsuperscript{24} As Bendukidze once commented: “giving scholarship to students who show excellent academic
performance has its repercussions. These kids become obsessed with their grades and all that matters is how
they pass exams…it incentivizes them to trick the system and we don’t want that to happen…so I abolished
this system that ESM (European School of Management) initially had in place.” The olympiads at the same
time incentivized students to take a chance and to see for themselves what Free U environment was like.
Chapter 4 is based on the essays written for one of the contests in “Independent Reasoning” that took place in
March of 2011. I examine approximately two hundred essays written by students on the topic of “tradition on
modernity”.

31
2012. In 2013 I recorded interviews with all members of the group.

Apart from that, my ethnographic material is based on the interviews with the historians who wrote another textbook on Russian-Georgian relations and with those who worked with the Georgian government as part of “The State Commission for Assessing Historical Truth.” The official document that this commission had to publish was never released to the public and neither the Ministry of Education nor the Ministry of Culture was able to inform me on its whereabouts. Nonetheless, it was noted to me by several historians that the commission was unable to accomplish its task due to disagreements on historical issues among individuals working on the project.

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25 Their meetings were conducted in a form of “brainstorming” workshops. Their mode of work resembled the process of assembling a jigsaw puzzle, but the kind where one is provided with an initial skeleton in which gaps and blank spots need to be filled in with all the small images to form a big picture. In this process they were assembling the bricolage of told and untold stories against the background of existing memory maxims that shape conceptual landscape of Georgians’ memory. Their way of imagining past was not self-contained or sealed off but dialogic and intertextual in that every single story they re-cast or retold in one way or another responded or was counterposed to a specific imaginary that was already out there.
CHAPTER 2: STABLE TEXTS AND THE UNSTABLE ORDER OF THE PAST

Things just happen, one after another... But history... ah, history is different. History has to be observed. Otherwise it’s not history. It’s just... well, things happening one after another. And of course, it has to be controlled. Otherwise it might turn into anything. Because history, contrary to popular theories, is kings and dates and battles. And these things have to happen at the right time. This is difficult in a chaotic universe there are too many things to go wrong.

(T. Pratchett The Small Gods)

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter sheds light on that common ground of “memoryscape” (Cole 2001) that is implicated when Georgians mention “our history” or “historical memory”. Through examining textual material I suggest that a set of recurrent motifs underlie existing forms of historical conception. While recurrent motifs function as structural elements on a textual level for developing the storyline of historical narratives, they also engender set of memory maxims that are operative on a discursive level. Memory maxims are paradigmatic categories that, on the one hand, evolve out of historical conception and, on the other hand, sustain discursive modes of national self-conception and construal of reality. The term “memory maxims” builds on the concept of “authoritative maxim” discussed in John Bowen’s work on Sumatran poetics. He
defines the term as a “short, often epigrammatic formulation of cultural and historical truth” that “locates the source of knowledge, authority, and social order in the distant past, thus connecting a particular temporal orientation to a distinct poetic form” (1991, pp. 141-142). A special faculty of such maxims is that they “provide a discursive window” into a specific cultural logic and “invoke a general authority that transcends current sociopolitical alignment”. In turn, the notion of “authoritative maxims” can be viewed as a version of Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1986) concept of “authoritative utterance” that I further elaborate in the subsequent chapters. Chapters 3 and 4 build on the claims made here to show the ways in which “memory maxims” shape the discursive realm on Georgia’s past, present and future.

Ultimately, I arrive at a conclusion that memory maxims can enter the Georgian discursive realm on national identity with two distinct voices: one that harnesses self-idealization and one that can potentially sustain a critical discourse of self-condemnation. Thus memory in this case sustains two discursive genres that remain at the center of my discussion throughout the rest of my study.

2.2. Stable Texts

There is no single source for exploring historical imaginaries that are at the crux of memory debates in Georgia. They are sustained by cultural discourses, transmitted through family stories, represented in public spaces, literary works, poetry, and so forth; but based on my extensive conversations with students I would claim that formal history instruction plays the most significant role in crystalizing historical images into memory maxims (material in chapter 4 further supports this claim). As such, the analysis of history textbooks is possibly the best way to approach the issue. Furthermore, the individuals I studied repeatedly referred to textbooks as a
source of a distorted, idealized past. In what follows then I examine history textbooks from three different periods and published under three different sets of political conditions.

These textbooks were published in 1974, 1992, and 2001 and were written and edited by different individuals. Separated by decades each was produced under drastically different socio-political conditions. Within these three decades Georgia went from being a Soviet republic to a troubled independent state tormented by coups, civil and ethnic wars, the rise of ethnic and religious nationalism, economic stagnation and a shift from isolationist to Western oriented international policy.

The 1974 “History of Georgia” (for 7-10 grade students) was published in Georgian in the Soviet period and authored by two Georgian historians. It covers Georgian history from the Paleolithic era to the “flourishing of communism.” The textbook was approved by the Soviet ministry of education, but published in Tbilisi by the publishing house “Ganatleba.” Its first edition came out in 1968, under the censorship of Leonid Brezhnev’s rule. This period was characterized by development programs for acculturating Soviet peoples into the common culture of industrialized, urban society. This new communist agenda undermined previous policy of Nativization (korenizatsiia) which contributed to the consolidation of nationalism in the early Soviet era by promoting national languages and national education of non-Russian titular nationalities. However, even after it was undercut by Stalin and after Brezhnev reinforced the policy of bringing Soviet people together, as Ronald Suny argues, “the processes set in motion by korenizatsiia continued until, by the 1960s, most of the republics had become more national in character, not only demographically, but politically and culturally as well” (1993, p. 109). The 1974 textbook with its exclusive focus on Georgian history is an evident outcome of these developments.
Shortly after Soviet disintegration Georgia’s political and social landscape was awash with nationalist ideology. During the rule of Georgia’s first president Zviad Gamsakhurdia myths of an ethnocentric, exceptionalist, and narcissistic nature became the reigning political rhetoric. But the early 1990s witnessed the torment and fracturing of the newly independent Georgian state by civil wars and ethnic conflicts. The discourse about both past and about present misfortunes in this context was saturated with anti-Russian sentiments. The 1992 *History of Georgia* (for 10th grade students) reflects an overtly anti-Russian agenda. This textbook provides an expanded focus on the period from Russian imperial annexation to the “Reinstatement of Georgian independence and national statehood” in 1918. Such an alternative focus naturally lends itself to the centrality of fixing memories of “annexation”.

The 2001 textbook came out in the milieu of Georgia’s economic and political hardship. In the early 2000s a steady stream of the politics of economic impoverishment overtook the country. While the state withdrew its rhetoric of ethnocentric nationalism from the official discourse, religious nationalism gained strength in another authoritative public domain. At the time, the Georgian Orthodox church gained power and ideological legitimacy and in the eyes of much of the Georgian public became a trustworthy substitute for the inept state apparatus. The cover of the 2001 *History of Georgia* (for 10th graders) is an image of the monument of Georgia’s great king - David the Builder - whose rule in the twelfth century defines Georgia’s Golden Age (for the golden age narrative see Wertsch & Batiashvili, 2012). Perhaps the image of this iconic ruler embodied the desire and hope of the decaying state to regain the strength and power of the golden age.

While textbooks are an essential part of the history curriculum almost anywhere, the degree of significance that is ascribed to this specific textual form can vary from one country to another.
Different societies have varying expectations on what a textbook can do, but in Georgia, the scope and intensity of public attention toward history textbooks suggests that they are treated rather as monuments of historical memory and as the ultimate (rather than just another) mechanism for inscribing historical consciousness in future generations (see discussion in the following chapter). In that regard, I agree with Claudia Schneider’s claim that “textbooks are inherently political” because “they represent temporary outcomes of negotiations between various social actors over what counts as legitimate knowledge” (2008, p 113). But unlike Schneider I do not think that this is so because the state is inevitably involved in textbook production through “various restraining and control mechanisms” (p 113). Textbooks are political even when social actors negotiating “legitimate knowledge” act independently of the state, and textbooks are political even before the state starts to regulate their content. The case I present later speaks to this point, because it shows how the production of history textbooks is taken up as a form of critical engagement with the polity and bears on the image of the Georgian public with its assumed political consciousness. “Political” is the historically shaped quality or function of this specific textual form, and this is particularly so because of how history textbooks have been deployed as weapons of political regimes and ideologies in most totalitarian states.

In the Soviet Union, and in many other authoritarian states as well, textbooks had a special place in upholding regimes of power knowledge (Foucault, 1972). In her work on education and social mobility in Soviet Union, Sheila Fitzpatrick (1979) wrote of how textbooks were tied to the machinery of the communist social order. In the eyes of the Soviet state textbooks were instrumental in stabilizing education and securing the indoctrination of party ideology (Heer, 1971). One of the 1934 Politburo transcripts of a dialogue between Stalin and L. M. Kaganovich – Stalin’s close associate, once proclaimed as the Soviet Union’s “architect of fear” (Kahan,
1987) – demonstrates the sheer absurdity of the regime’s concern with textbooks:

*Kaganovich:* The Central Committee found out that the children did not have textbooks. Comrade Stalin came and asked: 'How are things with the textbooks? Find out what is happening.' Then the Politburo established that we did not have any permanent textbooks.

*Stalin:* They changed every year.

*Kaganovich:* Right, the textbooks were changing every year... The 'leftist theorists of the withering away of the school argued that if we kept the same textbooks for a few years we would be dragged backwards, not noticing that for want of textbooks the children were half illiterate. Just let a student try to get any firm systematic knowledge on the basis of 'loose-leaf textbooks'. Each year Narkompros issued an enormous number of textbooks. Money was spent and mountains of paper wasted on the 'loose-leaf textbooks, yet each year we still had no stable textbooks...

*Stalin:* Now the textbooks are stable.

(Quoted in Fitzpatrick, p. 234)

Stalin was himself intimately involved in designing history textbooks. It was due to his criticism of conveying the past through “abstract sociological schemas” that history textbooks followed a chronological order – narrating sequence of events, historical figures and dates (Fitzpatrick 1979). This allowed for a Soviet republic like Georgia certain fluidity with the content so that history textbooks could transmit stories of enemies, resistance, heroic struggles, and so forth even while framed in terms of Marxist dialectics.

Hence while Georgian textbooks can be viewed as artifacts of ideological and knowledge regimes transmitted to each generation, they in fact demonstrate continuity and persistence in conveying the past through immutable patterns. There is a line of continuity not only between historical representations from the Soviet to post-Soviet period but linkage in form and content to a *memory framework* from the 19th century founding texts by Ilia Chavchavadze (see following

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26 Loose-leaf textbook refers to a binder type journal - a collection of material on different themes, disciplines or sciences for reading and working assignments.

27 People’s Commissariat for Education was an administrative unit in the Soviet Union that overlooked and regulated all matters concerning education and culture.
chapter). This linkage was made possible not necessarily because of some sub-altern form of resistance aimed at defending history from the ideological pressure of the communist state, although many Georgians like to think that, but primarily because the memory framework in the 19th century texts was so general and powerful as to have imposed limitations on the Soviet doctrine. It posited three basic memory maxims, none of which inherently contradicts the Marxist framework or infringes on the power of communist rule: a) Georgia has always been under attack by various invaders, b) Georgians are heroic and have always resisted attackers to defend their culture and nation, c) history reveals both strengths and weaknesses of the Georgian people. In what follows I demonstrate the ways in which these maxims are sustained by recurrent motifs in historical narratives.

2.3. RECURRENT MOTIFS

Georgian history textbooks are generally organized around a series of narratives. They convey historical processes as events that have a beginning, middle and end. In most cases, the beginning of each historical period (and end of the previous one) is marked by the appearance of a “new enemy” (sometimes the term “new” or “another” is in the very titles of textbooks chapters). The element of “enemy” is a motif that sets the boundaries of a setting within which characters are revealed and relations are established. This is the dominant motif that drives the action, but it also creates conditions through which “Georgianness” is realized. This is possibly why in collective imaginaries, “Georgia under threat” is conceived as a condition of existence.

In the analysis of the textbooks the emphasis on the narrative form and other textual means that organize meaning stems from my approach to memory that has been shaped by the
works of James Wertsch (1998, 2002). Cultural tools and linguistic forms such as narratives are central to his analytic framework, which emphasizes the agency of symbolic mediums in both organizing and transmitting collective memories. Linguistic mediums, especially narratives are useful and effective instruments for grasping reality in a coherent whole and the following quote by Aristotle on the “play” points to this special faculty of the narrative form:

…If you string together a set of speeches expressive of character, and well finished in point of diction and thought, you will not produce the essential tragic effect nearly so well as with a play which, however deficient in these respects, yet has a plot and artistically constructed incidents. (Aristotle, *Poetics*).

What Aristotle once wrote about tragedy is at the core of narrative form and function. Tragedy he wrote, “is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole” and “whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end”. More generally narratives are typically composed of these three parts, and as commonsensical as this may sound the point that any plot of an artistic form has a beginning, a middle and an end, and that the meaning of each part is only evident once the end is known is critical in understanding narrative-reality relationship. Do life events have a strictly defined beginning “which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be”? (Aristotle, *Poetics*). To restate the question posed by Hayden White, “Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well made stories, with central subjects, proper beginning, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see ‘the end’ in every beginning?” (1981, p.23). Authors like White show why this is almost certainly not the case. Instead narratives convey reality as if it is a story that begins with specific events or actions and ends somewhere. While an event in reality may or may not have meaning for consequent happenings, narrative plots structure them in a way that only meaningful ones are conveyed, while leaving out things irrelevant to the plot. Plot in its
own right is the meaning, the explanation, the line of argument that defines characters and their actions.

When it comes to history, univocal memory narratives are often employed, and they are useful because they are capable of simplifying matters (Novick, 1988). Louis Mink has pointed out that “we cannot make sense of history, unless it is possible to discover in it a single theme, a ‘regular movement,’ [that] beyond … mere chronologies there should be a ’larger theme’ about the movement and direction of history’” (Mink, 1981 p.190). For Mink, the idea of “narrative form as cognitive instrument” is part of a broader dialogue with Kantian claims about “universal history”. Mink questions the notion of universal history because it fails to accept the constraints of narrative. The point is that narrative rather than simply representing reality constructs it according to a certain plot, and the plot is not given in real experience but posited by human imagination. With that, what narrative form does is help make sense of events by grasping together how they relate to each other. It posits a plot of a story with “a single theme”, taming uneven and multilayered flows of historical occurrences according to a unilinear narrative schema.

In examining the semantic organization of the texts I shall consider, ideas from Russian Formalist scholars, especially Vladimir Propp’s (1968, 1984) approach in the Morphology of the Folktale. Propp’s principal postulate is that in a folktale objectively identifiable constants are the “functions” of the dramatic personae. These are the basic components that “serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled” (1968, p.21). A number of Russian scholars have elaborated Propp’s thesis on the folktale. Several of his interpreters have taken his postulates further in a general discussion on semiotics, and some of these ideas are used here in the analysis of historical texts.
I.I. Rezvin, (1975) another Russian formalist and Propp’s interpreter, elaborated on
dramatic functions to suggest that two types of predicates (constructs) can be found in folktales
as well as epic texts: ones that express constant and inherent characteristics of actors and ones
that reveal action/transformation. These latter are what drive *siuzhet* or the plot of a story. These
elements explain not “referential semantics” but “inner semantics that serve to form links within
the text”, hence they show the ways in which text is made into a coherent whole (p 83). Another
of Propp’s interpreters, B.N Putilov (1971), wrote about motifs as elements that form *siuzhet*. He
pointed out that there is a certain collection of settings, relations, episodes and psychological
states that form the arsenal of the epos and that this is not immobile and absolute.

My interest here lies not so much in the morphological analysis of textual units, but rather
in using these theoretical terms to extract from historical texts certain patterns as paradigmatic
categories that make up the semantic field of memory. From this perspective these elements
matter not as structuring mechanisms strictly on a textual level but as meaningful markers of
historical processes that consequently serve as lenses for framing and conceiving historical
reality on a discursive level.\(^\text{28}\)

### 2.4. UNSTABLE ORDER OF THE PAST

Georgians trace historical antecedents of their statehood to the ancient Kingdom of
Colchis (Bronze Age), the mythical land of the Golden Fleece. The memory of this proto-
Georgian state is entrenched with the myth of the Argonauts who came from the Black Sea. With
the help of Medea, the daughter of the Colchian King Ayet, who fell in love with Jason, they
were able to steal the Golden Fleece from the King. Mythical imagery associated with Medea

\(^{28}\) The kind of discourse “framing” practice I have in mind corresponds to George Lakoff's notion of
“framwork” and discourse framing in his popular *Don’t Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the
and Golden Fleece have been employed and appropriated under different political conditions and for very different purposes in contemporary discussions of the past and Georgia’s cultural belonging (see Khalvashi forthcoming). As such this myth is overlain with various ways of reading, including conflicting interpretations. Medea’s image has been appropriated to symbolize Georgia’s belonging to European civilization (even its birth giver) and the photograph below (Figure 2.1) of a mosaic fragment on the facade of the Georgia’s Presidential palace (constructed by Saakashvili’s administration) is an example of such appropriation of this myth. But the myth also represents one of the first instantiations of an alien force intruding to take away something valuable from Georgians, an effort that succeeds because of an internal collaborator. Bendukidze and his associates entertained this formulation when they mentioned “Argo treacherously sieging Colchis” (see Chapter 1).

The history of Georgian territories is represented from that point on as an unending cycle of invasions and attacks, often aided by backsliding internal agents. Georgian lands become a terrain for competing empires to gain control over these territories and expand the borders of their empires. The era of King Parnavaz in the third century B.C.E. marks the beginning of Georgia’s movement toward territorial integrity and strong statehood. Describing this period authors of the 2001 textbook write:
The formation of the Kartli Kingdom took place against the background of bitter confrontations for supreme power among various aristocratic clans. In this battle, rulers of various Eastern Georgian entities even relied on external forces for assistance. For instance, Azo, is referred to as “The first King” in Georgian historical chronicles, but the official version (“Kartlis Tskhovreba”) does not recognize him as such, since he came to Kartli as an invader with the help of external forces (Greeks). Azo’s rule based on external power did not last for long. Rebellion erupted in the country, spearheaded by … Parnavaz29. The rebellion ended with the success of Georgians and Parnavaz’s

29 According to the Georgian chronicles Life of Kings King Parnavaz was a descendant of mythic Kartlos the eponymous ancestor of Georgians (himself a descendant of Noah and Japeth). Parnavaz is credited not only for laying the foundation of Georgian statehood but for creating writing and literacy for the Georgian...
ascendance to the throne. The year of 284 B.C.E. is identified as the date of Parnavaz’s accession which is also the beginning of the Georgian national chronology…

In this passage, (A) creating the Kartli Kingdom appears as a self-induced process, left unexplained as to what processes and forces mobilized this creation. It is as if it emerged spontaneously out of some common ethos. And this process was foiled by aristocratic clans who are portrayed as aberrations from the norm, as traitors relying on external forces while rebellion implies the common will of the nation led by a king of distinguished leadership.

In the 1974 textbook, chapter five is titled “The Struggle Against Foreign Invaders in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries”, and it opens with the following passage: “On its way toward progress, Georgia’s normal path of development was arrested by a new dangerous invader - Tatar Mongols” (emphasis in the original)”. Subsequent paragraphs describe the cruelty with which “enemies” treated the local population. “Thus the ravaged and tortured country was unable to render necessary resistance to Mongols … Part of the nobility met the enemy with obedience. Friction and disorientation showed in Georgia’s military leadership. Mongols used this to their benefit and occupied Georgian fortresses one after another.” This internal disorientation is further aggravated when Queen Rusudan, Georgia’s ruler at the time, died: “In the country left without the King several lords strengthened by support from Mongols strove to gain complete power, acting adamantly and together with the occupants who were ravaging the population.” In contrast, the “patriotic part of the nobility from the first year of Mongol rule was designing plans for liberation and was plotting rebellion.” However a traitor gave away the rebellion: “The rebellion planned against the Mongols was thwarted by internal language, as well as establishing a unified religious cult which in turn laid the groundwork for subsequent conversion to Christianity.
betrayal, but the Georgian people did not give up in their struggle against intruders” (pp 94-97).

Later on, discussing events of 6th century Georgia, the authors of the same textbook wrote:

From the beginning of 6th century Iranian conquerors re-intensified their attack in Kartli for the eradication of Georgian customs and culture. Under the Shah’s command peoples of Transcaucasia had to be induced to reject the Christian faith and convert to Iranian Zoroastrism. To these demands of the conquerors Georgians responded with rebellion. The Georgians were defeated and the Kingdom of Kartli became a vassal of Iran.

The very next section of this textbook narrates a similar heroic struggle of another “Georgian Kingdom” - Egrisi. According to this narrative Egrisi became a target of Iran as a strategic point for its power-struggle against the Byzantine Empire. “Egrisians at this time found themselves between two fires: on the one hand they wanted to overthrow Byzantine rule, on the other, they were conducting a life and death struggle against a new invading enemy – the Iranians.” (P 40) Between these two fires, the authors recount how Georgian chiefs disagreed on choosing between Byzantine and Iran as the less damaging force. But the disagreement was surmounted by a persuasive speech by one of the Egrisi chiefs, where he argued: “Iranians are enemies of our customs, of our faith; they will prohibit our ancestral customs and will try to convert us to their religion.” Based on this argument the Georgians decided to side with the Byzantine Empire. Recounting the end of an enduring and long struggle, the authors conclude: “The Georgian people, under the threat of complete destruction by two potent Middle Eastern empires - Iran and Byzantine, through continuous self-sacrificing struggle and smart flexible politics, rescued its physical existence and defended its old culture” (p 42)

The same storyline is played out in the account of “the struggle of Georgian people for freedom in 17th century” against Iran’s Shah Abbas, or later against the Ottomans with public
the struggle against the Ottomans was foiled by disagreement between kings and the
nobility…and continuous internal feudal wars” (p 128).

The repeated elements in these narratives represent motifs that speak to the theme of the
story, forming a pattern of historical occurrences. Of course this is from a particular perspective,
one that demarcates events from non-events, stories from non-stories, visible actors from
invisible ones. As Peter Brooks has pointed out “It is in the peculiar nature of narrative as a
sense-making system that clues are revealing that prior events are prior, and that causes are
causal only retrospectively, in a reading back from the end” (2003 p.93).

In 1783 King Erekle II of Kartl-Kakheti Kingdom (Eastern Georgia) signed a treaty with
Russia that placed his kingdom under the tsar’s imperial protection. Provisions of the treaty
guaranteed the preservation of the throne to Erekle’s descendant, but limited their sovereignty
(Suny, 1988). Given these circumstances, this case of Russian-Georgian relations poses a
somewhat different “enemy” paradigm, first and foremost because Georgians pursued the
alliance with Russia, with the promise of security from other enemies such as Persia and the
Ottoman Empire.

The textbook published in 1992, soon after Soviet disintegration, conveys Georgia’s
annexation by the Russian Empire following the same thematic framing. In the narrative of
Georgia’s annexation by Russia, we encounter the same basic plot motifs that shape the siuzhet
of all other encounters with foreign invaders. These same elements not only reinstantiate the
single repeated storyline but reinforce the image of Georgians’ immutable nature. Below is a
schematic outline of how the 1992 textbook narrates the events of Russian-Georgian relations,
framed by recurrent motifs:
- New enemy motif: The 1992 Georgian history textbook frames the arrival of Russians in terms of deceit and treachery of a new enemy disguised as an Orthodox Christian relative, “but the effect of this deceptive trick,” write the authors of the textbook, “bursts at once like a soap bubble” (p 4).

- Internal weakness facilitates enemy’s success motif: “Russia was devoted to the principle of ‘divide and rule’ and used existing disagreements between Western Georgian principalities and ‘rendered assistance’ to the chief of Samegrelo [a region in western Georgia] … Samegrelo was occupied by Russian troops and turned into a bridgehead for the battle against the Imereti principality [another Western Georgian region]” (p 13)

- Resistance motif: “The anti-Russian, national-liberation movement of the Georgian people began right away with the annexation of eastern Georgia. To be more accurate this movement only redirected its course. If earlier it was targeted against Iranian and Ottoman occupiers, now it was mainly conducted against tsarist politics” (p 38). Under the heading “national-liberation movement of the Georgian people” the textbook mentions rebellions in 1802, 1804, 1812, 1819-1820 in several provincial regions as public uprisings against tsarist rule as well as an 1832 conspiracy that failed as a result of internal treason (pp 37-55).

- Preserving culture motif: “After the Russian occupation, the significance of national literature further increased. Besides framing past events in their own historical settings, its aim was to assess the past and define perspectives of the future. After the abolition of national-statehood, it [literature] was to function as the only unifying and supportive [medium] of the Georgian people.” All the while, “Tsarist imperialist policy was an impediment to the accomplishment of this difficult and honorable mission by Georgian literature. It regarded the repression of Georgian literature as one of its major means for realizing its goals for assimilation and Russification” (p 81). Despite, all the difficulties and barriers, “Georgian literature was on the way to revival and renewal”. The concluding passage of the chapter re-asserts in highlighted letters the purpose of Georgian literature as being to “serve the liberation movement of Georgian people, who once again found themselves enslaved” (p 88).
Despite the diversity of historical episodes being analyzed and the context in which the book was published, all three of these textbooks employ similar themes and motifs to frame, or sometimes to take a stance toward events. Across various historical periods and episodes, then, the following narratively organized “functions” appear repeatedly as stable elements that make up a general narrative framework:

I. An “initial situation” is characterized by *path of normal development*. This usually presupposes movement toward integrating Georgian territories into a strong and successful political unit, as well as the flourishing of Georgian culture. In history textbooks, constructing or rebuilding Christian monasteries usually symbolize the path of normal development, as these were both markers of Georgian spiritual integrity as well as expressions of cultural progress.

II. Normal development is thwarted by the appearance of a new enemy. Usually this takes the form of much more powerful but less cultured and civilized actors than Georgians, and they threaten the nation’s cultural purity and integrity. One of the perpetual memory images related to the country’s unending struggle is that Georgians repeatedly find themselves caught between the forces of two competing empires.

III. Regardless of circumstances, *Georgians resist external domination*. Resistance is one of the most important defining motifs of the Georgian narrative framework. However, a wide range of actions can be implied under the heading of resistance - rebellions, acts of individual martyrdom, language preservation, religious devotion, or cultural activism (such as production of poetry, literary or historical texts). The act of resistance in its own right symbolizes the endurance of the Georgian spirit. Its importance is not in the outcome of a rebellion or uprising, but the act itself bears significance as a testament to
the survival of common national will and the incorruptibility of the Georgian soul.

IV. In this struggle for freedom some internal weakness impedes the nation’s liberation. This might involve betrayal during rebellions, internal frictions or power struggles, or collaboration with an enemy to gain advantage in the internal hierarchy. Internal weaknesses are represented as Georgia’s Achilles heel. In many cases they are explained or justified in terms of an enemy’s treachery and attempts at manipulation to “break the castle from the inside”30.

V. Once the internal weakness is surmounted, united Georgians free themselves from external domination and manage to maintain their cultural values (especially language and religion). In many cases the overcoming of internal dissent is due to the appearance of a talented and powerful leader, a monarch who crushes traitors and monopolizes otherwise dispersed power.

These recurrent motifs frame historical events throughout different periods of retelling the past in Georgia. In these elements one can see that Georgians’ inherent nature is revealed in two contradictory tendencies: on the one hand they are characterized by an unsubdued nature and the capacity for heroic struggle and resistance; on the other hand, internal disagreements, betrayal and collaboration represent an opposing tendency of Georgians. In many instances, the dialectics between these two contradictory functions is what determines the outcome of whether Georgians succeed or fail. These two polar functions of Georgians are at the basis of self-idealizing and self-condemning voices I introduced earlier.

30 “The Castle always broke from the inside” is a common Georgian aphorism that embodies and encapsulates collective memory of betrayal and treason. People would refer to this aphorism when conveying either historical events or reflecting upon certain present circumstances. The aphorism is just another instance of “memory code” that I discuss in chapter 4, a speech element that implies judgmental undertone by way of indexing certain memory maxim.
The presence of contradictory functions is something that goes against Propp’s theorization of the folktale, since for him the storyline of a folktale grows out of a coherent set of functions. For Propp the function of dramatic personae is “an act of character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action”, which is assumed to be coherent (p 21). Christopher Booker has pointed out that any feature of a “fatal flaw” that inhibits a hero’s success is part of the plot-line of a tragedy (Booker 2004), but Georgia’s memory narrative does not have the quality of a tragic story because the end-result, what Brooks calls the “inevitable discovery” of the narrative (2003), is measured in terms of preserving culture and national identity and the Georgian mnemonic community takes this to have been accomplished successfully.

One can conceive of the internally contradictory nature of Georgia’s memory narrative in terms of the following axioms found in fairy-tales:

I. If a hero resists temptation/trial from a giver, then the hero acquires a special/magical quality.
II. If a hero, acquires a magical quality then he is able to overcome the consequences of any damage begotten by a perpetrator (Rezvin, p 88)

In the case of Georgian memory framework, the actors need to tame their internal disagreements, or temptations in order to overcome an enemy’s treachery. In consequence, national unity as a magical quality would render them invincible. As Rezvin points out (in his attempt to address the question posed by Propp on why people tell tales) “a fairy-tale functions in a collectivity as a model, a paradigm (in a wide sense of the word paradeigma) of a coherent text, on which a language-bearer is oriented for creating new texts” (p. 90). Further he suggests that a fairy-tale depicts a “certain game situation (igrovaja situacija) and every game situation can be viewed as a peculiar model for complex situations that for instance a child can come
Similarly, my claim is that recurrent elements function as paradigmatic categories that perpetuate the modes of thinking about Georgia and Georgianness. Which of these are highlighted or downplayed in any particular instance is shaped by the “addressivity” involved in any given context of communication. As a general rule, the more ritualistic, public, and performative the act of communication, the more it accents the self-idealizing elements of freedom fighting, resistance, and the unsubduable nature of Georgians. In contrast, in an informal “off stage” (Goffman, 1959), behind the scene discursive encounter, Georgians may be able to talk about the internal weaknesses of their nation that have contributed to failures in the historical past and in the present.

This mode of discourse that I shall call self-condemning does not reject the existence of the former element, but it re-accents in a different way that reflects the interpretive demands of discussion—usually informal discussion among Georgians in a private setting. Elements of internal flaws can be found in all textual representations of the past, but it is a matter of balancing virtues and flaws in memory performances that end up conveying historical outcomes as successful, given that Georgia is a nation that has survived all attempts of destruction and annihilation. Although what survival means may be contested, the notion that Georgians have survived and endured is an underlying axiom, both for vehement critiques and proud, self-promoting nationalists.

2.5. THE DUAL PERSPECTIVE OF GEORGIAN MEMORY
When thinking about the means for representing reality, one of the important categories to take into account is the idea of a perspective. Denis Cosgrove in *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (1998) writes about the emergence of landscape in the history of European culture and thought, and he points to the idea of perspective as an important technique for “spatial control”. For Renaissance artists, he writes that perspective was the most significant tool for the realistic representation of the world: “perspective was regarded not merely as a technique, a visual device, but as a truth itself, the discovery of an objective property of space rather than solely of vision” (p 21-22)

In his overview of how perspective was devised in Renaissance painting and theatre, Cosgrove writes that it “was a device for controlling the world of things, of objects which could be possessed. It was related to a cosmology in the Renaissance which regarded creation as ordained by fixed geometrical rules. The painter or architect could understand and apply these rules and thereby emulate the creative act” (p 25). Perspective for a landscape is what plot is to a narrative, both define the limits of the horizon of what “can be seen” and what needs to be perceived. That limit has a structuring force in shaping the plot, the motif, the point to be made of a visual or verbal representation of the world. In both cases, the flow of history is arrested in a single perspective and it draws a cosmology with its inherent logic of what reality is. This points to the idea that narratives always portray reality from a particular perspective and this certainly applies to the examples I examined. However, the presence of two contradictory functions of Georghianness allows for the two distinct points of entry on the discourse of the national past and national identity. The co-functioning of self-idealizing elements with self-condemning ones enables this dual perspective. While in textual representation, “narrative form as a cognitive instrument” (Mink, 1978) may impose its own limitations on playing out of this dual perspective,
on the discursive level such dualism is much more viable.

2.6. Metanarrative and the “True-Self”

The final questions I address in this chapter are: What is the cultural impact of the historical consciousness that narrative frameworks convey? What kind of imaginaries of social order and moral registers can they sustain? And how do these images from the past translate into discursive modes on Georgian identity, history and politics in the present?

While the following chapters provide more in depth answers to these questions, I want to introduce a few examples at this point from popular sources to demonstrate how the basic motifs outlined above, can facilitate stance-taking and how memory maxims open discursive windows for certain political judgments. Specifically, I turn to an example from a blog entry by Tariel Putkaradze, a famous or even infamous historian and ethnolinguist teaching at one of the Georgian universities. In the Georgian scholarly community, especially among historians and linguists, Putkaradze is well known (although possibly not well established) for his radical ethnocentrism and religious nationalism. In 1990s Putkaradze served as the member of Georgia’s state council and was later appointed by Georgia’s first President Zviad Gamsakhurdia as the prefect of the city of Batumi. Putkaradze is one of the more outspoken radical scholars who became vocal in the wake of Georgian nationalism. As an ethnolinguist he has published several manuscripts on Georgian language arguing against granting the status of language to Kartvelian languages other than Georgian (e.g. Svan, Mingrelian and Laz31). Liberal intellectuals view

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31 Kartvelian languages are indigenous language family, spoken primarily in Georgia. Kartvelian languages are not know to be related to any other linguistic family.
Putkaradze as a typical case of politically motivated pseudoscientist whose theories are shaped by ethno-nationalist agenda. But the ideas he has been promoting for decades have had a broad impact on the proliferation of public discourse on linguistic issues. From this perspective defending the status of the Georgian language is equated with defending the nation and its unity. In an article titled *The “Putkaradze Syndrome” and Intellectual Shahidism in Georgian Science* written by one of the liberal intellectuals, the author points out that it was due to Putkaradze’s skillful promotion that in the discussion of linguistic analyses of Georgian languages every other “doctor, bus driver, fireman, religious clergyman, journalist, flight attendant” is involved. The point is that Putkaradze’s vision is interesting not only because it finds resonance among many radical and not so radical nationalist groups, but because it manifests the ideological worldview that persisted in the official rhetoric of the 1990s. But apart from that, excerpts from his text manifest how memory maxims are appropriated as framing mechanisms for authoritative judgments.

In his *History of Georgia: A Short Version*, written in the context of strained Russian-Georgian relations, Putkaradze asserts:32

In its struggle against various invaders Georgian selfhood (identity) and its culture of statehood (which implies a centralized but tolerant state) have been formed. Historically, some intruders were capable of tearing apart Georgia or partially incorporating it into another state. In such times, the Georgian church remained as the guarantor of the Georgian state’s indissolubility, while the Georgian people never complied with the occupant.

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32 This text has no date of publication or the date when it was uploaded, but from the text it is evident that it was written sometime after Russian-Georgian war in August of 2008. This is important in light of discussion on the extent to which historical representations are aligned with present political orders. In Putkaradze’s text we see that he both maps his discussion onto current political predicament, but frames historical representation in culturally pre-given symbolic forms.
In this passage the author, on the one hand, reproduces one of the dominant historical motifs as a given truth, namely, that Georgia has continuously faced attacks from multiple invaders. But he attaches and posits something else to this that serves to essentialize Georgian identity and make this general identity claim synonymous with “historical truth”.

Putkaradze uses this as a preamble to his ensuing discussion where he points out that for contemporary Georgia “the major problem is de-occupying territories of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali [South Ossetia] region that have been occupied by Russia” (for more on this conflict see chapter 1). Most of Putkaradze’s blog entry is dedicated to exposing the strategies of Russian “imperialistic” aspirations:

…the aim of the Russian Empire is unaltered: by disorienting the international community or Georgian citizens, [Russia pursues] the gradual occupation and annexation of Georgian territory, and in parallel, by ethno-linguistic dissociation of Georgians, [Russia’s aim is to] complete its assimilation of the nation that historically owns these territories.

But he also deems it necessary to remind readers of “what is unalterable is the goal of the Georgian nation and generally its population: to preserve national identity and culture by saving its statehood.”

In a contemporary globalist world this aim can only be realized if a new, depoliticized, and academic history of Georgia and the Georgian nation is created. We consider documenting the 200-year conflict to be the major aspect of this history.

While this example demonstrates how the past is mapped onto current political challenges, it also builds on and reinstates pre-existing formulas that impose a certain form of reasoning and moralizing logic. It may be hypothetically true that any kind of new past can be construed with a need to meet present needs in mind, but not any new past can sustain moral power. In other words, memory’s art of persuasion and its moral weight rest on the
embeddedness of culturally shared and legitimized imaginaries. As a result reinventing memory normally is launched only from the semiotic and semantic basis that is already in place and that conveys a particular social order.

Putkaradze’s formulation of Georgia’s eternal mission, “to preserve national identity and culture by saving its statehood”, is one pre-given historical axiom – a memory maxim – that is part of an accepted social order in Georgia. Statehood here appears only as an auxiliary or an accessory to national identity and culture. It seems that Georgia’s realization as a political entity is only a second order mission. The major premise of this statement is that the Georgian nation did not cease to exist when “some intruders were capable of tearing apart […] or partially incorporating it” (in other words abolishing it as a political entity). His inference is predicated on the dialectics of the narrative he employs as part of the preamble to his discourse.

Putkaradze’s vision is not unique, but is instead punctuated by the recurrent motifs outlined earlier in textbooks that are common forms of historic ideation in Georgia. The list of motifs in Georgian memory includes the struggle against the enemy, the claim that Georgians have never complied with invaders, and acceptance that a powerful enemy like Russia can “disorient” and “tear apart” (in one way or another undermine an internal strength in the form of unity) Georgian society. These are all basic motifs that underpin not only Putkaradze’s reasoning but serve as an underlying code for all forms of engagement with the past in Georgia.

Abstracted from concrete historical circumstances these recurrent motifs form what I shall refer to as a “metanarrative” of Georgia’s past, a narrative about the narratives of all specific events and historical processes. It is a conceptually compressed reproduction of an atemporal “historical truth.” A metanarrative is a transhistorical narrative that not only
encapsulates historical processes taking place over several thousand years, but conveys Georgia’s inherent nature, its mission, its character and how it relates or must relate to the rest of the world.

The metanarrative of Georgia’s past is a mythical construct, but not because it obscures or falsifies true course of events. Instead, it is because it abstracts away from reality—a set of complex, ambivalent, indeterminate historical processes—to create a coherent sense-making structure that fixes multiple happenings over several thousand years into a single symbolic construct. Events of distant periods and processes of a complex nature are emplotted into the narrative of one story that occurs over and over. It encapsulates the pattern of historical development and grasps a sequence and set of multiple events in a single frame (on Georgia’s national narrative see Batiashvili & Wertsch, 2008; Batiashvili, 2012) Its capacity to compress vast period of time and variety of happenings in a single coherent plot is related to what Amartya Sen calls the “miniaturization of reality” (Sen, 2006) that can be so dangerous in conflicts around identities.

Dolgin and Magdoff (1977) make the point that “as time passes, events of import to a people…retain only the skeleton of their significance, having lost much of their previous content” but “these events become vehicles for new significations. At the same time, such events embody contemporary meanings, legitimated by an implicit reference to a historic past, simultaneously they (event-meaning) legitimate the past by exemplifying its continuity in the present” (p. 351-352). When employed as an argumentative tool, this two-fold nature of memory form assumes special effectiveness. “The very principle of myth” writes Roland Barthes is that “it transforms history into nature…[myth] is not read as motive, but as reason” (1972, p. 129) Georgia’s metanarrative functions as a “condensed symbol” (Dolgin and Magdoff, 1977 p. 352)
in two ways, first as a condensed representation of all the historical events in Georgia’s past as a distilled pattern of meta-history; second, as a condensed symbol of Georgianness.

By way of illustration, consider two examples of formulations of metanarrative. The first comes from the foreword of a children’s history book called “My Georgia” (chemi sakartvelo) published in 2009 and the second from the forward of the 1974 history textbook of Georgia’s history discussed above.

The author’s foreword to “My Georgia” includes the following passage:

I have tried to convey a consistent narrative of the centuries-long existence of the Georgian nation, of the heroic struggle for self-preservation and a free and noble life. Georgia has always faced powerful empires due to the geopolitical importance of the Caucasus. Despite this, it is astonishing that Georgians have formed and, most importantly, have preserved their original, distinct culture. . . . Georgians created their country with their sweat and blood: they have never seized a single inch of others’ land and to this day have maintained their language, traditions and everything that is called culture. Along this, I have tried to explain to young readers that although there were the traitors and backsliders, there were many true patriots [of Georgia], who were devoted sons of country and nation; because of their dedication Georgians in the end achieved victory in unequal battles even with world conquerors such as the Mongols, Timur Leng [Tamerlane], Shah Abbas and others. . . “We have said more than once that a nation’s deterioration, decay and erosion begin when it forgets its history, when it forfeits remembrance of its past, of its former life”. This was preached by the great Ilia [Ilia Chavchavadze]. My aim has been to transmit a genuine heroic past of the Georgian nation and not a false history of lamentation which [our heroic past] is evidenced by a multitude of illustrations from our very rich cultural heritage.

The foreword to the 1974 textbook conveys an almost identical image of Georgia’s past. Moreover, here, too, the author cites a quote from Ilia Chavchavadze to lend authority to the claim that remembering nation’s history is a moral obligation of every citizen. In both cases the quotes are extracted from a single letter by Chavchavadze published in 1888, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. The 1974 textbook includes the following
The Georgian people have traversed an extremely difficult and long road. Every page of our past was written with the blood and sweat shed in the struggle for a better life and for independence. This book tells us about this interesting and heroic past and present…Our patriotic duty is to know the history of the Georgian people, how they managed to overcome powerful and numerous enemies and preserve their national existence, how they arrived at today’s light day”.

As a testament to this duty, the author quotes familiar words from the “Great writer and social activist Ilia Chavchavadze,” who wrote:

What is the strength of our life and what is weakness and futility only history can explain and translate\textsuperscript{33} to us, and if we forget this history, then we have forgotten the origin of our life, its root and its foundation, and if we do that, then on what are we to base our present and future? Indeed, historical knowledge, first and foremost, is a tool for better understanding the present and future and [a tool] for the conscious and purposeful labor of humans. (p 4).

These two formulations were written four decades and three political ideologies apart from one another, but they reproduce the same thematic elements that I have outlined earlier, and they are nearly identical in their conception of the past and in their stance toward remembering.

The amount of details with which this narrative can be spelled out varies. One can relocate the emphasis and intensify certain aspects depending on the context. For instance some formulations emphasize that Georgia is a very small country or conversely that Georgian lands have exceptional strategic importance to the entire world. Then each of these has its own imposing logic: the former seeks to pronounce the exceptionality of Georgian people in their

\textsuperscript{33} Chavchavadze uses the word \textit{gvitargmnos} literally meaning \textit{translate to us}, although it is an odd formulation it makes sense in his poetic form of discourse in which he lends certain agency and voice to the “past”. He vocalizes history as if it can be active, performative and speak to its people, as its father and procreator.
ability to defy powerful enemies, regardless of being small, and the latter speaks to the cause of
invasions and reasserts the country’s exceptionality in terms of its lands.

There are two defining properties of a metanarrative that I would emphasize. First, it is a
narrative that encapsulates and absorbs all specific narratives (Wertsch 2002) into a single
whole. As such, it is a formulation often encountered in the introduction of history textbooks or
in an attempt to briefly convey what Georgia’s history is about. It says something about the past
by “telling” us what the underlying grand schema that guides historical processes is; it states up-
front the moral of the story. Second, metanarratives relate not only “historical truths” but provide
a commentary on why knowing this “historical truth” is important. This didactic value of
memory builds on the idea that “stories of peoplehood” provide a directory of exemplary models
that can serve as nation’s moral compass and guarantee survival of a polity (Smith, 2003).

Another dimension of my argument concerns the role of narrative formulations for
transmitting and fixing memory maxims vis-à-vis general conversational discourse. Scholars
such as John Shotter (1990), David Middleton and Derek Edwards (1990), have pointed out that
since thoughts must be expressed in language in order to be communicated, discourse is a bridge
through which remembering is constituted. Their focus is on conversational forms of
remembering. As Shotter points out, “Our ways of talking about our experiences work … to
represent them in such a way as to constitute and sustain one or another kind of social order” (p.
122). But such accounts often have little to say about the ways in which the social order is
linguistically mediated. The notion of narrative as a cultural tool provides the natural bridge
between memory and social order. For example, the capsule formulations of the past such as
those outlined above play a most significant role in the proliferation and reproduction of
crystalized memory images. These function as easily retainable cognitive shortcuts (Kahneman,
that are much easier to remember and reproduce than specific historical narratives (Wertsch 2002).

The examples of metanarrative I introduced above represent the kind of symbolic forms that convey social order by narrating both what happened and who we are. They relate not a particular story but condense recurrent motifs into a single whole and expose a schema that underlies the flow of history. The notion of schema is important when considering semiotic means that organize and mediate people’s understanding of their past. The concept of a narrative schema, specifically when tied to memory, builds on the work of Frederic Bartlett whose experimental studies in psychology dealt with social and cultural factors involved in the processes of remembering. Bartlett maintained that remembering or understanding events involves an “effort after meaning” and the patterns such events might reveal. In his experiments individuals displayed a “constant effort to get the maximum possible of meaning into the material presented” (p 84) by for instance conventionalizing unfamiliar elements or simplifying complex content. It is in this “effort after meaning” that humans deploy what Bartlett called “schemata” based on recurrent themes and link them in a coherent way (1995, p. 44).

But forewords to textbooks and other such summary statements convey the same recurrent motifs not as underlying themes but as extracted historical and cultural truths. They reflect a general, schematic formulation of historical axioms, or what I shall call “memory maxims”. As an axiomatic statement it not only takes a stance toward what happened but toward memory itself and mends the narrative into a moral dictum that knowing “our past” is important as a civil obligation and a moral duty. The effort after meaning is a defining element of metanarratives. By expressing reality in certain ways such formulations not only explain the past, but impose their own reasoning logic about reality. The “moralizing impulse” as Hayden White
suggested is an inherent property of narratives, because unlike mere sequence of events as White wrote “every fully realized story...is a kind of allegory [that] points to a moral or endows events, whether real or imagery, with a significance [thus] every historical narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats” (1981, pp. 14-15, italics in the original).

In the case of metanarratives this moralizing impulse is put forth not as veiled authority as White or Bowen suggest, but as exposed dictum. The moral weight of “historical memory” as it is employed in discourse stems not from some abstract, detached category, but from the metanarrative of Georgia’s past that this term indexes. In other words, moral weight is the faculty of a specific form of historic ideation, it stems from what this narrative says about Georgia’s past and Georgian “true self”.

The notion of a true self is essential to nationalism almost anywhere. Even Americans, who are not particularly nationalistic in ways found in Europe, have an idea of what an “American ideal” is or should be. To Georgians the image of “true Georgianness” is drawn from representations of the past, and vice versa. One of the episodes in Lewis Caroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*, provides a flippant look at this notion, suggesting that the “self” can turn into an evasive notion when our relationship to the world becomes unrecognizable. When Alice, who has lost herself in the wonderland, is asked by Caterpillar, “Who are you?”, she responds: “Why, I hardly know sir, I’ve changed so much since this morning ... I’m not myself, you know” (Lewis Caroll 1865).

Alice’s sense of “being the same” being her “true self” is shattered because the reality she found herself in is so different that she can no longer grasp it. This is not the case with the image
of “Georgianness” posed by the metanarrative. This metanarrative captures the past in a way that ensures the coherence, continuity and integrity of a collective image. It does not matter what the structure of the world was in third, fifteenth, or eighteenth century Georgia. Regardless of the forces shaping individual actions in these various contexts, Georgians are viewed as construing and acting in the world in the same general terms. The father of the modern study of collective memory, Maurice Halbwachs, was the first to recognize that collective memories are tied to a group’s identity. In Halbwachs’s view memory, unlike history, emphasizes the recurrence of themes, events that resemble one other, and “represent currents of thought and experience within which we recover our past” and as such conceive collectivity in terms of certain immutable qualities (1950, p.64).

2.7. CONCLUSION: A MODEL OF BIVOCAL MEMORY

The “true self” stemming from Georgia’s historical paradigm that I have outlined is both canonical and intact. It is canonical because it conveys an absolute ideal evidenced by historical truth; it is intact because it remains true regardless of particular circumstances. Part of its strength in remaining impervious to challenge stems from the fact that it incorporates two seemingly contradictory claims. The symbolic plane of memory harnesses both virtues and vices that are viewed as inherent to Georgians. These are taken to be polar, but generic and coexistent characteristics, and they engender two parallel discursive regimes: one that builds on a self-idealizing tendency (heroic elements such as resistance, freedom-fighters, non-compliance with arbitrary authority, martyrdom for the nation, and so forth), and one that harnesses self-condemning rhetoric by admitting to shameful elements of Georgianness (betrayal, internal friction, collaboration with enemies, internal dissention). The latter locates the blame of misfortune within the intimate space of we-ness. As a result Georgians often treat breaches of
unity both as stemming from the inevitable and insurmountable disorder of their character and as part of their cosmological order.

National integrity and unity are central elements of the self-idealizing rhetoric that is usually part of a public and somewhat ritualized speech genre, a performative domain where nationhood is celebrated or where nationhood needs to be upheld and reinforced. This is highlighted in history textbooks. Historians who were socialized during the Soviet era seem to hold on to the idea (and the practice) that school children need to be cultured and socialized into these modes of self-perception to become part of a collectivity and carry on the ideal model.

The voice of self-condemnation, in contrast, is hardly ever silent in private discussions, and even in public ones that problematize the state of Georgian affairs. It surfaces in speech genres involved in a “truth discourse” for critical reflection on “we-ness”. When discussing what he described as “dual nature of Georgians” Vaja, the director of the History Institute explained this to me: “The school textbook has its own demands, more patriotic elements need to be emphasized... We can talk [about the dualistic nature of Georgians] in private discussion, [or] with part of a wider society but the school textbook has its demands” (personal communication). Such comments point to the conclusion that one should think of these two polarities not in terms of mutually exclusive conceptions of Georgia’s past and Georgian identity that have disparate users, but in terms of alternating modes of discourse that exist in dialogic tension and hence are involved in mutual definition.

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While examples from the textbook presented here lay the groundwork for the claims I make, this analysis is certainly not exhaustive. In the following chapter I rely on different sets of data to further my propositions. In what follows I pursue two goals: a) I expand the claims I have
outlined by examining data other than history textbooks that suggest that recurrent elements in historical representations function as paradigmatic categories that perpetuate the modes of thinking about Georgia and Georgianness, and b) I seek to demonstrate the ways in which these paradigmatic categories are devised as authoritative maxims that lend moral weight in speech acts. Chapter 3 situates these historical paradigms in the discursive field where contests over Georgian culture, politics, and national belonging take place. The textual material in chapter 4 demonstrates one way in which only the “self-idealizing” voice is employed for certain expressive and argumentative purposes.

Chapter 3: IT’S A POOR SORT OF MEMORY THAT ONLY WORKS BACKWARDS
The Value of “Historical-Memory” for the Future of Nationhood

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is about how “historical memory” is articulated and employed as a morally charged category to talk about the future of statehood, national identity and forms of citizenship. I draw ethnographic and textual material from diverse settings to shed the light on the value of historical-memory as an emic category that, when employed in an argument opens a discursive
window and enables individuals to make certain kinds of judgments or claims. At the same time, I want to demonstrate that a discursive tradition in which the past is made simultaneous with the future has its antecedents in 19th century emergence of nationalism. Founding texts by Ilia Chavchavadze written in late 1980s (that I discuss below) employ the past and a particular memory image as symbolic signifier of the Georgian nationhood.

This chapter unfolds the discursive field in which both Georgian memory and Georgian identity are problematized over contests about the nation’s geopolitical and cultural belonging. Disputes over “historical memory” become sites for voicing the anxieties over future “citizenship” and “cultural values”, anxieties that arise from shifting and unsettling political trajectories, but are shaped by and transposed through pre-given historical imaginaries. In other words, I want to demonstrate how the memory maxims outlined in the previous chapter shape both contested political imaginaries and modes of discourse about culture, nationhood, and Georgian geopolitics. In many of these debates and arguments what is being said explicitly is steeped in implicit, assumed and culturally shared meanings. These encounters embody forms of cultural interaction where statements index meanings beyond their straightforward definitions and words make sense or have emotional impact as part of the complex web of cultural meanings.

In this connection, Mikhail Bakhtin’s notions of “hidden dialogicality” and “hidden polemic” are apt concepts for exploring the dynamic between overt and covert meanings in Georgia’s national debates. Bakhtin defines hidden polemic and hidden dialogicality in terms of forms of the “addressivity” that the speakers’ discourse manifests in a communicative setting:

In a hidden polemic the author's discourse is directed toward its own referential object, as in any other discourse, but at the same time every statement about the object is
constructed in such a way that, apart from its referential meaning, a polemical blow is struck at the other's discourse on the same theme, at the other's statement about the same object. A word, directed toward its referential object, clashes with another's word within the very object itself. The other's discourse is not itself reproduced, it is merely implied, but the entire structure of speech would be completely different if there were not this reaction to another person's implied words...In a hidden polemic... the other's words are treated antagonistically, and this antagonism, no less than the very topic being discussed, is what determines the author's discourse. (1984, p. 195)

The general idea behind hidden dialogicality, (and hidden polemic) is that it describes kind of speech encounter in which addressee “is present invisibly, his words are not there, but deep traces left by these words have a determining influence on all the present and visible words of the first speaker” (Bakhtin, 1984 p. 197). Each spoken word “responds and reacts with its every fiber to the invisible speaker, points to something outside itself, beyond its own limits, to the unspoken words of another person” (1984, p. 197).

Critical to Bakhtin’s theory of dialogicality and speech in general is his notion of voice and multivoicedness. On the one hand, every utterance is produced by the voice, “the speaking consciousness”, and this voice implies certain “perspective, conceptual horizon, and world view” (Wertsch, 1991 p. 51). On the other hand, an utterance can incorporate multiple voices that originate not from the actual speaker, but enter his/her discourse or are appropriated by him/her from the sociocultural setting in which communication takes place. This phenomenon is best understood in terms of Wertsch’s notion of mediated action, in this case mediated speech which suggests that all human action is carried out through cultural instruments that are pre-given in the social milieu in which the action is situated (1991, 2002). As Wertsch notes “the agent of mediated action is seen as the individual or individuals acting in conjunction with mediational means” (1991, p. 33). Mediational or semiotic means may include a wide spectrum of symbolic forms such as language, speech genres, narratives, or memory maxims. But the crucial thing about them is that when we use such media, we become borrowers of others’ words and the
others’ voices enter our discourse as an “alien,” and sometimes even “hostile” word in the utterance (Bakhtin 1981).

The debate I introduce below demonstrates characteristics of hidden dialogicality that are usefully understood as instances of mediated and multivoiced speech acts. Beyond responding to each other, interlocutors’ utterances can be fully understood only by recognizing the presence of antagonizing words of others; they reflect the hidden dialogicality that comes from engaging in a polemic with non-present addressees. Understanding the hidden dialogism that is involved is essential because of how the meaning of the spoken words relate to the explicit subject of the discussion, on the one hand, and on the other, are involved in the mutual constitution of antagonism of the interlocutors, all of whom are shaped by implicit, schemas of memory. Understanding the hidden meanings that stem from indexing the voices of others in these debates is only possible if one bears in mind the Georgian memory paradigm (outlined in previous chapter) as a symbolic vocabulary that sustains and substantiates the polemic and as a source of authoritative voices that fuse or juxtapose with a speaker’s words.

3.2. HIDDEN POWER AND “RIGHTS ON MEMORY”

“This is some kind of experiment that they are trying to conduct on Georgia…you are trying to raise global citizens and uproot patriotism in this country…that’s what it is!” With these words Tavadze,¹ a historian socialized during the Soviet generation and teaching at the University of Georgia, responded to the presentation by Simon Janashia, the director of the National Curriculum and Assessment Center at the Georgian Ministry of Education, on new history textbooks. I was one of the initiators of this talk that took place on December 29, 2008 at
one of the universities in Georgia.

I had met Janashia earlier that month to interview him on state initiated changes in the history curriculum that entailed the production of new textbooks. My pre-existing prejudices are reflected in the fact that I had envisioned meeting a typical bureaucrat with vague (if any) understanding of what anthropological research on collective memory could mean. Instead, a man in his early thirties walked in, dressed in cargo jeans holding a folder of papers. He put the papers in front of me and we started talking. But it was not his appearance only that challenged my stereotype. As I inquired about the proposed method behind the new history curriculum Janashia pointed to the small bundle of papers he had put in front of me earlier. There I found some of the leading scholarly articles on memory, history teaching and the limitations of historical narratives (some of which I even cite in my work). Janashia was well acquainted with critical academic discourse on history teaching, which in turn informed and guided his approach to history curriculum reform at Georgian high schools. However, his efforts were socially situated, underpinned by a particular political agenda, and aimed at redefining Georgianness to create a kind of civil consciousness that a modern democratic state requires as a basis of its functioning.

After the interview, I suggested organizing a joint discussion on “history and memory” at the university where I had ties at the time. He agreed, but he anticipated something I did not—a controversial dispute. Janashia was more aware, possibly due to his somewhat unpleasant experiences, that history textbooks could become arenas of dispute and the source of public anxiety. His projects and his own legitimacy were questioned not only by historians of different generations and scholarly affiliation, but even by the leaders of Georgian Orthodox Church. During the seminar at the Georgian University, when Tavadze exclaimed “Who gave you the
right?" objecting to “someone else” having a “monopoly …over what kind of collective memories will be instilled” he was voicing a prevalent sentiment of the discourse of the intelligentsia that someone might be trying to annihilate Georgiannes by tampering with national memories.

Janashia had a presentation prepared for such occasions to explain the ideas behind the history curriculum reform, its intended goals and projected outcomes. The first couple of slides were headlined - “imaginaries about Georgia” and included:

1- Georgians have always lived on Georgian territory
2- Georgians have always been surrounded by enemies
3- Georgians have always had a peaceful nature [this, for instance, included “Georgians have respected other cultures” or “helped their neighbors”]
4- Relations with external powers have always been dangerous
5- Georgian statehood is a natural phenomenon
6- The source of Georgians’ failure is mostly in Georgia (this included poor rulers as well as internal collaborationism)

Figure 3.1: Slide 2
“Imaginaries about Georgia - 2” from Simon Janashia’s slideshow presentation

Red section displays the list of enemies: Urartu, Scythians, Greeks, Iran, Rome, Byzantine, Arabs, Selchuks, Mongols, Turks, North-Caucasians, Russia

(with the permission of Janashia)
These imaginaries are derivatives of the memory paradigm that I have discussed in the previous chapter and represent examples of what I refer to as *memory maxims*. We can see that a number of the points made by Janashia can be mapped on the basic *motifs* that I have outlined earlier. But the question is why these memory images were important for Janashia and for what purposes he questioned or problematized them? On the one hand, displaying them had no informative value for any individual present in the audience that day. As members of a “mnemonic community” (Zerubavel, 2004) any Georgian listening to his presentation was already a bearer of this knowledge. Usually these memory maxims operate as authoritative voices that underpin any communicative encounter whether implicitly or explicitly when “history” is a subject of discussion and becomes instrumental in “effort after meaning” (Bartlett, 1995) for making sense not only of past but of present and future as well.

By linking these memory maxims with the “problematics” of the old history curriculum, Janashia pointed out that history teaching was “mono perspective, non-inclusive”; it promoted “xenophobia, ethnocentrism, narcissism” and was based on “mythologizing history” that further reinforced “internalization of victimhood” and a diminishment of the role of an individual. His vocabulary was clearly informed by scholarly literature on collective memory. But his criticism like that of many others among the new generation of western educated intellectuals (see following sections) was motivated by his socio-political concerns as a citizen of Georgia. Such imaginaries, Janashia noted resulted in a lack of social institutions and deficiency of loyalty toward the state.

The new history curriculum had to accommodate the same principles that general education reform sought to follow. It was aimed at learning outcomes categorized in three clusters: general skills, specific skills, and values. In his closing remarks on a general conception
of history instruction, Simon Janashia displayed these latter - ‘values’ (“girebulebebi” Georgian) that he thought students should be taught at school. There were eight points. Respect of human values and rights, empathy and care, and love of homeland were the top three items on the list.

It was at this point of Janashia’s presentation that Tavadze erupted in criticism. It was the order in which “values” were displayed that for Tavadze epitomized what “the state project” was all about: “This is exactly what I am saying…” he exclaimed. “How can you have ‘love of homeland’ in third place?…So what does that mean?… We are getting rid of patriotism now?” Tavadze’s astonishment epitomized what his logic was all about, something that was not just about history teaching—be it for him, Janashia, or the state for that matter.

This ethnographic vignette provides an entry into memory’s discursive terrain and political landscape within which the debate took place in Georgia. The exchange between Tavadze and Janashia reflects Bakhtin’s hidden dialogicality and implies that statements made that day were addressed not only to the specific interlocutors present at the time, but were overlain with chain of texts as a part of a “generalized collective dialogue” (Wertsch, 2005). In
particular, they were constructed as a response to another “chain of texts” circulating within the community. The logic and the arguments on both sides were mediated by cultural frames that make things thinkable in a certain way, and the hidden dialogue of this kind bears a relationship not only to the specific subject matter under discussion, but indexes larger frames of cultural cognition. These frames are linguistically and semantically embedded formulations for conceiving Georgian history, politics and more importantly the notions of Georgianness, part of which is what earlier I have referred to as memory maxims.

As such, the theme of this debate goes beyond the concerns of history teaching narrowly construed. It has to do with a number of other issues, including conceptions of future citizenship, democracy, Georgian statehood, and above all how knowledge and collective memory of what it means to be a Georgian reflect people’s imaginaries of the country’s changing future. Situating this debate in a broader context of transformation is important for understanding part of the hidden dialogicality.

Soon after gaining power as a result of the “Rose Revolution” in 2003, the new “western oriented” government of Georgia embarked on educational reform intended not only to modernize and enhance the educational system, but also to eliminate structural remnants of the Soviet and post-Soviet system. In an attempt to reverse seventy years of isolation Georgia’s new elite had appropriated the notion of “modernization” as a principal instrument for ideological detachment from the Soviet past, but had cast this goal not in terms of western “universalizing forms” (Chakrabarty, 2002) but posed it as Georgia’s authentic path of

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34 The reform first and foremost was intended to fundamentally transform entrance examinations for higher education. This involved the standardization of tests and required applying changes in exam subjects and the way tests were conducted.
development toward “regaining its place in Europe” (Weathley, 2005, p.37).

Of the many radical reforms undertaken by the government few have sparked as much conflict and heated argument in the society as educational reform. Georgia’s Ministry of Education and Science (MES) collaborated with several international agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to draft a law to shift to a decentralized system but at the same time develop centralized mechanism for accreditation.

While reforming and modernizing education in general was part of the wider geopolitical agenda to improve the system and appropriate western standards, changes specifically in the history curriculum were directed at re-modeling the national cosmology and realigning symbolic categories. At least that is how Janashia envisioned reconfiguring Georgian citizenship. By recasting or questioning fixed imaginaries about the past (the ones he outlined in his presentation) he sought to re-orient someone like Tavadze in his construal of both Georgia and its relationship to the external world.

As Janashia’s presentation implied, certain formulations of the past breed imaginaries on the essential character of Georgians and their relationship to the external world. His aim was not so much to problematize history as it was, but to point to the shortcomings of certain modes of representations. His argument concerned what Maurice Halbwachs calls “Collective frameworks of memory […] currents of thought and experience within which we recover our past […]” (1950, p.64). Collective frameworks operate as social matrixes into which cultural, social, and political meanings are woven. As such, they do much more than recover the past; they mediate collective imaginaries of the future and quite frequently shape how individuals respond to ongoing events. Inversely, it was exactly these “currents of thought” and modes of perceiving
external world that sustained Tavadze’s fears of “uprooting patriotism”. His sense of threat, that a new western-oriented state was aligned with alien “global” forces and that novices in education were endangering Georgianness were rooted in the very imaginaries Janashia’s presentation displayed; namely that “Georgians have always been surrounded by enemies” or that “relations with external powers had always been dangerous.” These memory maxims served him as authoritative voices that underpinned criticism and suspicion toward state’s modernizing and Europeanizing projects. The photograph below (Figure 3.3.) of a poster is just another example of the culturally and historically shaped significance ascribed to the knowledge and education as a shielding mechanism against the fear of cultural annihilation.

This is why Janashia’s effort to dismantle such modes of representing the past were aimed at disempowering “faulty” or “idealized” notions on Georgianness and recharting the world order in such a way that the “Europeanization” is no longer equated with “uprooting patriotism.” Although he acted as an agent of state, Janashia’s vision and agency were shaped by his extended competency in academic discourse. For him, it was not only a matter of how mistaken historical imaginaries mis-serve state interests, but how they reinforce the malfunctioning of civil society by inhibiting the process of forming critically thinking, autonomous individual agents. As he noted during the interview, his goal was not to impose an alternative memory narrative, but to introduce new textbooks with multivocal historical sources. In such an effort part of the challenge is to develop the capacity to reflect on the underlying assumptions and voices in the hidden dialogue that shape the debate in the first place. In short, Janashia was implicitly convinced that alternative mnemonic frameworks would emerge as a result of students’ engagement with such multivocal, de-centered historical sources.

In fact Janashia and Tavadze may not have been as far apart as they seemed. Perhaps
without conscious awareness they both agreed on at least on two points: a) historical memories have a special role in forming citizenship, and because of that b) ‘right’ memories can salvage Georgia’s future and furthermore, help it overcome existing or anticipating political and cultural threats. In that they shared common ground. What they didn’t share was how they defined the threat.

For Tavadze both the larger context of transforming and “tampering” with “historical memories” signaled a threatening “experiment” conceived and orchestrated from beyond the boundaries of Georgia. His antagonism toward Janashia and his project was sustained by a memory paradigm that allowed him to frame the “West”, “modernity” or “Europeanization” as well as all forms of “tampering” with Georgian cultural values as just another attempt of a new enemy to eradicate Georgian culture and nationhood. In his eyes Janashia represented a collaborator aiding the alien force, examples of which populate Georgian historical narratives.

Figure 3.3. The poster in the hallway of a provincial public school, in Kakheti (eastern Georgia) reads a quote from a famous Georgian writer and poet Vaja-Pshavela (1861-1915): “Knowledge is a stronghold erected in fear of an enemy” (photo taken by author)
His sentiments spoke to more widespread public anxieties over the projects of the Ministry of Education. Part of the criticism was based on fears of upsetting the pre-existing order that would render much of the Soviet-trained generation of the intelligentsia disempowered and detached from the new “modernized” system\(^{35}\). Public apprehension and mistrust toward these projects were articulated not in terms of power contests, but in terms of the threat that changes in the education system presents to the cultural values. Changes in education alarmed part of the public to such an extent that a whole genre of conspiracy theories surfaced. There were suspicions for instance, that the Minister of Education was a co-conspirator with alien forces (e.g. Free Masons) who were intent on annihilating cultural uniqueness. Some of these conspiracy theories exemplified what Harry West and Todd Sanders (2003) call “occult cosmologies”—the belief that expresses “profound suspicions of power”, the power that is concealed from the view of a common citizen but orchestrates the entirety of world processes (p. 7). Georgia’s new pro-western government evoked suspicions in part of the public in the form of the belief that it operated from beyond national boundaries and was appointed by a “global power”.

Tavadze’s choice of word “experiment” had this hidden reference to other voices and pre-existing utterances, that something much more threatening than reforming history textbooks was taking place, orchestrated not by a government with national interests, but by a hidden power. This is why Tavadze exclaimed that educational reform that tampers with memory is aimed at eradicating patriotism and raising “global citizens”. He saw the threat in Janashia’s project emanating as if from this “global power”.

\(^{35}\) Tamta Khalvashi’s work in progress offers an extensive and insightful analysis of how Georgian intelligentsia enacts its role in public space where fears and worries serve them as emotional capital for self-definition (upcoming dissertation project “Feeling Like a Nation,” University of Copenhagen, Denmark)
This episode provides an entry point for the remaining discussion, focusing mainly on two conceptual issues. First, I address how emic notions of “historical memory” empower certain moralizing perspectives in disputes about the nation’s present and future, where contestation of authority and power is inevitable. I discuss the “value of historical memory” not so much as an analytical assertion, but engage it as a culturally meaningful category that reinforces a certain discursive genre. Second, I trace this moral authority to the mode of historical representation that sustains certain imaginaries about the cosmological order. This links back to the discussion on the paradigmatic elements involved in conceptions of the past that I claim frame forms of engagement with memory.

3.3. “Historical Memory”: A Looking Glass

The moralizing impulse of “the value of remembering” can enter different discursive arenas. But it is most pervasive in the contestation of ownership of historical knowledge production, what Tavadze referred to as “rights on history”. This is so because it underlies talk about the future of nationhood and forms of citizenship. The letter written in 2008 by a group of Georgian historians addressed to Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili (and number of other state officials including the Head of the Parliament David Bakradze, Prime Minister Grigol Mgaloblishvili and Minister of Science and Education Ghia Nodia) is a good demonstration of this. While their statement expressed concerns with history teaching in Georgian schools, specifically with new curriculum policies and the decentralization of history textbook production, it also reminded Georgia’s officials of the importance of “Georgian history” in
The role and significance of Georgia’s history are utterly exceptional for raising future generations with national spirit (erovnuli suliskveteba) and high civil consciousness [especially] today, in the context of extremely painful events, for every Georgian citizen […] It is essential for the improvement of the situation that a new state program of history teaching be created… We believe that our initiative will promote building a civil, legal, democratic, morally elevated Georgian society that is founded on historical memory…

Written only few months after the Russian-Georgian war over the secessionist region of South Ossetia (or as Georgians prefer to refer to it “Samachablo” - land of Machabeli aristocratic lineage) in August of 2008, the historians evoked these “extremely painful events” as circumstances elevating the importance of historical memories.

In general they argued for the increased role of history in all education spheres and for “professional historians” to be included in state projects concerning history teaching. But more specifically, this group seemed to have been unsettled by losing its grip on what in Tavadze’s words were “rights on what kind of collective memories will be instilled”. In light of this, they proposed to form an official commission that would oversee all textbooks and policies in the history curriculum. One of the recommendations listed in the statement, pointed out that “it is necessary that authors of Georgia’s history textbooks are professional historians and not representatives of adjacent disciplines as is now the case”, while another asserted that “it is unacceptable that the selection of problematics in current textbooks is entirely dependent on the desires of its authors. It should be mandatory that the above commission work out the unification of [historical] problematics”.

Hence while the state pursued somewhat decentralized politics with regards to history textbooks, historians of the sort Tavadze represented deemed such an approach unacceptable. Namely they objected to the idea that history textbooks could be written by any group of authors
and that high school teachers had the freedom to choose among several suggested course material for class instruction. Most importantly they criticized the established practice (in the new history textbooks) of “replacing Georgia’s history with a chrestomathy of Georgian history”. What seemed to be at stake was a certain framework for envisioning the past, since a multivocal text such as a “chrestomathy” blurred the contours of a coherent narrative of the past that had been the focus of all previous textbooks. [Figure 3 illustrates the difference in textual layout between old and new textbooks] It was in light of such concerns that historians who had been trained in the Soviet era argued for the “unification of historical problematics,” which implied a fixed set of themes that should be explored in Georgia’s past.

The discussion in Georgia on the importance of history for preserving “national spirit”, for

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36 The process was coordinated by the National Center Simon Janashia was heading. The center would make a call for certain textbooks to be written, it would then consider all applications and approve of several textbooks to be admissible for school instruction. As Janashia explained during the interview, he was trying to promote a liberal market approach and was convinced that competitive market would yield better product than if the state were more narrow in its focus. But to be sure, state did provide certain instructions on the format of history textbooks and in that its main focus was that new textbooks should combine multiple historical sources, instead of conveying a coherent narrative-text, the goal was to give a picture of a multiethnic and religiously diverse Georgia and include analytic tasks: “students should learn to work on historical sources and make their own sense of what was happening” Janashia explained to me during the interview.
instilling cultural values in future generations and for solving challenges of the present is not a phenomenon invented in post Soviet or even Soviet Georgia. In fact, many of the current debates reflect a 19th century intellectual tradition. Certainly, under Tsarist Russia, Georgian society faced challenges of an essentially different nature, but the ways of approaching national “grievances” reveal a certain historical continuity. Ilia Chavchavadze Georgia’s most renowned and venerated public figure, a writer, poet, journalist, and lawyer who spearheaded the national movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, wrote:

We have said more than once that a nation’s deterioration, decay and erosion begin when it forgets its history, when it forfeits remembrance of its past, of its former life … The past is a foundation of the present, as present is of the future…Many nations did not have any past at all, did not have history, that is, the kind of conscious life that usually expresses spiritual and physical identity of a collectivity, its gravity (Geo: miziduloba - attraction/ gravity) its point and principle of existence, its sacredness, that which harvests for its time and at the same time seeds the future… [A nation] that had history but has forgotten it …does not have strong foundation to struggle for existence either, because what it was—it has forgotten, therefore, does not it know what it is. It does not know how to strengthen itself, what to sacrifice itself for, what to stand up for and what not.

Our nation has lived for two thousand years with historical life. [Our history] has thrown many strong and many futile rocks in the bedrock of our present that has been established for erecting our future. Evidence of this is in front of our eyes. What could have saved this tiny group of people for these two thousand years amongst these great restless enemies? Why and how would greediness of foreign tribes yield to us this beautiful oasis that is called Georgia, if our past had not laid a strong bedrock as the foundation of our life. This is the case on the one hand, and on the other, what would degrade us so mercilessly compared to other counties either in education or in wealth if it had not been for our history to have thrown few crumbly rocks in our foundation?

What is the strength of our life and what is weakness and futility - only history can explain and translate to us, and if we forget it, then we have forgotten the origin of our life, its root and its foundation, and if that happens, then what are we to base our present and future on?

Apart from all this, we have said many times and we will repeat once again, that history is a great temple, where a liturgy for the common soul of the nation is held and where the nation

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37 Chavchavadze’s use of the “past” and “history” is obscuring, because on the one hand he points to the significance of remembrance of a nation’s “former life” but at the same time he deploys a poetic speech genre to speak of “the past” as something concrete that has an agency of its own and “can throw crumbly rocks” (i.e. nation’s weakness) or “lay strong bedrock” (i.e. strengths to defeat enemies and preserve the country) for the Georgian nationhood. These phrases make no sense unless viewed as mythic and metaphoric expressions that use the “past” not as a temporal dimension of the nation, but almost as a mythic creature that determined nationhood, its strengths and its weaknesses.
has erected sacred icons of its great and great-natured men and inscribed on it the story of their great deeds, a kind of will to its descendants. When a nation remembers this liturgy of its common soul, those great-natured men and stories of great deeds, it is revamped, encouraged and inspirted and is self-assured everywhere in joy or sorrow… [This nation] fights steadily, embraced with an example of its ancestors and their will, and only such a relentless fighter gets to keep a playground to itself.

Written in 1888, Chavchavadze’s words have as much significance and symbolic value in Georgia’s contemporary imaginaries as ever, and this publication has probably played the most crucial role in the sacralization of history and memory in Georgian nationalist consciousness. One hundred and twenty years after Chavchavadze wrote “Nation and History”, professional historians addressing the government of independent Georgia convey similar sentiment in asserting the value of memory for raising future generations. Chavchavadze’s conviction that history reveals to its people who they are is an encryption in Georgia’s modern nationalist consciousness. The belief that the past is the only true mirror for reflecting the true image of Georgianness, because “only history can explain and translate” Georgia’s strengths and weaknesses lies at the heart of the social processes that this study investigates. But apart from this, clues are ingrained in this text about the principal notions of Georgia’s past and Georgians’ nature that are operative in the present context. Several key elements in Chavchavadze’s text can be mapped onto basic thematic motifs of memory paradigm that I have outlined in the previous chapter. The following key themes can be extracted from Chavchavadze’s text that shape the contours of modern Georgian historical and national consciousness:

- Survival in the face of countless invasions “amongst these great restless enemies”.

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38 This text “Nation and History” along with other literary works and poems of Chavchavadze is part of the school curriculum. We will see in the next chapter the imprint of Chavchavadze’s authority on students’ imaginaries and the ways in which his words are deployed as authoritative utterances.

39 His use of proximal demonstrative pronouns such as “these enemies” may suggest that he addresses Georgians as a
- Because of virtues that Georgians possess (“strong bedrock in the foundation of our life”) they have been able to endure hard times and survive as a nation (“What would have saved this tiny group of people for these two thousand years”)

- But it is because of their weaknesses that Georgians occasionally failed in other respects (“what would degrade us so mercilessly compared to other countries either in education or in wealth if it had not been for our history to have thrown few crumbly rocks in our foundation”)

What memory can accomplish, in Chavchavadze’s words is to explain both its strength and its grave weaknesses, while memories of its exemplary heroes can “revamp, encourage and inspirit” a nation to “fight steadily”.

Chavchavadze wrote this letter with an understanding that Georgian territories were and had been inhabited by ethnically and religiously diverse groups and that a modern national consciousness could not depend on markers of Georgianness that harnessed ethnocentrism and religious exclusivity if his project of modern Georgian state was to succeed at all. A shared past was what he conceived as a common symbolic terrain, as a unique ground of national consciousness. In public memory Chavchavadze is credited as being one of the most zealous fighters for Georgia’s independence from Russia, but in reality he advocated the idea that Georgia had to evolve first as an autonomous society, based on civil institutions and modern national consciousness and only once it accomplishes these goals should it break away from the Russian Empire. Most of his projects emanated from this idea. Chavchavadze was part of the particular mnemonic community (Wertsch 2002) in which memories of Georgia’s struggle and survival against “great restless enemies” are already shared. But if not in Chavchavadze’s times, certainly in today’s Georgia the memory narrative of struggle and survival in the face of continuous attacks and foreign invasions is at the heart of national imaginaries.
nucleus of young Georgian nobility reinventing itself as a national intelligentsia (Reisner, 2009; Manning 2004, 2011) Known as “Tergdaleulebi” (literally those who drank river Terek⁴⁰) due to their Russian based education, they were inspired by contemporary liberal movements in Europe.

In the spirit of the modern ideas with which Chavchavadze was familiarized during his education in Russia, he spearheaded countless public projects. He was the founder of the Society for Spreading Literacy Among Georgians, "The Bank of the Nobility", "The Historical-Ethnographica l Society of Georgia", to list just the few.⁴¹

Some nine years after publishing “Nation and History” (Georgian: eri da istoria) on New Year’s Eve 1897 Chavchavadze wrote an open letter with a somewhat different message. This letter addressed the Georgian public in a voice of reprehension and criticism. What is interesting here for our present purposes is how Chavchavadze attempted to ignite his public by recourse to the past as an exemplary model. The title of this later piece is presented in the form of a rhetorical question: What can I say to you? What can I cheer you up with? (Georgian: ra gitxrat? rit gagaxaro?) with a regretful undertone that there is nothing in Georgia’s state of life to be cheerful about.

All that has happened to us, all those enemies that have fallen upon us, all the ordeal, bloodshed…we have endured all…[We have] preserved ourselves, kept our country, our land. Langtemurs (Tamerlane) bathed us in our own blood. Still we survived and revived. Shah-Abbazs (he uses the plural here) made us tear up our own children with our

⁴⁰ The Terek River runs through Georgian and Russia to the Caspian Sea. Anyone traveling from Russia to Georgian (or vice a versa) through Greater Caucasian Mountain had to cross river Terek. Tergdaleulebi was the term devised by Georgia’s older generation of aristocratic elite with conservative beliefs to refer to new generation of Russian educated intellectuals.

⁴¹ In his analysis of one of the most significant literary texts by Ilia Chavchavadze, Paul Manning argues that during his studies in Russia, Chavchavadze was disenchanted with the promise of Russian civilization and came back to rediscover authentic culture. This is possibly so, because Chavchavadze saw the potential of “authentic culture” as a powerful medium for “imagining national community” and certainly “history” for him was important for reigniting the interest in “authentic culture” (Anderson, 1986)

⁴² Google search renders approximately 10000 results for this title and in recent years and months a number of journalists, publicists, bloggers, and others have referred to it to claim that nothing has changed in over 100 years. I found an article written by a 21 year old blogger who discusses this text in length to argue that Georgians are failing in much the same ways that Chavchavadze has pointed out here.
teeth, and still we recovered, came back to our senses. Agha-Mohammad-Khans (plural again) toppled us, exterminated, slaughtered us, and still we stood up on our feet...straightened ourselves up. We endured Greece, Rome, Mongols, Arabs, Ottoman-Turks, Persians, pious and impious and the flag of Georgianness torn with spear, arrow and bullet, soaked in our blood, but we kept it in our hands, did not let anyone take it away...Would it not be a shame for this flag to be eaten by a moth, or torn by a mouse!...the present lingers with this possibility....What can I say to you? What can I cheer you up with?

If in “Nation and History” Ilia proclaimed the past to be the mirror of the nation’s virtues and faults, here he employs the past - this narrative of struggle and survival - to warn his compatriots that what “an armed enemy could not seize from us...[One] who comes with labor and diligence, knowledge and method will ... abolish our name, exterminate us...and will occupy our country as it would an ownerless church.”

Chavchavadze’s publications are voluminous and apart from his literary activities as a poet and a writer he published countless articles commenting on cultural, social, political, and economic problems (For some very insightful analysis of Chavchavadze’s texts and 19th century publications see Paul Manning, Strangers in a Strange Land). But here I chose to focus on two pieces as paradigmatic texts that best exemplify the ways in which past is engaged in Chavchavadze’s rhetoric, and also because these two are possibly among the most influential, more memorized, and quoted texts from his writings (apart from his prose). Of these two, the first is commonly referenced as a source of authoritative quotes when the value of historical memory is invoked, while the second can be traced in discursive settings where “Georgianness” is problematized. Each provides the underpinnings for one of two distinct discursive voices on Georgianness.

These founding texts provide an entry point for understanding several things. First, Chavchavadze’s address paints the contours of Georgia’s dominant memory narrative; second it
functions as a canonical text for notions about the importance of the past (that we see repeated in historians’ statement above and will see play out in chapter 4 again in students’ essays) and the ways in which memory rhetoric can be employed as both a language of self-conception and self-reflection. More importantly, Chavchavadze’s texts introduce two distinct voices or modes of discourse on Georgianness, in a sense polarized voices that emerge out of the core of national consciousness—one self-idealizing and the other self-condemning. These two contradictory visions engender notions about Georgians’ dual nature, but they also represent two polarities in an endless dialectic of internal contestation over Georgian identity. Because these voices are at the core of historical consciousness they harness two modes of discourse both on Georgianness and on the Georgian past, with each having its own context and purpose of articulation.

Chavchavadze’s text might have paved the way for the tradition of appreciating memory and his words continue to be cited as a source of authority when claims are made on the basis of the indisputable value of memory for national identity. He grounded the symbolic plane of nationhood in a certain image of the past and provided the foundations for a discourse of two distinct voices for contemplating Georgian identity. He may not have invented this opposition, but his texts canonized it in the modern discursive traditions. The canonical authority of Chavchavadze’s discourse is transmitted by social means, and formal education in school is most crucial in this. In my conversations with Georgian students, many of them have maintained that two school subjects - Georgian language and literature and Georgian history play the greatest role in monumentalizing Chavchavadze, and chrystalizing historical imaginaries into the notions of national identity.
3.4. Conclusion

In the Georgian mnemonic community the discourse on “memory” is almost always saturated with claims about national identity and assertions about the nature of Georgianness. These discussions are inherently political. As Gillis argues identities and memories “have no existence beyond our politics, our social relationships, and our histories” (1994, p. 5 emphasis in the original). The need to stress the importance of memory and re-assure communities of the categories of selfhood usually arises with some kind of political and identity crisis. As Kansteiner points out “memory is valorized where identity is problematized” (2002, p 184) and in instances like these memory becomes both a tool and an object of power (Nora, 1996).

This points to certain forms of “presentism” guiding the recourse to memory—the idea that collectivities construe the past according to their current needs which is a topic widely discussed in memory studies (Mead 1929, Halbwachs 1981, Nora 1989, Assmann 1995). However, while acknowledging the role of present political needs in shaping representations of the past, understanding how memory functions also requires an appreciation of discursive traditions and established linguistic forms that remain stable, even with strong ideological shifts. While my main focus is on the current memory debate and how it relates to earlier discursive traditions, the following chapter further advances the claim on the persistence of certain linguistic forms that sustain historical conceptions.
CHAPTER 4: “THINGS CODED IN OUR GENETIC MEMORY”

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The title of this chapter is a quote from an essay written by a Georgian high school student in a writing competition in March 2011 at the Free University in Tbilisi. In her essay, Maka an 18-year-old high school student from Tbilisi wrote, “culture and traditions ... are something coded in our genetic memory... Traditions are reflection of our history...” Another Georgian student used similar wording and made a point that this “code” is what sets Georgia apart from the rest of the world:

Tradition ... is not simply a word, it is a national code embedded in us from birth that bestows individuality and differentiates us from others. By modernization this individuality is lost, ...Furthermore, traditions can be a good precondition for business advancement, aren’t tourists amazingly attracted to cultural diversity?!”

This short passage exemplifies the extent to which essentialist notions on Georgian culture and Georgian identity are assumed to mark Georgia off from the rest of the world. Paradoxically, it also demonstrates how these forms of self-conception are entertained within the context of Georgia’s evolving development projects and are attached to the desires to be integrated into the international space.

More than 200 young Georgians from about 15 cities and towns across the country participated in the 2011 competition geared toward winning a Free University scholarship. Throughout the contest, conducted on the two sites simultaneously (at the Free University’s Tbilisi campus and in Kutaisi (city in the western Georgia) – students sat in several large
auditoriums and were given two hours to answer the question; the question that the Free University faculty determined an hour prior to the competition (see section 4.2. on how the faculty deliberated). The question they had to address juxtaposed tradition and modernity in the context of the society’s progress. In their attempt to formulate a persuasive argument, the overwhelming majority of the students resorted to the symbolic domain of the past, reiterated historical narrative and imposed judgments that stemmed from it (see chapter 2). This chapter is based on the analysis of these 204 essays.

Although, it is not particularly surprising that the term “tradition” prompted young Georgians’ to enter the “semiosphere” of the past (Lotman 1990), there are several unique aspects in these texts that help me further my argument on Georgian memory and its role in public discourse as a special speech genre. What is of special interest here is the ways in which students’ arguments were socioculturally situated and relied on a cultural “tool-kit” (Wertsch 2002) to sustain and substantiate their claims. Ethnographically these essays are important as sites where various critical discourses come to light; more so, because the topic of “tradition and modernity” frames Georgia’s geopolitical aspirations and dialogizes prevalent critical debates on Georgia’s past and its future.

These essays are critically positioned at the intersection of: a) social institutions such as schools that instill cultural knowledge, b) political conditions that act upon individual worldviews and practices, and c) powerful ideological forces that shape the public sphere. As such they animate the voices of young Georgians as they produce their own constellations and transliterations of the voices that emerge out of these social domains.

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43 I am grateful to the Free University administration, especially Giorgi Meladze and Aleko Shelia for not only allowing me to use the essays for my dissertation project, but for putting me in charge of the organizational work for the writing contest in “independent reasoning”. Such close involvement gave me an opportunity to observe the entire process and look closely into how academic faculty deliberated on the essay topic. To retain the anonymity of the contestants, when quoting the essay I use pseudonyms throughout this chapter.
As these contemporary issues come into focus, students dwelling upon society’s progress through the lens of Georgia’s absolute and ideal future that has no existence without the image of an absolute and ideal past. This is why most students invested their arguments in the idiom of memory as a distinct form of speech genre that builds upon historical narratives and expresses meaning through code-words that hint toward shared memory maxims. Below is figure with a schematic formulation of these maxims:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Enemy} &= \text{endangers polity} + \text{threatens culture}[	ext{Christianity/Language/spirituality/traditions/national identity}] \\
\text{Georgians} &= \text{fight fearlessly/resist heroically/always preserve culture}[	ext{Christianity/language/spirituality/traditions/national identity}]/\text{are always united}[\text{few exceptions: traitors/collaborators}] \\
\end{align*}\]

I advance the claim that memory is operative on a discursive level as a structuring force and a sense-making mechanism by showing how students referenced the memory maxims (sometimes directly, sometimes implicitly) to impose truth judgments that are embedded in these symbolic forms. In other words, these memory symbols functioned as what Bakhtin calls an “authoritative utterance” or “authoritative discourse”:

In each epoch, in each social circle, in each small world of family, friends, acquaintances, and comrades in which a human being grows and lives, there are always authoritative utterances that set the tone – artistic, scientific, and journalistic works on which one relies, to which one refers, which are cited, imitated, and followed. In each epoch, in all areas of life and activity, there are particular traditions that are expressed and retained in verbal vestments: in written works, in utterances, in sayings, and so forth. There are always some verbally expressed leading ideas of the ‘masters of thought’ of a given epoch, some basic tasks, slogans, and so forth. . . . This is why the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interactions with others’ individual utterances. This experience can be characterised to
some degree as the process of assimilation – more or less creative – of others’ words (and not the words of a language) (1986 pp. 88-89)

In the discourse on modernity and tradition the narrative of Georgia’s past (see chapter 2) serves as such a “master of thought” that “sets the tone” for the students’ mode of judgment and for re-voicing their individual perspectives. “Our past” becomes an “authoritative utterance” oftentimes appears in these texts in the form of a message within a message, what Roman Jakobson relying on Volosinov’s stylistic refers to as “reported speech” – “a speech within a speech” (1971, p 130). But unlike any form of reported speech in students’ texts Georgia’s narrative of the past is posited as what Victor Turner called a “dominant symbol” because the narrative (in many ways likened to the “milk tree” in Ndembu ritual) stands for a set of axiomatic values and carries a range of condensed meanings, anchoring a specific moral (or moralizing) framework (Turner, 1967).

In their essays the students sought to deploy the past as a rhetorical device that lends authority to their words and advance their arguments according to a cultural logic embedded in the modes of historical conception. These essays demonstrate how memory maxims open a discursive window and sustain argumentative logic in a speech act that appears to have no political agenda, but nevertheless enacts political thinking.

On the other hand, the students’ mode of reasoning (in the majority of the essays) presents a case of a discursive genre in which only one of two opposing memory voices is employed. Because students pursued their argument on the value of traditions, one of the dominant memory maxims they relied upon was how “Georgians have always struggled to preserve their nation and culture”. Thus for the purpose of their argument students engaged the voice of ‘self-idealization’ as a structuring element and steered clear of the self-critical element almost entirely.
This chapter conveys a multilayered and somewhat complex argument, both ethnographically and theoretically, first of all because these texts are themselves multilayered and multivalent. While I claim that the majority of the students relied on the same pool of cultural material and concentrate on the use of memory symbols, obviously there were diverse perspectives. More importantly the multivoiced and dialogic nature of these texts implies that a wide spectrum of social issues and public discourses come in contact with students’ discussions. As such, one can take different angles in analyzing them and focus on any one of a number of important issues such as religious beliefs, traditional outlooks, political imaginaries, understanding of modernity, global politics and so forth.

In this chapter I orient the analysis of the texts to strengthen my claim that “memory” (and the symbolic forms outlined in previous chapters) functions as an authoritative idiom that is culturally tied to a set of discursive themes. Here for instance, the term “tradition” inevitably triggers cognitive frames that enable this idiom as a dominant form of expression. The only cases where the memory idiom was not employed were a few essays where authors chose to address the question by employing an example other than Georgia.

“Any utterance,” wrote Bakhtin, “is a link in the chain of speech communication” (1986, p. 99). In spoken as well as in written texts utterances animate discursive events and social settings that are not necessarily given in an immediate speech situation, but address voices that may be both spatially and temporally distant. Bakhtin’s theory of the utterance provides a useful framework for the analysis of the texts I undertake. His conceptual vocabulary points to the dialogic orientation, multivoicedness, and heteroglossic nature of words (texts and speech) and it frames my analysis below. Since “the living utterance [takes] meaning and shape at a particular historical moment, in a socially specific environment” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 274) I enter discussion
first by introducing the specific setting in which these texts were created and later turn to a more complete outline of theoretical framework, followed by the analysis of the essays.

I begin by introducing a vignette that described how the topic of the writing competition was selected. This episode, on the one hand, ties the writing contest to the discursive landscape on the “Georgian mentality”, “Georgian memory” and broader context of the nation’s sociopolitical challenges. On the other hand it unveils how the intellectual elite construes the image of the Georgian public as its internal alterity and inflects this image into the notions of stereotypical “mentality” that is different from its own patterns of thinking. This is especially relevant when considering the Free University textbook project (discussed in subsequent chapters), because it evolves out of similar concerns for “Georgian mentality” and orients its discourse against the models of thought on Georgia’s past and Georgian identity that are at play in students’ essays.

4.2. “GEORGIAN MENTALITY” AND INDEPENDENT REASONING

Sofio was a high school graduate from Chiatura in the western region of Georgia. I met her in January of 2011 during the Free University information and recruitment campaign. She was preparing for the national exams and came to Free University to attend the short introductory program for prospective students. I remembered her among several hundred of her peers, because I did not know of many people from Chiatura who had applied to Free University. So I recognized her when we met again in March of 2011. That day, she had taken a three-hour trip to the capital of the country to participate in an essay contest organized by Free University. Roughly five hundred students competed for a chance to win one of the five university
scholarships to study at the country’s top ranked and one of the most expensive undergraduate programs.

On that chilly March day, while Sofio was on her way from Chiatura to Tbilisi, I sat at a table with a small group of Free University professors, who were deliberating on the topic of an essay contest in “independent reasoning”. Among them were a biologist, a philosopher, a classicist, a psychologist, a historian, a scholar of Indian literature and a mathematician; the group was diverse and so was their understanding of how one should formulate a question prompting students to “reason independently”. Topics varied, ranging from a question Aristotle posed to some legislation discussed in the Georgian Parliament. Members of the group disagreed on many things: “Can we give a question about Don Quixote if not everyone has read it?” “Will they be able to address a question on democracy?” “The question should not be too complicated” “No questions about religion, please, or we will drive them into a tough spot” and so forth, but they all agreed on some principle issues:

(Tamuna): We want them to think beyond pregiven frames, to overcome cliches...

(Leri): Right, they should be able to formulate arguments and reason logically toward their conclusions as opposed to merely repeating what they hear in public discourse or what their school teachers have had them memorize.

Most of the deliberation was couched in terms of the ability to predict what and how students would write and then deciding based on that prediction whether students should or should not be led to a certain type of reasoning, as well as how possible it would be to objectively evaluate these essays depending on the subject matter of the topic. This deliberation conceived of students’ conceptual horizons and approached the subject of discussion (essay topic) through a triangular lens. It was triangular because professors predicted an outcome (what the essays would be like) through the lens of their preconceived subjects (what students are like)
which in turn was overlain by their desire to act upon such subjects (how do we want them write). When it came to discussing the essay question on “tradition and modernity”, concerns of this sort became even more salient and substantial.

Giorgi (a philosopher who was teaching several undergraduate courses): We don’t want them to write in terms of mythical notions they have of Georgia’s past.

Beno (a biologist): Well, Nutsa can tell us all about Georgian “national narratives”, how they sustain claims on “purity of Georgian traditions” and so forth, right Nutsa? ...This is the way they teach at Georgian schools!

This was a remark from a western educated scholar, internationally published biologist and possibly one of the most intelligent, insightful and immensely knowledgeable (in fields far beyond his profession) individuals I have known in my life. Beno like many other intellectuals in Georgia felt disquieted by the overwhelming patriotic discourse and nationalistic overtones in Georgian schools, especially with regards to history and the Georgian language curriculum.

The criticism of the school history curriculum by new western educated intellectuals is akin to what scholars of collective memory would concern themselves with when looking at history texts, but unlike them, Beno’s or Tamuna’s worries arise from culturally embedded and politically shaped motivations (Similar to those of Simon Janashia, discussed in chapter 3). Beno’s desire is for Georgians to develop civic consciousness, and engage critically with their own cultural prejudices in order to build a successful state with well functioning social institutions. He feels that the “mythologized” view of “Georgianess” and Georgia’s past is thwarting progress. Beno is just one among many Georgian intellectuals I have come across who would readily tell you the flaws of “Georgian mentality” and the ways in which Georgians’ “misconception” of their past is a source of these flaws. Thus, there was a degree of sarcasm
implicit in his mentioning of “pure traditions” and “national narrative” that indexed what might be called a “mainstream model” of the public with its “predictable” modes of thought.

Certainly, the perspectives and worldviews of these professors are culturally conditioned and socially embedded in their own right. Deliberation on the essay topic silently reflected discourses prevalent in some intellectual circles that critically engage such mainstream cultural models and modes of thought. When needed, these models can be communicated by mere hints or a sort of “code words” such as “pure Georgian culture” or “Georgian spirituality” (or “mother-history” mentioned in chapter 1 by the group working on the history textbook). This mode of cultural intersubjectivity produced a baseline of the discussion on the essay topic. But more importantly it yielded an image of the public with certain characteristics, modes of thought, and accompanying dispositions. With that image of the public in mind, the Free University Professors “knew” in advance how 90% of several hundred students would respond to a certain type of question. Familiarity with “cliches” or cultural “formulas” that are in the public space allowed them to predict the schooled and socially modeled mind-set of an “average” eighteen year old Georgian. Their deliberation, to borrow Bakhtin’s words, was “dialogized in the belief system” of this imagined public, oriented “toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world” of their internal alterity (1981, p 282, 283). Their aim was to single out applicants who would think beyond pre-formulated discursive frames, rely on “logics and reasoning”, in other words, discursive modes of thought.

After a couple of hours of deliberation they agreed on the final formulation of the question. The essay topic addressed tradition, modernity and progress of society. It simultaneously referenced current state projects of modernization, Georgia’s ambition to become a successful nation-state, as well as nationalist discourse on unadulterated Georgian traditions.
Such a formulation dialogized two anatognistic voices in the social milieu, but posed the question in such a way that did not necessitate polarization. Not everyone agreed with the choice initially but eventually everyone conceded that this might be a good way to see if students are capable of contemplating or even deconstructing these two concepts (tradition and modernity) by overcoming “Georgian cliches” about the purity of Georgian traditions, sanctity of culture and so forth, without taking either modernity or progress for granted.

Meanwhile Sofio rode her bus, possibly in a state of uncertain anticipation of her experience at Free University. A few hours later, in her essay Sofio (18 years old) would write the following:

Throughout the centuries, in people’s psychology certain rules, norms, are formed that they obediently abide by, and they perceive living by these norms to define their integrity/self-sufficiency as a nation. Indeed, certain types of traditions bestow individuality and mystery upon a nation, make it interesting/attractive to other nations, which in its own right shapes a thriving economy and tourism […] Were we not able to stand this many centuries, survive so many enemies?! And slowly, step-by-step we developed into a modern country. Traditions have not interfered with that. On the contrary they helped us become different from everyone else and exceptional. In fact, let us remember Greek colonization, about which an historian tells us that Greeks have spread their customs in all colonies, but were unable to do the same with us, because Colchian [early proto-Georgian tribes developed in Bronze Age] traditions were much stronger and firmer. But instead, it became possible for us to adopt some things from them that were unknown to us before. […]

After, few paragraphs on the importance of progress, on the capacity of a country to adopt to the rhythm of modern world, and on Japan44 as a successful example of how modernity and tradition can be reconciled resulting in a flourishing nation-state, Sofio concluded with the following lines:

44 A number of students used other countries as examples supporting their claims on tradition and modernity. There was an evident trend in this too. Nineteen students used Japan as an example of successful merging of traditions and modernity. Five students used example of Israel as a testament to the claim that a nation can exist without a political entity and will succeed if traditions are preserved. A few students also mentioned “Muslim countries” as an example of “bad traditions” that need to “modernized”.

98
In short, a nation needs to defend and maintain traditions in order to preserve individuality and self-sufficiency/integrity, but it needs to be reconciled with the modern and [that which can] give a nation attractiveness and mystery and not prevent progress [more precise or literal translation of the word she uses “tsin’svla” is “moving forward”] and development. A good example of that is our tradition of hospitality that enchants and attracts everyone around us, but certainly does not thwart our development.

Sofio’s position is exceptional in that she could readily admit to the possibility of Georgians having adopted something from the Greeks. Very few were willing to entertain this possibility. Later on in my fieldwork, for example, one of the students explained to me:

Every time we [in the classroom at school] would touch upon Greek colonization, the teacher would reiterate this over and over again - ‘Greeks couldn’t fool us, here they found themselves among people that were developed’, and then she would add that they were able to subdue everyone else.

Much of what students wrote was informed by, and relied on the material provided by the school curriculum of Georgian literature and history. Their writing was heavily shaped by competences acquired at school, by how they had learned to talk about certain themes, what their schoolteache explained and demanded of them. For instance, in students’ arguments one can encounter various formulations of an idea conveyed in the following passage:

A nation that forgets its past, history and national character does not have prospects for a great future... A nation’s past is the foundation on which its statehood should be built and which should define its bright and prosperous future. (Giorgi, 18, from Kutaisi)

Giorgi’s sentence is a rephrased quote from Chavchavadze’s text “Nation and History” which reads: “...a nation’s deterioration, decay and erosion begins when it forgets its history, when it forfeits remembrance of its past, of its former life … The past is a foundation of the

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45 Jane Kitaevich’s recent research explores historical narratives and memory discourse among Georgia’s school teachers (forthcoming paper “History that Splinters”). Her findings show a pattern very similar to what I discuss here.
present, as the present is of the future” (see chapter 3). Around half of all participants quoted Chavchavadze directly and roughly another 30% used a rephrased formulation of his words. Like Giorgi, they often did this without explicitly identifying the author of the quote. Here are some other examples that use Chavchavadze’s words as a kind of authoritative utterance to assert the value of traditions and remembering:

The nation’s spiritual downfall and physical failure was caused by forgetting traditions and by the desire to become a “modern society”. Everyone who moves toward a past-less future and as I. Chavchavadze said, who does not know “who is s/he, where it came from” will not know “where he is and where will he go” (Ika, 17)

A great Georgian writer has said that a nation’s degradation and spiritual failure begins when people forget their own history. History amounts to traditions and national culture, thus national culture needs to be cherished. New generations are raised on its basis which (new generation) create a new society... (Tina, 18)

Many students (some of which participated in this writing competition) in later conversations with me commented on how the school curriculum played a crucial role in forming the “cultural knowledge” that helped them formulate the arguments in the way they did. For instance, three years after writing her essay Sofio, who had become a Free University student, noted that the example of “Greek colonization” she used in her essay was “definitely a matter of the courses I was studying at the time. I don’t think I would have remembered it if I had to write this essay now”. Similarly, students were able to quote Chavchavadze by heart because they had to memorize it for Georgian language and literature classes.

Another student commenting on her own essay, said, “We learn most of that patriotic stuff from our Georgian language and literature teachers and when we prepare for national entrance exams”. Further discussions with the students regarding this “patriotic stuff” they learn at school revealed a great deal about the system within which young Georgians are socialized into forms of cultural knowledge, and their comments resonated with my own experience at a
Tbilisi high school. These reflections suggest that while social discourses, family discussions, popular media and other unofficial media play a significant role in socializing individuals into historical imaginaries, these essays suggest that the official schooling is the central mechanism for training individuals in how to master cultural knowledge and how to use cultural tools such as memory narratives. This observation reinforces the suggestion made by Ernest Gellner that official schooling plays a crucial role in forming national discourse and identity (1990).

Nevertheless, the operative field of the symbolic forms students draw upon in these essays is in no way limited to or bounded off by the student-teacher-school circuit. When Sofio wrote “Were not we able to stand this many centuries, survive this many enemies?!”, she posed a rhetorical question that demanded no answer or further explanation. In writing this, she was certain that it would not be just her Georgian or history teacher who would immediately understand what she was referring to. Her question indexes a memory narrative that in various forms and for alternate purposes is employed in political rhetoric, religious and other public discourses, colloquial conversations in the household kitchens, and even in short conversations with taxi drivers. The memory narrative of Georgia’s past is a pervasive instrument that shapes how people engage the symbolic field of the past and “Georgianness” as its central category to address current political and social contexts. What empowers their words is not the authority of their schoolteacher alone, but their reference to a wider and often more authoritative domain of collective memory.

4.3. THE “SCRIPTORS” AND THE MULTIVOCAL CONTEXT

In spite of diverse perspectives and stances toward “modernization and tradition”, the overwhelming majority of the students relied on the same pool of textual tools, symbolic terms,
authoritative voices, and emplotment strategies. This is what Wertsch refers to as the capacity to use “off the shelf [cultural] technology” in mediated action (2002). My analysis here focuses on the nature of the textual tools used in such speaking and thinking, on what students draw upon from what Frederick Barth calls “surfeit of cultural material” (1993 p 4) to carve out their arguments. This in turn provides insight into the spectrum of imaginaries on the Georgian past and how these images come in contact with contemporary discourses. For instance, Sofio’s argument follows two key discursive frameworks, both in turn from given socio-political discourses and both being invested in memory paradigm: a) traditions are important because they bestow individuality upon the nation (it is a selling point), and b) as distinguishing markers traditions have made Georgia firmer, more resistant to an enemies (it is a defense mechanism). The latter addresses the discursive circuit that embodies “semiosphere” (Lotman 1990) of Georgian memory (i.e., tradition as defense mechanism). Sofio’s rhetorical strategy builds on the authority of the voice extrapolated from this narrative; one that affirms that Georgia has endured multiple invasions throughout the centuries, starting with Greek efforts at colonization, and yet preserved its cultural uniqueness. She calls forth what is the very ethos of the nation. On the other hand, her argument also reflects another discursive genre encapsulating a modern model of Georgia, a model that has been forged by the state. So, I begin by situating the “modern model of Georgia” in the context of political and ideological forces that have acted on Georgia’s public sphere.

Beginning in 2003, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili’s administration capitalized mainly on two principal policy orientations: first, Georgia’s integration into Western alliances (EU and NATO) as a route to political security, and second, embracing foreign investment as an economic strategy. Such political and economic action-plans involved the advancement of
tourism as a main tactic for both exposure to a western audience and increasing the flow of foreign capital. State projects and rhetoric on tourism harnessed both the discourse of modernizing Georgia, which involves progress of the state; and one of a culturally rich Georgia with its history, culture, and captivating scenery and nature. This legitimized the state’s effort for internationalizing the domestic landscape, but also has brought in the subjectivized experience of Georgian culture under the “gaze” of the western public (Foucault, 1973).

However, the Georgian state has pursued this regime of “Europeanzation” and rapid modernization under continuous tension (though in some cases subterranean) with its major rival in power: the Georgian Orthodox Church. The church has acted (and still does) as the main locus of a strongly nationalist ideology, and in this it empowers the notion that a successful Georgian state cannot be realized beyond the boundaries of a particularly Georgian Christianity. To be sure, rather than loudly declaring these ideas and cursing the west openly, church leaders have circulated them in their congregations through the veiled discourse of pure Georgian culture vis-à-vis dangerous foreign ideas. This strategy involved not going against EU integration, something that in surveys over several years was unequivocally supported by over 70% of Georgians. Instead, the church has stressed the importance of “unadulterated culture” and harnessed skepticism toward the feasibility of Georgia’s European aspiration. So for instance, while Saakashvili often spoke of a multiethnic Georgia, one of religious diversity, and the “historically tolerant nature of Georgian people,” the church has often reiterated the importance of Orthodox Christianity in sustaining the Georgian state, culture and national identity. For the most part its promotion of animosity toward all forms of otherness, while not entirely hidden, was at least disguised in its insistent rhetoric about pure Georgian traditions and culture.
Given the context of these competing voices, Sofio’s tactic is an intelligent one; she appropriates both voices in her multivoiced text so as to capture both the narrative of the past and futuristic perspective on modern Georgia in a way that favors her point of view: “…certain types of traditions bestow individuality and mystery upon a nation, make it [a nation] interesting/attractive to other nations, which in its own right shapes a thriving economy and tourism.” Sofio mentions tourism not out of her own inventiveness, but because she knows the social weight given to that argument. Her tactic relies on forging linkages between what Thomas de Waal (2011) calls the “old model of Georgia” and the “new model of Georgia” and reconciles the two.

In looking at these texts, the notion of “user” and the practice of “using” based on “tactics of consumption” as outlined by Michel De Certeau seems especially apt. According to de Certeau’s definition in her “scriptual play” (p 135) Sofio, is not simply a “consumer” of a single ideological discourse, but performs as a “user” of several rhetorical genres “by poaching … on the property of others” (1984, p xii). Thus, her argumentative tactic is a form of “production, a poiēsis” (de Certeau, 1984 p xii, italics in the original). Such textual production is based on a “tactic” that:

Insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansion, and secure independence with respect to circumstances…because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time - it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized on the wing (p xix).

Indeed, throughout the essays collected for this study one can see various instances of how students’ tactics of argumentation depend on “seizing the opportunities”, on capturing and re-weaving socio-culturally pre-shaped and imposed discursive forms. Creators of such texts are what Roland Barthes (1977) calls “scriptors” whose power is in compiling pre-given texts in
somewhat new ways. They are producers of textual “bricolage” (de Certeau, 1984). From this perspective, understanding a text is only possible if we turn to discursive norms and conventions that underlie such scriptural performance.

4.4. MEMORY MAXIMS AND AUTHORITATIVE DISCOURSE

In this section, I discuss essays where students incorporate formulation of Georgia’s past as a point of departure for construing “authoritative discourse” (Bakhtin, 1986). These examples serve to a) reveal a set of essentialist notions about nationhood that can be attached to such a conception of the past, and b) vividly demonstrate the use of the moralizing impulse (White, 1981) embedded in the conception of Georgia’s past (see chapter 2). While these examples support my claims on the discursive function of memory maxims, in the following sections I engage in a large-scale analysis according to the dominant argumentative trends I found in them.

In the essays separate elements of the Georgian memory narrative appear in different forms and their analysis further reveals set of imagery attached to the Georgian past and the concept of Georgianness. Consider following example from one of the essays:

The history of our nation is an endless struggle for preserving the integrity of the nation. For almost twenty centuries our nation has been defending Christian belief with the spear…They fought with Iranians, Arabs, Turk-Seljuqs, Mongols, Kizilbashs, Russians...(Thea, from Tbilisi, 17)

Turk-Seljuqs (Georgian turk-selchukebi) refers to the Turkish tribes of the Great Seljuq Empire originating in 1073, a medieval Turko-Persian Muslim empire. Seljuq dynasty controlled the vast area stretching from Hindu Kush (central Afghanistan, northern Pakistan) to Anatolia (modern Turkey). Series of Turk-Seljuq invasions of Georgia beginning from late 11th century is known in Georgian historiography as the “Great Turkish Invasions” (Georgian didi turqoba).

Kizilbashs or Qizilbashs refers to variety of Shia militant groups that were established on the territory of Kurdistan and Anatolia in late 13th century. In this context Thea refers to the Kizilbashs that established Safavyd Dynasty that ruled Iran after the Muslim conquest of Persia, from early 16th century. In Georgian
In this formulation Thea renders Christianity into the dominant marker of Georgian culture and Georgianness. Thus the struggle for self-preservation becomes a struggle for “defending Christian belief”. It is noteworthy that at crucial points in her text Thea does not use the past tense (“the history of our nation is an endless struggle”). In so doing she tells us that it is not just about some events in the past, but that this cycle of invasions is more of a sealed fate that continues to play out in the present. Furthermore her use of ellipsis makes her statement open-ended, implying that the list is incomplete. Thea might have left out a few of Georgia’s enemies, but accuracy is not of primary concern here; what matters is the pattern. The narrative she brings to the forefront is not “prehistorical” but “transhistorical” in that the cycle of events it conveys is timeless (Ingold, 2001:57). She re-appropriates this memory maxim to argue that rejecting traditions will equal abrogating the essence of Georgianness. This memory maxim not only opens a discursive window for her, but gives her authority that transcends her own voice. In a similar vein, Luka (17 years old) from provincial city of western Georgia, Zestafoni writes:

We Georgians have three thousand years of history… On this tiny territory God gave us a country enriched with traditions and we do not comprehend the possible outcome of forgetting traditions and culture. Our culture that has endured the passage of time, endured the Ottomans, Mongols, Arabs who we so easily erase from the pages of history. Old words: language, fatherland, belief today remain solely as poetic verses […] The Georgian people without culture are like a cattle grazing. You can herd them in any direction you like. Living in slavery is easy; it is hard to live in freedom with great traditions and culture. Today [traditions and culture] are becoming degraded because of modernization … [this] results in blending the Georgian people with other peoples and it means the disappearance [of Georgian people]. We have no right to allow for our culture to vanish which equals our annihilation.

Claims about the sacred nature of the culture - “God gave us country enriched with traditions” – set out an important premise in this text. While few students made such

history Kizilbashs appear in mid 18th century as they established Kizilbash rule (Georgian: kizilbashoba) in eastern Georgian Kingdoms that lasted for more than a decade.
straightforward reference to divine authority or a direct procreator of the nation’s land and its traditions, the allusion to sanctity, whether metaphoric or literal, is implicit in many of the texts. What generally defines the rhetorical genre of these verbal performances is the use of tropes and powerful metaphors as we see in this passage. Speech genres of memory are essentially poetic. The very first words “We Georgians have three thousand years of history” is an example, as it attests not so much to the factuality of historical date but evokes a mythic sense of atemporality. Legitimacy of something that endured for “thousand years of history” is exposed by this phrase’s imposing sense of immortality. Form-wise its function is poetic rather than factually informative in a strict sense. Meaning-wise it is a classic demonstration of what Wertsch calls “a hallmark of essentialism” that commonly prevails in nationalist discourses (forthcoming).

Georgian history has few precedents of political unity and political autonomy, yet Georgians hardly ever think of Arab domination, or Russian colonialism as instances when the Georgian nation ceased to exist. The historical periods when Georgia as a political entity was in abeyance are conceived in terms of “self-preservation” times when cultural boundaries (language, religion, tradition) were (or needed to be) demarcated. The fact that Georgia had no political autonomy and that administrative control over its territories was out of reach for Georgians is not entirely silenced in such representations of history, but it is de-emphasized and understated as opposed to the weight assigned to markers of cultural identity and spiritual solidarity. Hence, the idea of “nationness” is invested with sacred definition, and the following excerpt is an explicit demonstration of this idea:

Maintaining the steadfastness of a nation and preserving its authenticity must be primary factors of movement for each individual. This implies both physical as well as

48 The actual word that he uses here in Georgian is Tvitmofadoba tvit meaning self, mkofadoba – being, existence. In terms of cultural connotation it implies both authenticity, uniqueness and ability to self-sustain but its potential is in the way it obscures the presence/absence of political autonomy of the nation, but at the same time alludes to it from the perspective that when a nation is unable to sustain itself as an autonomous
spiritual preservation... Ignoring moral ideals and a revision of values can be mainly caused by forgetting one’s own history, by nihilism toward traditions, which will cause a nation’s spiritual depletion first, and then make its existence devoid of purpose. “A nation’s decay begins when it forgets its history” – the great Georgian writer and thinker Ilia Chavchavadze said a hundred years ago… For us to assert the importance of cultural “truth” and traditions, the example of Israel and Jews will suffice. They were dispersed in every corner of the world, but they preserved everything that kindled their self-consciousness and patriotism. What is the outcome? They founded a nation-state that is developing and progressing… (Rati, 17, from Tbilisi)

Such a definition emphasizes two conditions, a stasis, of nationhood in physical, geographical terms and a stasis of the, spiritual (recall Putkaradze’s quote from chapter 3 that conveys similar understanding of nationhood). In that account a nation exists as somethingness (nationness). This somewhat Platonic understanding, that a nation can be present as an idea, as a transcendental or metaphysical category, also underlines the essentialist understanding. Furthermore such ideas rely on a historical paradigm that conceives of a nation not only in terms of a political entity, but in terms of a spiritual force, as an agency that seeks to realize its full existence, but most of the time is present as a partially unrealized ideal. Perhaps it is due to this weight ascribed to the authenticity and uncorrupted nature of culture that this perspective embraces isolation as a means for resistance to global power.

Clifford Geertz wrote that symbols are “tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience, fixed in perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgments, longing or belief” (1975, p.91). Building on Geertz’s definition one can say that Georgia’s historical narrative is a symbolic form that is “multivocal” (Turner, 1976). It is charged with multiple values and meanings and can be employed in a range of settings for different ends. In the case of the students’ texts they employed a same basic underlying narrative

political entity it must preserve this qualities as a guarantee that when moment arrives it has the potential to exist as a self-sustaining state.
regardless of the stance they took with regards to tradition and modernity – whether “conservative” or “progressive.” In both cases this narrative aided their effort to construe a persuasive text by availing their perspective of greater authority, and by lending the power of cultural truth.

4.5. “Our past”: The code word

The 204 essays I analyzed can be clustered according to the stance the author took toward modernization and tradition. Provisionally, I labeled them either as “conservative” (those who argued against modernization and claimed that preserving traditions is of utmost importance) or “progressive” (those who argued that traditions are not important for the society’s progress). But such an approach sometimes obscured as much as it clarified. More than a half of the students made some version of a “hybrid” argument. In other words, they argued for the value of “tradition”, “cultural heritage,” “remembering,” and “preserving national integrity”, but saw these values as all compatible with modernizing projects. For instance, Sofio argued for the importance of the traditions, but deemed “keeping up with the modern world” to be equally important. Below is a classification of all 204 essays according these three clusters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Number of Essays</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>104 essays</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>66 essays</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>34 essays</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regardless of the stance they took, the majority of the students based their responses in
the idiom of memory (with the exception of 29 students among “Progressive”) who either avoided discussing Georgia as an example or maintained a “rational” outlook. My notion of idiom of memory emphasizes that these texts communicate not so much specific events from the past, but a pattern of judgment through symbolic language that denotes culturally embedded notions of how to think about the past. Collective memory then, provides both a cognitive and a verbal basis for the argumentative mode and rhetorical genre of these texts.

As noted above students did not always spell out these symbolic forms, but merely hinted at them. They did so by employing code words or phrases that would tip off any competent Georgian reader. Code words function as what Roland Barthes terms “second-order signs” (1986).

Semiosis as a production of meaning through signs, according to Roman Jakobson depends on the existence of frameworks within which these signs make sense (1971). For instance, Sofio’s question, “Were we not able to stand this many centuries, survive this many enemies?!”, is a rhetorical tactic that hints of a powerful cultural symbol. Her question serves as a “headline” to a story line that is a shared, assumed and legitimized cultural construct. By hinting at this “dominant symbol” she calls upon a reader to make a set of judgments that the Georgian memory narrative evokes; simultaneously she draws the boundary of a “textual community” to which her reader must belong (Stock 1983).

In many of these essays, certain speech elements (such as Sofio’s question for instance) assumed the function of codes, because they indexed Georgian memory maxims indirectly or implicitly and their assumed presence as a “hidden transcript” (J. Scott, 1990) is only evident to the reader who shares the same symbolic landscape. I refer to such verbal forms as “codes-words”, speech elements that function as idiomatic expressions by carrying meaning about
memory’s pre-determined “semiosphere” (Lotman 1990). Code-words, in turn exist as part of an existing speech genre a special idiom that builds on existing historical conceptions.

In his discussion of speech genres Mikhail Bakhtin pointed out that “At any given moment … a language is stratified not only into dialects in the strict sense of the word (i.e., dialects that are set off according to formal linguistic markers), but is … stratified as well into languages that are socio-ideological: languages belonging to professions, to genres, languages peculiar to particular generations, etc.” (1981 p 271-272). From this perspective the conceptualization of language reveals a system of co-existing and distinct, but interanimating idioms that comprise what Bakhtin refers to as “heteroglossia.” Using this perspective, I understand codes-words to be part of the idiom of memory, a socio-ideological language that is inherent to certain discursive settings. As any speech genre, the idiom of memory exists not merely as a constellation of words and phrases, but it functions against the background of memory’s symbolic and conceptual framework that makes using the genre meaningful.

With that in mind, my analysis approaches collective memory as a pool of usable symbols and explores the mnemonic field on which young Georgians play in an attempt to shape their arguments by employing culturally meaningful “code-words”. When used, these code-words or phrases: a) index a memory narrative, b) signal speech genres, c) anchor cultural schemas, and d) impose reasoning logic embedded in the schema. For the sake of clarity, below I provide a representative sample list of the code-words or phrases that were used by students more than five times:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>*our past</th>
<th>*Possessive pronoun “our” in case of “our history”, “our past” not only denotes history of us, but functions as a demonstrative pronoun that indexes shared narrative of the past.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>our history</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>our history of many centuries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>our long history</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using such code-words or phrases enable young Georgians to appropriate the authority of
the memory narrative without actually articulating it. These phrases function as rhetorical
shortcuts for vocalizing powerful voices that lend the argument moral gravity. Consider
following passage as an example:

Our ancestors fought for many centuries in order for our generation to live in the country
called Georgia and not merely read about it (Georgia) in historical sources. We are
obliged to defend and preserve for future generation, the traditions that Georgia and
Georgians had. (Nino, 18, from Tbilisi)

Nino’s assertive tone indexes the assumption not only that her point is obvious, but that
her utterance points to a shared and undisputable truth. Another advantage in alluding to the

49 The parallel can be drawn with ceremonial speech in religious rites. The idiom employed there is invested
with divine authority, namely that whatever is said God's presence behind these words is assumed as an
authoritative voice. Thus in religious speech “God” serves as an underlying structure - a “schema” that
dictates both how one should interpret the words and how one should act relative to them. In similar vein, a
speech genre that enacts a narrative schema of the nation's past has a meaning-dictating and moralizing
force.
memory narrative is to cultivate its patterning logic and apply it to the issue at hand so that events or actors are rendered recognizable. For instance, by evoking this narrative as a starting point of their discussion, students were able to make sense of “globalization” by inserting it into the narrative schema. Such reductionism of complex phenomena like “globalization” to the familiar and simpler category of “just another enemy” affords for a process of sense-making by which abstruse or ambivalent variables are rendered manageable.

From ancient times our ancestors fought for self-preservation. Only two times, throughout our history have we had bright patches of statehood, in all other instances we were compelled to struggle for self-preservation. Our ancestors had internalized traditions, and for them the primary tradition was love of homeland, love of God and love for each other (if we can deem these three as traditions)  

Narrative form allows speakers and writers to frame the discourse and then control the flow of meaning according to that very frame. More importantly, it allowed students to construe a moral argument in which the source of authority is transcendental in that it surpasses any single voice but embodies common “truth”.

4.6. Self and Other

There are two main genres of discourse in the texts. One conveys Georgia as a solitary nation in its own closed cosmology and casts the rest of the world as a homogenous source of threat and corruption. The other genre subjects both Georgian modernity and Georgian tradition to a wider geopolitical structure that gravitates ‘westward’ (treated in the next section). The 33% of the essays that I labeled as “conservative” fall in the first category, and the 51% that I labeled  

50 Remark in parenthesis in the original
as “hybrid” fall into the second category. In the first case, Georgian culture is something pre-
given, a sanctuary, a “treasure house” in and of itself and in its own right; in the second case it is
something posited in relation to an external measure. Here “culture” functions as commodity that
acquires its value in relation to the market that transcends its margins. The following two sub-
sections of this chapter elaborate on these two trends.

4.6.1. Pure Us and Polluting Others

The essays categorized as “conservative” (33%) mostly centered around the claim on the
purity of the Georgian culture or the “ethnos” and pursued an argument against any form of
otherness as a potential source of pollution and cultural annihilation. The following excerpt from
Vaja’s essay is an example of such isolationist view that equates modernity to globalization and
defines these two as forces that endanger the ethnos:

It is as if Georgia and small nations in general are on the verge of an abyss. They are
facing a dilemma, either they have to confine their countries in complete isolation and
with this try to rescue the ethnos or they have to open doors to globalization, in case of
which, it is not hard to believe that rescuing a nation as an ethnos will be even minimally
possible. So what is the salvation route for us - small nations? (Vaja, 17, from Tbilisi)

In instances such as this it can be seen that nationalist ideologies rest on the claims of
uniqueness, purity, intrinsic nature, and the unilinear path of cultural and political development,
the boundaries of which are asserted by the innate characteristics of the group. This approach
avoids assumptions about foreign influences and intercultural relations as shaping forces of
cultural and social characteristics; rather any contact with the external world is represented as an
impingement on its purity. From such a perspective change equals annihilation. Cultural
formations are understood not as outcomes of historical processes (including intercultural
influences), but as solidified, preordained conditions originating from the essence of a given nation or from being divinely bestowed.

As an argumentative tool within the nationalist discourse the Georgian memory narrative allows harnessing imaginaries that sustain a closed nationalist cosmology. According to such a cosmology the nation is elevated and glorified in a way that asserts its intrinsic value independent of value systems beyond its boundaries, while every form of “otherness” is defined as threatening. Irakli follows this line of reasoning but expresses more specific concerns with contemporary threats facing Georgian culture:

Let us remember our past, for on a number of occasions Georgia was invaded by invaders with different traditions and faith. Certainly, these countries tried to change the nation, to convert it to their traditions and faith. Had they been successful in accomplishing this, unquestionably the Georgian nation would no longer exist. Today European culture is being established in Georgia. (Irakli, 17, from Tbilisi)

Irakli goes on to expose his critical outlook on what he defines as “European culture”, emphasizing the differences in social relations and social attitudes that seem unacceptable to any Georgian.

Concerns with “Europeanization”, “modernization”, “globalization”, and “Americanization” play an important role in the essays. As noted earlier, Saakashvili’s modernizing projects played big role in valorizing worries with Western influences infiltrating Georgian cultural domain. While not everyone saw these forces as intrusive and threatening, but rather regarded modernization as intrinsic to Georgia’s natural path of development, for some, especially Christian church congregations and nationalist groups the “West” signified impure ideas and dangerous ideologies.

These views were reflected in the students’ essays. Among the 33% who made “conservative” arguments, many (28 essays out of 66) voiced concerns about “global” forces
threatening Georgia’s cultural integrity. In their language, the terms globalization, modernization, “Europeanization”, and “Americanization” were posited as nearly synonymous and were viewed as carriers of the threat of annihilation, as destructive forces against cultural uniqueness and individuality. The role of the Georgian Orthodox Church’s authority and its pervasive rhetoric was especially evident among the “conservative” perspectives. In all instances, however, the Georgian memory narrative anchored students’ argumentative strategies and their effort to map the “threat” of “global forces” onto a familiar schema. Consider the following passage that has overtly religious overtones, but alludes to the memory narrative to invigorate his argument:

Throughout the centuries, none of the invaders were able to exterminate Georgia, because the nation never once collapsed spiritually; it always had faith in God and with this we have reached this far. Today his Holiness and Beatitude Ilia II is taking care of our spiritual unity, and in that Georgia is superior to other countries. Spiritual solidarity facilitates our progress…I think that modernizing the national cultural heritage and traditions is more of an imitation/parroting and desire to be like another country. Every nation is individual and imitating actions will not change their culture and traditions, but will entirely destroy them as a nation, will eradicate their history and fundamentally alter the psychology of a nation and social vision. In such case a nation’s degeneration takes place, its merging with some other nation and fundamental mutation. (Saba, 17, from Tbilisi)

Here we see that religion is something that “Georgians fought for” throughout the centuries, while simultaneously serving as a defense mechanism for the nation to preserve its cultural boundaries. This particular view is imbued with religious discourse, in which Georgia’s Orthodox Church and its leader are presented as the single most important defender and proclaimer of the nation’s spiritual unity. It is spiritual integrity that drives the society’s progress and not cultural adaptation to popular trends.

Like any form of “otherness”, globalization is viewed as a similar source of corruption from this perspective, and it attacks if the gates are left open. The isolationist perspective builds
on the tenet that preserving nationhood is humankind’s single most important mission. We see this vocalized in many instances (26 essays have similar claims) throughout the texts. For example, Lika emphasized this in writing:

Preserving individuality and defending traditions is much more critical and necessary [now] than it was before, since the problem of globalization is much more powerful and dangerous than any empire with its almighty army. Everything [forced] together, for a common purpose, with one language and single currency – this is the general image of globally unified universe. The Soviet Union was a similar model of “state” …Imagine the future of similar globally unified world! (Lika, 18, from Rustavi)

In this example, not only are modernity and globalization posed as synonymous, but the uniformity and homogeneity that they bring about are equated with the totalitarian regime of the USSR. With a final rhetorical question this young author presents a picture of globalization’s detrimental impact on Georgian culture similar to the one begotten by the Soviet regime.

In Identity and Violence Amartya Sen makes a point that nationalism can be built around a “solitarist perspective” and promote “a sense of inevitability about some allegedly unique—often belligerent—identity that we are supposed to have and which apparently makes extensive demands on us (sometimes, of a most disagreeable kind)” (2006, p.xiii). In the essays such a solitarist perspective is entrenched with the understanding of how the world outside Georgia operates and what it represents. A narrative of the past anchors such perspectives.

4.6.2. What Is It That Attracts Tourists?

In the majority (68 out of 104) of the essays categorized as “hybrid” argument, globalizing power is mitigated and dealt with from an aspirational perspective, one that seeks to belong to, and take advantage of the source of power rather than combat it. In these discussions tradition and culture were represented as “sites of attraction,” not as ways of being that stand in the way of
modernity. They are treated as commodities that can be exploited and used for the purpose of progress. Traditions then, were conveyed not as immanent, intrinsic forms of existence, representations of order but as embellishments of a nation. As one student wrote, “tradition is that something exotic that adds extraordinariness to every nation and country”.

[Traditions] make our country more diverse and interesting. That is why we should make use of this wealth and exploit for the country’s welfare… If we ask the question, what is it that attracts tourists? My answer would be – culture. We have witnessed on many occasions how old Georgian architecture or choreography astonished foreigners…[Nations] should move forward but we should not forget national culture which makes our lives so much more interesting. (Tatia, 18, from Tbilisi)

The conception of Georgianness within the context of Georgia’s Europeanization discourse, can produce articulations, definitions and imaginaries of national culture that are dialogic, in that their implicit value is measured with respect to Georgia’s positioning vis-à-vis western civilization, in a dialogic conception of self-other relationship. In essays that reflect this tendency, students present elements of traditional culture as markers of Georgia’s uniqueness, but also as embellishments of “our country” that contrast with other European cultures. Tradition becomes a commodity that generates difference and produces distinguished “labeling” for Georgia in the international market economy of cultural uniqueness.

“A nation must be unique!” wrote Eka (18), asserting that traditions should not be rejected for the sake of modernization, and she elaborated by saying, “The existence of tradition and culture is generally essential for the nation to feel what its cultural position among other countries is”. Her expression provides another example of the ways in which the value of tradition is defined in terms of its capacity to assign a certain “position” to a nation among others.

A statement by Vako is even more straightforward in this regard.
The tradition of a culture is a visiting card [Georgian “sa’vizito barati – invitation card or business card]. A nation is rich that possesses a great history and culture. That is why this factor incites interests toward this country [Georgia]. Americans visit who have no traditions. This is not an insult, it’s just a reality. Georgia is progressing. Each day new projects and ideas come in and that is why a threat exists of transforming our traditions. (Vako, 17, from Tbilisi)

Vako further argued that Georgia needs to preserve its tradition to gain respectable position among modern states and remain “attractive” for the international public (i.e. tourists). The labeling of this essay as “hybrid” points to the fact that Vako (as well as Sofio and 102 other students) argued neither for Georgia’s isolationism (as did 66 students with “conservative” views) nor for the kind of “modernization” which assumes the disappearance of all Georgian traditions. Rather they incorporated the claim that traditions need to be preserved within the scope of Georgia’s modernizing and Europeanizing goals.

Such judgments embody at least two important social processes that are relevant to the current Georgian context. On the one hand, these essays reveal an internalization of the recent state rhetoric on the country’s modernization, on Euro-integration and on the importance of tourism. On the other hand, they reproduce the resistance discourse that emphasizes traditional culture, Georgia’s uniqueness and resents the state politics of “becoming like somebody else”. In a sense, what these young Georgians express can be viewed as reconciliation between the two antagonistic discourses. It shows how students forge linkages and create their own constellation of discursive forms that in the public space are often put forth as more stark and simple Manichean oppositions.

4.7. CONCLUSION: WE MUST NEVER FORGET!
In all types of representations of culture, tradition, and Georgianness, the term “past” and what it refers to provides a framework for arguments and judgments. None of the models whether isolationist or modernist, conservative or moderate, where detached from “the past”; rather, they all sprang from and were rooted in it as their departure point and shaping force. The past often times is articulated as a force that invigorates the nation and imbues every corner of the country with uniqueness and exceptionality. The essays in all the categories I have outlined are driven by the claims on distinctiveness and idiosyncrasy. If in one instance these traits are charged with value as Georgia’s defense mechanisms, in others they function as practical market-oriented commodities. In fact, students almost never spoke of any specific values, or even traditions for that matter; the ethos of all this is “remembering” and “not forgetting” itself. Hence, the term “past” can be treated as a code-word that has significance as an interpretive schema for a conceptual framework to which it points. When a Georgian mentions “our past” in a conversation with another Georgian, most likely the listener is not going to wonder ‘which’ past his interlocutor had in mind.

These texts suggest a hierarchy of generalization of various terms. Namely, the “past” (tsarsuli) is of a higher order as a parent category for “tradition” (tradicia) and “cultural heritage” (kulturuli memkvidreoba). This hierarchy of categories was reflected in the argument that “modernizing traditions will result in forgetting the past” and in many instances tradition

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51 In total I have identified less than 20 essay (out of 204) that had no mention of terms such as “Georgian history”, “our past” and so forth, or any reference to the historical events or historicity.

52 I did actually respond with a question about this to a taxi driver (as a way to provoke him) while engaged in a heated discussion of Georgia’s political affairs. While making political claims (on the contemporary issue) the taxi driver was referring to “our past” as something of a divine significance and as something that guided his interpretation of current political actions - of what was wrong and what was right. My question that came across as something like “which past do you have in mind” seemed to have caught him off guard. Caught him in astonishment he slammed on his brakes and turned around, possibly making sure that I was in fact Georgian and even then he did not deem it necessary to provide an answer. He took my question merely as cynicism about “this past” as he assumed that I knew (or rather remembered) what he had in mind as perfectly as he did.
and culture were defined not as ways of life but as “knowledge” or “memory” about Georgia’s past. For example in her essay Maka argued against modernization not in terms of any tangible impact it might have on the Georgia’s social or cultural life, but in terms of how it can “create conditions” for “forgetting” the past. In arguing that, Maka as many others provided a paraphrased quote of Chavchavadze’s words to establish why “remembering” is important. Consider the following excerpt as an example:

   By modernizing our cultural heritage we will destroy one of the most important bedrocks of our history. We will create conditions for our descendants to forget their past, and without a past no nation and no child of that nation will be able to lead a complete life, because they will not know where they come from, whose descendants they are, and what their ancestors fought for, and henceforth they will not know which way to go, what to sacrifice their life for, and what to guard with their life…” (Maka, 17, from Tbilisi)

   The “knowledge of history” is where a nation’s certainty about its future and its mission is inscribed. Ultimately, the notion of national, cultural identity is upheld through memory discourse, a line of reasoning reflected in a comment from Goga:

   Forgetting the cultural heritage that our ancestors shed blood to preserve equals crossing out our history, which eradicates the face of the nation…Without its past it is impossible for a nation to exist in the present or to build a future. As Ilia Chavchavadze writes in his public letter “the present born out of past is a parent to future”. On the other hand, preserving traditions does not mean inalterably following them and not stepping ahead of it. Certainly not. (Goga, 18, from Tbilisi)

   It seems that this passage reveals a chain of associations evoked with the word “tradition” and it exposes the hierarchy of meanings that these symbolic term carries. In the beginning Goga treats tradition as a mere vehicle for that abstract notion of the past. While he invests the “past” with unquestionable and indispensable authority, he obscures the particularity of “tradition”, mistreats it as something intangible as a mere medium and not as a “thing” in its own right.

   The entire statement focuses on preserving something that matters only with regards to
“memory” that is the “face” of a nation. Here, again the term “tradition” functions as a code-word referencing that which has to be “remembered.” But once he shifts focus from “preserving traditions” to “following them” his judgment takes on a different angle. From this angle tradition ceases to function as a code but is reinstated with its original meaning. It becomes a sign that signifies a set of practices. Here, and in many other essays we see that, on the one hand, preserving traditions is about remembering and not forgetting the ethos of the nation. It centers around the principal purpose and mission of a nation’s existence that encapsulates the miniaturized cosmology of a nation and its environment. On the other hand, following traditions accentuates an individual’s attraction to a set of actions and behaviors or customs that need to be followed. It enacts ways of being as opposed to ways of seeing. In light of this, the term “tradition” is transposed in a different field of meanings and connotations, where students realize that for instance enacting old mountain traditions of a tribal vendetta is not such a good idea.

In the following definition that Koba gives to the term “tradition” we see this ability of terms to serve as an operative vehicle for meanings not relating to customs and actual behaviors:

Tradition …is that knowledge that a nation has acquired over time. Forgetting it, or crossing it out, equals erasing all information from the mind. No human can exist with an empty mind and will not create anything new, just like a nation cannot exist without history, without a past…(Koba, 18 from Tbilisi)

These texts in a sense reveal that the term “tradition” is a constitutive element of a certain speech genre (Bakhtin, 1986). In this context “tradition” is more of a term of art, of a poetic nature, rather than a “real thing”. Yet it has some “real” argumentative value in memory discourse.

From this perspective “tradition” becomes a code-word that indexes some larger schema with generalizable notions about the nation and its past. It speaks to consciousness and not to action. As evidenced from the essays the term “tradition” bears significance not as a singular,
self-sufficient object, or as an independent entity but as a symbolic denominator, denoting things beyond its immediate content that demarcates self and other and functions as an indexical category in a web of meanings.

Various strands of scholarship on memory have shown: a) how historical narratives can serve as interpretive tools to make sense of present political and social events; and b) the ways in which collective memory is invested with ideological weight to provide the basis for collective self-imagining, thus being an indispensable resource for construing, making or re-making national and cultural identities. In this chapter my aim was to show how in students’ writings an underlying narrative about the past served as a semiotic basis to produce a distinct discursive genre. Wertsch has argued that remembering is a form of mediated action, a semiosis which is transpired through using textual tools like narratives and underlying schemas (2002).

But these narratives infused with cultural meaning and overlain by continuous uses in sociocultural settings, can in turn become vehicles for shaping speech whereby speakers deliver messages not directly, not through the surface forms and words, but through code-words that elicit indirect meaning.
CHAPTER 5: MEMORY GAME: VOICE, COUNTER VOICE

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The title of this chapter has a double allusion, one theoretical and another literary. The term “Memory Game” is meant to echo Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of “language game”, defined in his own words as “the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven”. Although Wittgenstein did not give a precise definition of the concept, the idea is that using language relies on the language rules that are analogues to the rules of a game, a chess game for instance, in which every move is meaningful in terms of the pre-established set of rules (Wittgenstein 1958). While meaning always depends on the interrelation between the word and
the reality in which it is pronounced, the use of language is also governed by a set of rules that
mark the boundaries of the “game”.

The memory game I describe here, reflects the process of social poiesis, of meaning
making through discourse on the Georgian past. Memory here figures as a form of expression, a
speech genre, rather than temporal orientation of the discourse. But what shapes this specific
form of cultural poiesis is the presence of pre-fixed memory maxims, paradigmatic categories
that underscore all forms of engagement with the past in Georgia (see chapters 2 and 4). Memory
maxims function as “game rules” in that they define the boundaries of the “game” and make
“moves” meaningful within those boundaries. Thus every “user” of memory has to orient her
discourse toward these categories as indexed by the initial authoritative words to produce new
meanings or reproduce old.

The idea of a game becomes more evident in light of dialogism between a voice and a
counter voice, reflected in the subtitle of this chapter. While the notion of voice is at the center of
Bakhtin’s theory of utterance, the formulation voice, counter voice is a literary allusion to the
novel by Alduos Huxley – Point, Counter Point which in its own right references the musical
technique known as a counterpoint. A counterpoint is a kind of musical score composed of
conversing voices that are interdependent harmonically, but independent in rhythm. This allusion
makes sense in light of the context I am describing where two accounts of the same historical
period were produced, each accenting one of the two voices given in Georgia’s bivocal memory
paradigm. Much like in a musical score composed according to counterpoint, the two voices in
Georgian memory are interdependent as the co-existing truths, but independent in their mode of
articulation. Similarly two textbooks on Russian-Georgian relations were produced in a single,
bounded discursive domain, as conversing parts of a single social script, but while one of the
textbooks accented the voice of self-idealization, the rival textbook was conceived as a counter account to the former one with an intent to re-accent the initial utterance and emphasize the self-condemning voice. None of these accounts entirely silences either of the two voices, owing to the fact that both voices vocalize co-existing and interdependent “truths”.

In this chapter I situate the two textbook projects in the wider sociocultural and geopolitical processes that shaped Georgia’s discursive landscape and triggered production of the textbook on Russian-Georgian relations. While focusing on the second, “rival” textbook in particular, I argue for the necessity to understand the inherent dialogism in this text in relation to both the initial textbook as well as the “conceptual horizon” of the reader, the Georgian public, against which writers of the textbook were oriented (see chapter 4). In doing so, I appropriate another of Bakhtin’s notions closely tied to hidden dialogicality and speech genre, the phenomenon of “re-accenting” or “revoicing” (Bakhtin, 1986). This notion is central to his discussion of “translinguistics” and is inseparable from dialogism. In Bakhtin’s words “when we select words in the process of constructing an utterance... we usually take them from other utterances ...we choose words according to their generic specifications” (1986 p. 87). In other words, we construct utterances from words that belong to one or another speech genre, and speech genres, as Bakhtin notes, “submit fairly easily to re-accentuation, the sad can be made jocular and gay, but as a result something new is achieved” (1986, p.87) Reaccenting is a deformative practice that displaces the accent of the initial utterance and “relies on the sites or nodes of repetition or resistance within a social matrix” (Amsler 2012, p. 45).

Re-accenting is important for understanding how social actors enact Georgia’s past to displace the accents in the symbolic matrix of Georgianness and produce shifts in how nationhood is signified. In other words, this deformative practice enacts the dialogism between
the two voices built in Georgia’s memory paradigm, but places an extended accent on the self-condemning voice. Its ambition is to transform memory as a site of mythic, idealized conception of Georgianness into the frame of reference that is not abstracted and detached from the ontological order, but is mapped on it. The significance of this practice is in how it tackles critical sites of nationhood through symbolic language of memory and how it seeks to undo present reality by resorting to the symbolic forms that concern the nation’s past.

5.2. The Enemy, The Neighbor and The “Mis-oriented” Georgian Public

In June 2013, I went to the History Institute to record an interview with several historians who had written the textbook on Russian-Georgian relations; the textbook that remained unpublished for more than two years. Dodo, one of the authors, who was a welcoming and engaging woman in her 60s began by relating her approach to writing history along with expressing her own anxieties about this project and about Georgia’s political “fate” in general. Dodo’s quote below provides an entry into a range of issues that elucidate the ongoing socio-political battles and position both the textbook and the authors in a wider scheme of events:

Do you know what journalists wrote? That the same people who used to write partistory (partistoria – history that was controlled by the communist party) are now writing this book and “How would they write it?” [they said]. I have to tell you I am a woman of the old generation, I published my first book in ‘72 (1972): poems; I am more of a poet, historian is my profession. I have never written a party (partiuli) poem, nor [anything] komsomolski (komkavshiruli – Young Communist Union)... As for this book I would not have taken it on, well you know, it is very difficult to write this book, for one because there are very different opinions among us and mostly overwhelmingly pro-Russian thinking (azrovneba - thinking mode, reasoning). As much as we say that this percentage
of population] supports NATO, UN, Eurounion there still are those against it. I can’t be certain on how this research was done, I respect research and possibly it was accurate, but when I am looking at it, the greater part of society, especially the intelligentsia which is supposed to have a more European orientation, is more pro-Russian and they think that Europe will export something that will degrade our values, traditions and that we are closer to Russia and that Russia is better in that sense and “What damage has Russia done to us?!” (ra dagvishava) - there is this opinion and we cannot escape it. For me as a historian the point of departure is Georgian statehood - whatever impedes or damages it, that I evaluate negatively. (Dodo)

On May 5, 2010, the Georgian government passed a resolution according to which Georgia’s National Social Science Fund (Rustaveli Fund, hereafter RF) announced a competition for the production of a “thematic” history textbook on Russian-Georgian relations. Six project proposals were submitted to RF. Ultimately, a proposal by a group of historians from the History Institute was awarded the grant (hereafter I shall refer to their textbook as HI textbook). This was not, however, the first collaboration of these historians with the state. Earlier they had worked with Georgia’s Ministry of Defense for the project called the “Warrior’s Library” to produce a handbook of military history and had also been previously funded by RF for the project on “the history of Russian colonialism.”

In their proposal for the current textbook on Russian-Georgian relations, authors Dodo and Vaja wrote:

In our work the emphasis will be on the following: the events taking place in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region (South Ossetia), the attitudes of non-Georgian populations on ongoing political processes, the artificial ethnic conflict instigated by Russia, the

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53 Dodo is refering to several surveys conducted by the NDI (National Democratic Institute, a U.S. organization devoted to developing civil society in places like Georgia) over the years of 2010-2012 according to which 74% of Georgians agreed with government’s goal to join the European Union and 70% agreed with NATO aspirations. In the same survey 49% thought Russia is a real and existing threat to Georgia and 30% thought that Russia is a threat but is exaggerated, only 8% declared that Russia is not a threat according to the NDI research. (Public Attitudes in Georgia, National Democratic Institute February 2012 Survey)

54 Representatives at the Rustaveli Fund refused to give away the information on the rest of the five proposals, hence I was unable to find out who were the authors of the other projects in the competition.
involvement of international organizations in the resolution of this problem, collaborationism, the struggle of Georgian emigrants against Russian imperialist politics in Georgia, etc.

Evident from this excerpt is the extent to which both the state’s initiative and historians’ response to it were framed in terms of Georgia’s ongoing political battles. This entire project was carried out in a continuous state of urgency and with a sense of emergency triggered by political crisis. Vaja, director of the History Institute and one of the two authors of the textbook made a point of this pressing urgency during our interview:

They were rushing us, quickly, quickly… even the headmaster of the (Tbilisi) No. 1 Public School reviewed it, because we had to know how it would be perceived in school... Well, you know, school is a completely different sphere […] As far as I know it received positive feedback. At first, it had a hard time winning [the grant by RF] over those [competing] groups some of which were evidently pro-Russian. Once we won it was of utmost importance that we completed it in time and then unexpectedly even though we were rushed all the time, then it (i.e., the demand from the state) suddenly disappeared. No one told us what had happened and then I just know this that some were very much against it, because [they said],”Why is it specifically about the relationship with the Russia?” This was wrong in their opinion55. (Vaja)

According to the initial plan the HI textbook had to be published by August 2010. It was intended as an addition to the high-school history curriculum. But because this project was intimately tied to the state agenda of Saakashvili’s administration, the shift in political leadership that took place as a result of 2012 Parliamentary elections altered the textbook’s fate. Therefore, although Vaja and Dodo had completed their work on time, publication was delayed several times, even before the change of power in 2012 took place. Vaja, had his suspicions about the reasons driving the process. At the time of our interview in the summer of 2013 he was

55 Although Vaja did point out that it were not state representatives who criticized the approach, he refrained from naming specific individuals he had in mind. He mentioned that a member of “Euroclio” - European Association of History Education that works in different countries to promote “European standard” for developing history curriculum - was one of those critics. I later enquired with one of Euroclio members who denied any involvement of this organization with history textbook on Russian-Georgian relations
convinced that the textbook would never see the light of day (and in fact as of April 2014 it had not).

Both Vaja and Dodo emphasized the role of some anonymous pro-Russian groups in advancing hesitation or even fear of “irking” Russia. It seemed less probable, both to them and to me that any form of hesitation could be ascribed to Saakashvili’s government whose extensive anti-Russian rhetoric had been piercing through the years in the global and local community. But it made more sense in the context of the new government’s rhetoric. In fact Saakashvili’s rival in power, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili whose coalition won the elections in October of 2012, lured the Georgian public with the promise of a “balanced”, “mild” and “diplomatic” approach to Russia.

The context of the new government’s “mild” rhetoric and the proliferation of the discourse on the Orthodox kinship by the Georgian Orthodox Church facilitated a climate in which the expression of pro-Russian attitudes became publicly sanctioned. So much so that briefly after the October elections certain groups held demonstrations demanding that the “Museum of Soviet Occupation” be shut down. As one of the protestors declared, the museum represented the effort of Saakashvili’s government to aggravate Russian-Georgian relations, shutting it down would have been a first step in normalizing neighbourly liaisons with Russia. In his words:

...if we are talking about occupation in Georgia, then we must have a museum of Ottoman occupation, Persian occupation, Arab occupation. This land that we stand on right now was under Arab occupation for 400 years. In general throughout Georgia’s 3000 years of history Georgia was occupied many times by different countries and if we establish museums for all occupations that would just be wrong.

The shift in political climate and reinvigorated discussions on “normalizing” Russian-Georgian relations had their impact on the textbook project. Most importantly, the state was no
longer interested in publishing the textbook and pursuing changes in the history curriculum for Georgian schools. In the eyes of Vaja these new circumstances also amplified the sensitivity toward Russia’s reaction:

I know that it annoyed Russians severely as soon as they learned [about the textbook]. I know this because they came to me for an interview - BBC’s Russian representative. They obviously were speaking to me from the pro-Russian position that “we think that... well the only thing... that we are united, we have such Orthodoxy and you are saying that even that was bad?” (Vaja conveyed this almost inarticulate statement in Russian that sounded like a mockery of an “innocent” Russian argument about unity of Russians and Georgian in their Orthodoxy (“Ну, мы думаем что, единственное что мы, единое, у нас, такая, православие, а вы говорите, что и там неправильно, что было?”) There was a big reaction from Russia in advance and it seems all of this had its impact on some circles and some in the form of fear, others knowingly, they blocked it. I think not printing it was wrong, because there was nothing out of the ordinary in there that could not have been delivered to pupils or the society. (Vaja)

The theme of the Russian-Georgian relationship presents an extraordinary predicament over lived and living, voiced and silenced imaginaries and sensibilities, even though most history textbooks (discussed in chapter 3) frame it as just another instantiation of Georgia’s perennial struggle against foreign invasions. Mainly because the memory of the Russian-Georgian relationship hinges upon the current political condition and as such embodies the unresolved tangle of present exigencies and future contingencies. As a result, it produces dual or ambivalent attitudes in interpreting the present political strategy toward Russia, but also in contemplating how events of the past must be judged.

The war in August of 2008 played a crucial role in stirring up public sensibilities in this respect and further aggravated an internal fracture on what was regarded as a sensible political approach. President Saakashvili’s opposition blamed him for reckless, aggressive politics that provoked Russia’s military intervention. In some instances, people would express their attitude
toward Russia as one of toward a dormant Goliath who should not be disturbed and annoyed. Such views were usually expressed to me with an overtone of regret or a sense of a compromise and an admission that “Yes, Russia is an enemy, but…” This “but,” at times followed by silence, was a link in a chain of multivalent and multivocal arguments for rationalizing the acceptance of Russian power. The framing of the arguments varied. Some made claims based on religious and cultural kinship between Russians and Georgians, others pointed to the inevitability of this political tangle. Yet some explained their position in terms of the juxtaposition of Western versus Russian cultural influences on Georgian spiritual, national, cultural integrity. Many of my respondents articulated their perspectives with varied levels of intimacy, depending on the position from which they spoke or the nature and the context of the communicative exchange.

At the same time, it seemed that in a post-war state of emotion many ordinary Georgians were compelled to think that dependence on Russia was an inevitable and necessary condition of Georgia’s existence. They usually justified their position with what they referred to as “realpolitik,” a term that embodies inherent juxtaposition to a certain form of “idealism” characteristic of memory discourse or the state’s performative rhetoric. Realpolitik questions the feasibility of Georgia’s Euro-integration and usually finds articulation in statements like: “The west will not engage in a conflict with Russia for a small country like Georgia”56. With realpolitik individuals articulate reality in a “pragmatic” vision and posit it as a quandary of limited choice in the existing geopolitical triangulation: “What other choice do we have other than dealing with Russia?!”57” At the same time people employed the argument of realpolitik in

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56 Throughout the years of my research and countless informal conversions I have heard such statements made more than once from a number of respondents, so although I place it in quotation marks, I am hesitant to identify any one particular individual as its author.
57 I have had different individuals articulating these phrases on multiple occasions, hence I cannot attribute it to any of my particular respondents. I have heard similar claims made in media outlets, on Facebook posts,
parallel with, or sometimes against the justificatory frame of “Russia the Orthodox Brother”. Realpolitik allowed them to navigate this strained debate by evading moral pressure, which generally compels Georgians to identify Russia as an enemy. Such moral pressure exists more as a corollary of the mnemonic model and less because of the reality that Russian troops were located in less than 50 kilometers from the Georgian capital. In other words, in every debate about Russia’s role and the status or legitimacy of Georgia’s disposition toward Russia, most Georgians would experience a moral pressure to condemn Russia as an enemy and embrace resistance against it. There is a sense of obligation to stay committed to the truth of the memory maxim that functions as a cultural imperative. In any dispute on this topic, Georgia’s memory maxim assumes its hidden presence as a voice that is heard even when it is silenced. Contrary to this, discursive frames such as realpolitik, Orthodox kinship, or skepticism toward the west overshadows or conceals this moral imperative of the memory maxim. These frameworks introduce alternative categories that shift or shatter fixed and axiomatic definitions of who the enemy is and who is not.

However, in the eyes of the state and the individuals with whom I worked, public attitudes of this sort signaled internal “disorientation” of the Georgians. For them such going off the tracks was a repercussion of distorted or forgotten historical memories.

during conversations with taxi drivers, sales associates in stores, my friends and family members, university professors, etc. In many cases even the wording was identical.
From their point of view, this was a case where the memory-model did not work as an interpretive frame, because there existed no “right” and specifically appropriate memory-model and because the image of Russia (both past and present) was charged not with definitive and unequivocal meanings, but with ambivalent or dubious signifiers.  

As a consequence, the state decided that such a model was needed to “properly” map Russia onto the schema of a paradigmatic memory narrative. “Reminding” the public of the atrocities of Russian rule, both during Tsarist Empire and the Soviet era was the main motive behind the textbook project on *200 Years of Occupation* and “State Commission for Assessing Historical Truth.”

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58 At the end of his presidency Saakashvili regretfully stated on several occasions that the failure to promote the memory of Russian occupation could have been one of the greatest mistakes of his administration. He said that this should have been an issue of continuous discussion, that his administration should have put up posters at every school and engaged in extended public discussions (source)
The state project involved a hidden dialogue with the part of the society that disapproved of aggressive rhetoric against Russia, with those who deemed that Russia’s animosity could be mitigated by religious kinship between the two nations. The goal was to dismantle the “illusion” that any form of constructive relationship with Russia was at all possible.

The state campaign rested on the belief that history is a powerful metaphor that can reset individual mindsets and clear the ambivalence between “Russia-the-enemy” as opposed to “Russia-the-Orthodox-relative”. The new account of the “200 Years of Occupation” was intended to reinstate fixed and certain definitions, projecting a clear image of the “reality” and produce a single, univocal interpretive schema for comprehending the current state of the Russian-Georgian relationship.
Memory, it seems, is a language in which discourse on national identity can be valorized in Georgia, and in this case national identity needed to be evoked in order to re-orient a “mis-oriented” public. This is why the state memory campaign also sought to “remind” Georgians of the internal weaknesses and misdeeds of the Georgians themselves in the past and devise an analogy as a technique of disambiguation. In this regard, the moral impulse of the state’s rhetorical game was two-fold: it had to reinstate an image of Russia as an “ordinary villain” (no different from any other historical enemy faced by Georgia), and it had to emphasize Georgians’ heroic resistance and amplify Russia’s demonism (more emphasis on heroic struggle and more demonic enemy). In this scheme the image of submission, betrayal and collaboration on Georgians’ part was to serve as an “identifying reference” (Ricoeur 2004) for the citizens, especially with regard to political leaders and public actors endorsing the possibility of a “dialogue” with Russia.
Such was the premise for the rush to produce a history textbook on Russian-Georgian relations. While for Vaja and Dodo the fading of this urgency (before the shift in power) was inevitably tied to the influence of “pro-Russian groups” or “the fear” of exposing the truth, in fact, forces hindering their textbook might have had more to do with the competing project that originated in the Free University of Tbilisi (hereafter FreeU). In 2010 the founder, president, and owner of the university, Kakha Bendukidze, initiated writing a rival textbook. The group working under his personal supervision was comprised of several well-known intellectuals (mostly public figures tied to western NGOs), politically and socially active public figures, university faculty and only one historian (for more on FreeU and these actors see chapter 1). This group had well established links and influential standing in Saakashvili’s administration,
first and foremost Bendukidze himself as well as several other members of the group and this might have played part in delaying the publication of the HI textbook.

5.3. MEMORY GAME: THE LOCAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE GLOBAL

This context serves as a point of departure for situating the struggle over Georgia’s geopolitical belonging and the resulting disputes on national identity and national politics within a public sphere where Soviet generation intelligentsia and liberal intellectuals animated the past in two distinct ways. This form of cultural action is what I call a “memory game”, and it represents a form of social poiesis that unfolds as a rhetorical game dialogizing two distinct voices and discursive genres on Georgianness. While my primary focus is on the rival textbook, I examine the project in terms of its dialogic engagement with the initial HI textbook, owing to the fact that it was conceived as a counter-project from the very outset. I follow behind the scenes deliberations of the group working under the FreeU umbrella. My treatment of this memory game as a social poiesis focuses on the function of this cultural engagement as a rhetorical strategy. It is a form of address that employs a culturally meaningful symbolic idiom as its mode of expression in an effort to transform the consciousness of its addressee. As such I situate my conceptual approach in philosophical and literary traditions concerned with matters of speaking and symbolic action. But for further analysis of the memory game itself, it is important to situate the social actors involved in this “game,” in the broader context of socio-political dynamics and along the lines of an ideological divide between the “intelligentsia” and “intellectuals” as distinct elitist formations.

The distinction between intelligentsia and intellectuals is ideological, genealogical, and sub-cultural. In the present context, both categories (intelligentsia and intellectuals) function more as
ascriptive terms that have value charged connotations rather than analytically descriptive ones. But the difference both emic and etic is significant for understanding the diverse vantage points that each represent in the context I describe.

“Intelligentsia” is a construct of the Soviet era, invented for the proletariat’s upward mobility that was supposed to produce a social layer of administrative and specialist groups drawn from the lower classes (as opposed to the bourgeois intelligentsia) devoted to Soviet power (Fitzparick 1979). Nevertheless, membership in this mutated form of class was determined by vague and arbitrary criteria and was far from being egalitarian (Narvselius, 2012). Individuals could have been included in this social circle not because of the symbolic, cultural or intellectual capital they possessed, or administrative status they occupied, but because they came from the family of intelligentsia.

However, as Eleonora Narvselius points out in her study of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, their “actual sociocultural position in the state socialist system was in discord with their self-proclaimed position as a cultural elite” (2012 p. 118). In other words, during the Soviet period the intelligentsia enacted a public space of double allegiance: on the one hand it served the Soviet state system of hierarchy as its “manipulated instrument of manipulation” (Narvselius, 2012 p. 118); on the other hand, it charged itself with the role of a patriotic cultural guardian and later on, during late Socialism and the emergence of nationalism, became the locus of exclusivist nationalist discourse while maintaining its status (see Dudwick 1994). Dodo’s words quoted above are revealing in that sense. While she and my other respondents from the same community of historians, (see chapter 6) did not ascribe to themselves the category of intelligentsia, they did identify more prominent public figures as intelligentsia representatives. In contrast, others, especially the intellectuals I worked with, saw them as such. The intelligentsia is an internally
stratified social group; divided along the lines of social status and prominence as well as ideologies and political stances (e.g. pro-Russian, pro-Saakashvili government, etc) (see Wheatly for an insightful analysis of the mutated social class structure in the post-Soviet Georgia, 2005).

The historians who authored HI textbook marked themselves off from the category of intelligentsia because in the given discursive domain this term had become synonymous with a pro-Russian orientation. On one occasion, I spoke with Dimitri about the issue, a historian of Soviet generation who had collaborated with the state established “Commission for Assessing Historical Truth” and had published several of his own manuscripts on Russian-Georgian relations. When discussing one of the prominent intelligentsia representatives Dimitri expressed his regrets on “Russophilia” among them and on their “disdain for Europe.”

(NB): Why do you think these people should despise Europe?

(Dimitri): Why? Oh that’s a good question, I liked it. I will tell you why. I have given much thought to this. Our intelligentsia has been raised on Russian culture and language. Language is very important… our generation mostly… well I love Russian culture myself Chekhov and Turgenev are my favorite authors but I was saved by the fact that I had admired west early on in my life, which began with the music and this music swayed me over toward Europe (As Dimitri related later, in 1970s he and his friends would listen to Jesus Christ Superstar, The Beatles, and Elvis Presley and he would go to “Leningrad” to buy Suzi Quatro’s CDs for 20 rubles which, he explained, amounted to one fifth of the average Soviet citizen’s salary at the time.) But for many this cultural and linguistic factor resulted in Russophilia. Well say for instance Robiko Sturua (Dimitri decided to use an example of Georgia’s one of the most renowned theatre director); let’s take one person as an example. He is well known in Russian society, don’t you agree?! His theatrical plays are products of the Russian world and he is renowned there while his productions are completely unknown in Europe. They were not able to integrate [with Europe] and they did not want to, because of a linguistic barrier.

Dimitri’s explanation of Russophilia hangs on the question of how post-colonial

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59 Russophilia is commonly used by Georgians as a derogatory term that is used to refer to those groups or individuals who are in favor of Russia, but whose penchant for close ties with the Russian society is sustained by some unhealthy, particularistic and "primitive" interests.
subjectivities are formed and why the sense of nostalgia, especially among elite circles, prevails in many ex-Soviet societies. John Steinbeck after traveling to the Soviet Union (including Georgia) during the early years of cold war wrote the following on how Georgia occupied a special place in the hearts and imaginaries of many Soviets:

Wherever we had been in Russia, in Moscow, in the Ukraine, is Stalingrad, the magical name of Georgia came up constantly. People who had never been there, and who possibly never could go there, spoke of Georgia with a kind of longing and a great admiration. They spoke of Georgians as supermen, as great drinkers, great dancers, great musicians, great workers and lovers. And they spoke of the country in the Caucasus and around the Black Sea as a kind of second heaven. Indeed, we began to believe that most Russians hope that if they live very good and virtuous lives, they will go not to heaven, but to Georgia, when they die (1999, p 144).

Steinbeck’s perception is relevant here because it echoes Georgians’ own sense of their place among Soviet peoples. This self-image had become part of their sub-colonial subjectivity that granted them sense of superiority within the colonial hierarchy⁶⁰. Against that, Euro-integration promises no special position on the margins of the European space, inferior both geographically and culturally. This is especially painful to intelligentsia whose elitism is deteriorating because of the gap between their cultural capital and the newly emerging “symbolic market” that has its reference in the European space (Bourdieu, 1984).

(Dimitri): That is why they are antagonistic to European, Atlantic, American culture because they think it rejected them. So, here is the factor of cultural alienation. That is why they have been alienated not only to European culture but to the younger generation [of Georgians] as well. I might not like everything that the new generation does but they are progressive [thinkers] and are looking toward the West.

Dimitri was initially among the FreeU textbook group. I met him first during one of the

⁶⁰ Manning, Ram & Shatirishvili have pointed out that the “geopolitics” of 19th century intelligentsia was expressive of their new-found and ambivalent position as a relatively privileged colonial class under Russian rule. (Ram & Shatirishvili, 2004)
first deliberations at the Bazaleti training center (mentioned in chapter 1). But his method, approach, and perspectives on historical processes were in discord with the rest of the group. In 2012 after a heated debate on one of his chapters (for the book) Dimitri left the FreeU project. In spite of his pro-western views, for the new intellectuals Dimitri was a “typical intelligentsia historian” because of his “academic habits”, his perspective on the “mission” of historiography, and his patterns of thinking about Georgia’s past (see Shlimerman, 1998 on the nationalist agenda of Georgian historiography, especially since late 1980s; also Kohl & Tsetskhladze, 1995 on nationalism in the practice of Georgian archaeology). Bendukidze commented on this during our interview:

This is the trouble with our historians [of that generation], they have a mission...and this was invented in the 19th century that “we now have to impose on people the myth of a united, strong Georgia [and] with that we will be able to form a united Georgian nation.” (Kakha Bendukidze)

Thus intellectuals (specifically the ones working on the rival textbook) devised the terms “intelligentsia” as a diffuse term to signify the source of an individual’s symbolic capital, i.e. education and career path (Bourdieu 1984) as well as a “nationalist mentality” or thinking pattern different from their own.

In contrast to the term “intelligentsia,” the notion of intellectual wakes associations with new forms of knowledge and cultural capital stemming from Western oriented geopolitical alignments. Intellectuals have allegiances and affiliations with a different symbolic market and different ideologies of power. As Narvselius explains, “unlike intelligentsia this term lacks a connotation of belonging to a community of ascribed virtues and, in principle, the core criterion distinguishing the intellectual is his or her outstanding ability of critical reflection” (2012, p. 121). But in the definition of intellectuals I would emphasize the role of their affinity with
Western intellectual discourse and its patterns of thinking as well as political ideology inherent in democratic forms of citizenship. For instance, new intellectuals usually come from the circles of western NGOs that have played a crucial role in promoting processes leading to the Rose Revolution in 2003 and continued their social activism for the advancement of civic institutions. They also played a part in educational reform, and so forth. Janashia (see chapter 3) is a good example of this.

The ideological clash that sometimes plays out between Soviet generation intelligentsia and the new intellectuals is reflected in the language of nationalism, allegiances to the homeland, and Georgian traditions and cultural values (as we saw for instance, in chapter 3, between Janashia, a representative of the western oriented intellectual, and Tavadze a well established historian of the Soviet generation intelligentsia). The Georgian nationalist intelligentsia armed with patriotic vocabulary often accuses western intellectuals of a lack of devotion to the homeland, pure Georgian traditions and conservative religious values. The intelligentsia charges them with adhering to universal, globalizing ideas which are therefore threatening to claims on the purity of Georgian culture (see chapter 3). In response to this, the new intellectuals criticize the intelligentsia for its double moral standards, standards that reflect the intelligentsia’s historically shaped dual position: “quasi-nationalists” who participated in the Soviet system and “collaborated” (as exemplary traitors from the perspective of the memory paradigm) in the reproduction of the “occupant’s” regime (Soviet system). When explaining why knowing “right” history is important, one of my respondents (from the group of intellectuals writing the history textbook on 200 years of occupation) critically commented on the intelligentsia’s role in Georgian politics:

The reality is the same...the methods are different, I mean no one will invade you riding a horse, Russia does not even spend money to come up with new methods, it’s doing the
same thing and as always finds support from the inside. This never changes either, because collaborationism is deeply embedded [...] in this intelligentsia, this circle for whom [such an order] is advantageous, sometimes for very primitive reasons, that for instance she likes to fly up to Moscow to buy a fur-coat... As long as these people are opinion-makers in our society and as long as civic consciousness is such that [people aspire] to this circle of artists and singers, nothing will salvage us... collaborationism is enabled by the existence of such circle. (Ana)

As evidenced by Ana’s response, these battles are also sites for contesting the right to control the dominant cultural forms that dictate social norms to the Georgian public (see Verdery, 1991). Thus, these contests are inherently political and embody conflicting desires on social order in the actual present and in the absolute future. Disputes over memory are central to these contests. If not always explicit, “historical consciousness” (or the lack of “correct” historical consciousness) is always implied as an underlying matrix of cultural “mentality” and the discourse on memory frequently turns into an instrumental site for judging present political realities. This is why I believe the context in which two history textbooks were produced is an important site where multiple sociopolitical vectors intersect and where discourses that are otherwise dispersed across diverse arenas become localized and acquire substance through the parallel and simultaneous discussion of past, present, and future as well as Georgian “self” and its sub-altern “other”.

The memory game that played out in this critical discursive field represents an example of what Michael Herzfeld in his study of Cultural Intimacy refers to as a form of intimate social poetics where one can see how embedded cultural practices reflect “the local consequences of the global” (1997, p. 37). The concept of cultural intimacy is at the crux of Herzfeld’s approach to nationalism. He urges anthropologists to contribute to the study of nationalism by looking “behind the façades of national unanimity” (1997, p1), and my study is partly a response to such a call. Given that some parallels can be drawn between my claim about Georgia’s internal
discursive field based on a bivocal mode of memory and Herzfeld’s interplay between different registers of national idiom. I will address some of his points to clarify similarities as well as differences in my conceptualizations of the Georgian case.

Central to the Herzfeld’s concept of cultural intimacy are the spaces of cultural engagement where social actors express negative self-stereotypes that are sources of national shame, but at the same time play a crucial role in simultaneously subverting and reinforcing self-assuring national rhetoric. Cultural intimacy denotes such forms of engagement. It is indeed an apt concept for looking into how global processes are manifested in the local, culturally embedded forms of action and how the interplay of official and unofficial idioms construes ideologies of the nation-state. Yet his approach to “diglossia” – “a situation in which a national language is split between two ‘registers or social dialects’” (p. 14) places emphasis on the kind of social poetics in which social actors (ordinary people) use, reformulate or recast official idioms (a “high” register that is usually a property of elites or state officials) for certain unofficial goals.

In contrast to this I present a case of the reverse process, whereby the intellectual elite de-officializes the nation’s symbolism to achieve somewhat official political goals. In this process Georgia’s new intellectuals subvert the normalized form of discourse on the past that had been institutionalized and proliferated by the old Soviet intelligentsia to reconfigure nationhood. This process unfolds within the bounded space of cultural “semiosphere” (Lotman, 1990) where as paradoxical as it may seem social actors employ the “past” to lend immediacy to their pronouncements in the urgency of the present.
At some stage, for reasons that are themselves historical, most often spurred by controversy, collectivities experience the need to impose a test of credibility on certain events and narratives because it matters to them whether these events are true or false, whether these stories are fact or fiction.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, 1995

In September of 2010, following article by the head of Free University, Kakha Bendukidze, appeared in one of the leading Georgian magazines. In it he wrote:

From next year, teachers in Georgian schools will have an opportunity to use the handbook (secondary textbook) *200 Years of Occupation*.

The first time I heard of this yet non-existent book, I got very scared, that it would be some primitive agitprop, with its conspiracy theories and exaggeration of Georgianness.

Then I figured, this might be one of the most important books, and not only for the school pupils. Why? If you think that a cruel Russia integrated (annexed) the adamant Georgian people, but was unable to enslave [the Georgian people], and for 200 years all of us heroically fought for freedom, and have completely preserved our culture, language, faith, integrity [or unity], then you need a fairy tale narrator, and it might be better that the book is not written at all.

If you want to learn, how had we trashed\(^61\) lost many things, acquired something, more ugly than beautiful, still survived, and now we have to make something out of ourselves […] then you need a different kind of book.

What kind of book do I want? I want this book to:

• Show Georgia and Russia in the context of the world's 200 year history
• Tell about Georgian collaborationism
• Show the emergence of Soviet phenomena among us such as the intelligentsia, double morals, and a seemingly (imaginary) equal society that is in fact deeply stratified...
• Explain why Stalin and Beria were scoundrels\(^62\) and not praiseworthy Georgians.
• Discuss how we became the country of legal thieves and what the Soviet

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\(^{61}\) The author actually uses here street jargon, the verb "gavfarchakdit" the root word is "far'chaki" (i.e., pitiful, surrendered, submitted and battered, the prefix "ga" denotes the process of becoming, the "v" in "gav" is a first person marker) and the verb here is dynamic passive.

\(^{62}\) The word he uses here literally is "no man" - Georgian arakaci
Georgian militia [police] was [he implies here how the militia was involved with mafia as legal thieves]

• Analyze how the Georgian economy was decaying and how corruption in Moscow was part of this.
• Make us think why in the first half of the 20th century Gelati monks and Akaki Tsereteli [a prominent Georgian writer and active social figure] wanted Georgians to convert to Catholicism.
• Tell us how the Georgian countryside [provinces] became impoverished.
• Remind us how Georgian "Teradleuli\(^{63}\)" liberals emerged.
• Teach us who Dimitri Qipiani\(^{64}\) was
• Ask us which traditions are truly Georgian and which ones are Soviet formations
• Describe why we have our current borders [territorial]
• Accurately recover [reconstruct] the war with Russia 08.08.08
• Ask us the following question: What did Russia/Bolshevik party knew [that enabled them] to bend our neck?
• And many other things

Don't know about you but it would not be useless for me to read such a book.

Bendukidze’s manifest tackles diverse topics; diverse, because they address problematics of disparate cultural, ideological and political domains. For the author himself the list of questions includes some untold stories that are waiting to be revealed, and the stories that have been told yet need to be tested for their truthfulness. His project, as hinted above, has no singular purpose, but goes beyond simply trying to demonize Russia. It contests most, if not all misconceptions of historical processes and their outcomes.

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\(^{63}\) Teradleulebi, literally those who drank river Terek (see chapter 3) was a name for the 19th century Georgian liberal intellectuals who were educated in Russia, hence had to cross river Terek when entering Georgia from the Caucasus (also see Manning, 2004, 2011; Suny 1993).

\(^{64}\) Dimitri Qipiani was a 19\(^{th}\) century writer, publicist and a public statesmen, leader of the liberal intellectuals. He was exiled and assassinated in 1886. Kipiani is a significant figure as someone who had served under the imperial regime but whose work is valued for its nationalist agenda. His textbook section on Kipiani is titled "In service of the enemy for the homeland." In 2007 Georgian Orthodox Church canonized him as a saint. This is another example of how Georgian church appropriates and incorporates secular heroes into its sacred domain. Such monumentalization and sacralization of the figures like Dimitri Kipiani (or Ilia Chavchavadze who is also canonized as a Georgian saint) results in a crystalization of public figures that become canonical and intact and their image can only enter public debate from a single, univocal perspective. Such images cannot be reflected upon or critically discussed, but can only be venerated as authorities of the divine nature.
When Bendukidze said “If you think, that cruel Russia integrated [annexed] the adamant Georgian people, but was unable to enslave [Georgian people], and for 200 years all of us heroically fought for freedom, and have completely preserved our culture, language, faith, integrity [or unity], then you need a fairy tale narrator, and it might be better that the book is not written at all,” he subverts the fixed and normalized form of historical representation (see discussion on metanarrative chapter 2 and 3) not only specifically of the Russian-Georgian story but all historical narratives of invasion, resistance and preservation. Contrary to this, the “truth” reveals an ugly picture of “how had we trashed, lost many things, acquired something, more ugly than beautiful.” That is the image of the unexaggerated Georgianness that Bendukidze wants to transpose and explain within that image how Georgians “still survived,” and how they can “make something out of [themselves].” His discourse dialogizes the voice of self-idealization and the voice of self-condemnation and while he antagonizes and debunks the former, he inscribes the “truth” claims in the latter.

In the eyes of Bendukidze and the group of liberal intellectuals working with him misconceptions about the past cultivate the image of “exaggerated Georgianness”, and these notions act upon the present by way of shaping Georgian citizen subjects’ reasoning mode with respect to political, economic, and cultural matters. As Bendukidze explained during our final interview:

For the development of [civil] institutions it is important that we have certain models in our heads. Why do we act in one way or another?! We act rationally based on our

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65 Bendukidze subscribed to an extreme right wing ideology and once metaphorically described the degree of his ideological belonging: “on my right side there is a wall.” Given that, whenever he used term “rational” I was compelled to wonder whether he took human rationalism to the same degree of absolutism. So, I asked him once: do you think human beings are rational? In response he said, "It depends on what we define as rational. I'm not entirely certain 'rationality' is the right word at all. Every act can be defined as rational from some perspective. If a man jumps from this window because he wanted to exit the building, we will regard it as an irrational act, but from his point of view it may have been perfectly rational. He may have sat and thought about it and from the way he perceived the world it may have made perfect sense to him, so it's not
imaginaries about the world. For example if someone’s understanding of the world is such that she thinks Russia devoted itself to helping Georgia and tried as much as it could to support Georgia, we will act in accordance to this knowledge. That is why correct knowledge enables us not to repeat those mistakes and make new mistakes. That is one of the charming parts of knowledge that a human can make novel mistakes⁶⁶ (Bendukidze, personal communication)

As pre-conceived, the book project on 200 years of occupation in a sense had to accomplish the impossible. It had to turn the story of 200 years of occupation into a cultural omni-book, a liber magnus that could alter “the core of national consciousness.” The photograph below (see Figure 5.5.) is a snapshot of the Facebook page created by FreeU group that provides a small description of the mission and purpose of the book. Whether or not it successfully accomplishes this mission will be known only once it sees the light of day and enters public discussion. Making a judgment on this issue falls beyond the scope of this study.

The “stock of stories” (MacIntyre, 1984) that Bendukidze alludes to in his article are meaningful to him as a member of a “textual community” (Stock 1983) because of how they

irrational. Rationality is always about third party perspective and it's not right to devise the term." To that I noted, "You are a lot more post-modern than you'd like to admit", Bendukidze smiled but asked, "Why?" I tried to explain: “Well, because of what you are saying right now; isn't it all about everyone having his/her own truth and that truth can be absolutely valid and legitimate from their point of view?” But he did not think of himself as post-modern: "No, I’m definitely not post-modern, because I just think rationality may not be the right term, but I do believe that most times people are adequate, otherwise we wouldn't be sitting here. Well, say for instance that there is a forest with animals and 30 lions are among them, do you think lions are adequate?” "If there are lions, then they are" I replied. Satisfied with my answer Bendukidze continued: "Good, that's right if they survive, then they are adequate. If their number increases to 70 that means they are adequate right? Well humans more than any other animals have had the greatest increase in population over their existence". Me: "But unlike other animals they also have the ability to manipulate their environment which does not make them any less adequate of course, so yes, I understand what you mean." The reason I am quoting this discussion is to provide a bracketed definition of the term “rational” as Bendukidze used it in the statement above. His understanding of human adequacy was inherent and somehow evident in his approach to people as a manager of the institution. His belief in a priori adequacy of human beings informed his conviction that when given a choice and sufficient information every individual will make the best of his opportunity. My impression after working with him for 3 years was that for him no one was inherently stupid or incapable.

⁶⁶ The kind of “understanding of the world” and Russian Georgian relations Bendukidze mentioned is the very opposite of “the fairy-tale” he criticized in his article. If in the first case Russia is a cruel enemy that Georgians continuously resisted, in the second case Russia appears as a protector. There is the paradox in these mismatched representations, but not of Bendukidze's vision but of Russian-Georgian memory's dual paradigm which I discuss at length in the following chapter.

149
engage notions of Georgianness and how they can transliterate terms of the present socio-political setup. Testing their truthfulness was important not for what these stories are in and of themselves, but for what they do as models for understanding the world (or what he thinks they can do as models).

Figure 5.5.
Snapshot of the Facebook page set up by FreeU group on the textbook *200 Years of Occupation*. The main purpose of this page was to invite people to contribute their memoires, photographs, personal experiences, or views on this historical period. The description of the page reads: "We, a group of authors are working on the textbook – *200 Years of Occupation*. This is a book about the events that made us lose independence for 190 years, which changed our life and soul and still impacts our present. We want this book to be about the people who lived in Georgia throughout these 200 years and were connected to the events...We offer you to take part in creating this book together with us..."

The remaining section of this chapter draws examples from both history textbooks as well as from discussions and deliberations (recorded by me) to unfold the central themes of this memory
game. In understanding these texts and commentaries by their authors, one constantly has to keep in mind the pre-fixed paradigms of historical conception and memory maxims (discussed in chapter 3 and 4) because these categories define the terms of the game both implicitly and explicitly. Based on these discussions I draw several theoretical conclusions about memory-making (or memory using) as a form of symbolic action that employs the past as a metaphor for cultural engagement aimed at realigning current social order.

The fundamental difference between the textbooks produced by the History Institute historians (HI textbook) and the FreeU group (FU textbook) can be formulated in terms of the evaluative orientation each takes toward two main subjects: Russia and Georgianness. While both texts are similar in their intent to demonize Russia and the outcome of its rule, the perspective on Georgianness is a point where the two diverge. It is the stance they take toward the image of the Georgian nation that is the node where dialogism of two voices and re-accenting plays out.

In the forward of HI textbook the authors address readers of their book by writing:

The experience of ancestors will teach you that there are no benevolent occupiers, that the most valuable thing for humans is freedom and citizenship of an independent country, for which our ancestors shed blood throughout thousands of years.... they were defending the homeland, language, and Christianity. This book will teach you based on the example of one of our historical invaders... to account for the experience of ancestors or the world’s historical events in order to foresee the problems of the future... Enormous empires have vanished, great countries have ceased existing, but Georgia has survived. That is the result of our ancestors’ self-sacrifice... Beginning in the 15th century, Georgian kings were looking for an ally in their struggle against Muslim invaders. With this aim they tried to form an alliance with Russia along with other Christian states in Europe. After the fall of Byzantine Empire (1453) Russia remained as [Georgia’s] closest Orthodox [Christian] country and the desire for its support and partnership occurred naturally to Georgian politicians. … Russia had its own interests and …when the time came, Russia did not pay attention to the destiny of a country fighting for its survival. It singlehandedly, piece-by-piece annexed [Georgia] and erased from the map a country of great historical past and culture. Russian politicians and scholars have been reiterating to
the present that Russia did not really invade our country but rather incorporated it in response to Georgian kings’ persistent requests. In reality none of the Georgian kings ever thought of resigning from the throne and rendering full rights to the Russian kings. All they wanted was protection and military alliance...

Evident from these introductory passages is the emphasis on Georgia’s victimization at the hands of Russia, and the accent is on the resistance and self-sacrifice of Georgians. Apart from that it makes a point of the benevolence of Georgian rulers’ intent in seeking alliance with the Orthodox power in their struggle to defend Christianity against Muslim invaders. This forward in its own right dialogizes multiple voices present in the contemporary discursive domain, but responds to them by framing the argument on the basis of Georgian metanarrative (see chapter 2). The phrase “on the example of one of our invaders” is a figurative speech element, it is a rhetorical enticement that inevitably prompts any Georgian reader to recall the rest of “our invaders” and evaluate the present actor - Russia - not in isolation, but as part of the “genera.” The tactic of persuasion that the authors employ here relies on indirect insistence to hint how things must be judged, and this speech genre bases its persuasive power on the assumption of shared commitment to the “moral impulse” (White, 1981) of the metanarrative.

By accentuating the voice of self-idealization, projecting an ideal image of “ancestors...[who were] shedding blood... defending the homeland, language, and Christianity”, it devises a moral impulse embedded in this memory maxim to make an evaluative statement on what the right action or outlook toward Russia is in the present context; an action that realizes the ideal of Georgianness.

While throughout our interview, Vaja, (one of the authors of the HI textbook) pointed out examples of collaborationism, highlighted the “dualistic nature” of Georgians, their inclination to “give in” and “give up,” when discussing the content of the textbook, he explained why he
thought silencing these vices and accenting the voice of idealism was important in the present context:

[Georgians believe] that fighting this huge empire is pointless (saying this, he was simultaneously referencing the current context as well as the processes of the 19th and early 20th centuries) and this is why in our [textbook] rebellions appear more important, because if you do not beseech and remind Georgians of this spirit* [in Georgian he used the word “vein”] then we are lost. (Vaja)

Vaja believed in what Chavchavadze wrote in his 1888 text that “when a nation remembers stories of great deeds, it is revamped, encouraged and inspired ...[it] fights steadily, embraced with an example of its ancestors and their will, and only such a relentless fighter gets to keep a playground to itself” (see chapter 3). Further comments by Vaja and Dodo, (who spontaneously joined us during the interview with Vaja) were triggered by the events of 1832 Georgian conspiracy against Russian imperialist regime. That attempted rebellion failed as a result of betrayal by the brother of one of the conspirators, but it remains a topic of lively discussion as an iconic narrative of both Georgians’ patriotic self-sacrifice and betrayal from the intimate circle of insiders. This is a point that emerged in their discussion.

(Vaja): The main thing here is a spiritual disposition. This is what the textbook was needed for. So that the only attitude [of Georgians] is not that of “we are idlers,” “we can’t win,” “we are small,” “we are no good for anything”. This must not be propagated, because such tendencies exist in all societies. Unless there is constant readiness [to resist] nothing will be salvaged. This tendency is the biggest failure, because we are a small country anyway, with a lot of problems, [internally] fragmented and if on top of that you constantly instill this [self-condemnatory sentiment] it becomes the greatest advantage for the occupier and a form of insurance that [the occupied] will abandon any idea of resistance...

(Dodo): ...and stay in slavery for tens and hundreds years more. It endangers independent statehood, this kind of thinking.
(Vaja): So, that rebellion [of 1832] might have been destined, but it did not let the spirit languish and a Georgian was always ready, with every opportunity, to awaken this dormant spirit. This is the point, or else how can you defeat Russia?!

(Dodo, later in the discussion): I was at a conference in Gori, and they criticized me [for my views]...of course if in war Russia uses a nuclear weapon, no one will defeat it, neither we nor Americans nor anyone on the planet, but why should one fear this [resistance] if you were fighting Persians, all this history of wars that we have, all these victories, David the Builder, from here from there...it’s not that I am proposing that what happened in the past could happen now, but why should we not preserve in consciousness that with normal weapons, normal battle, in a normal war you can defeat someone or be defeated but not have this obsessive [fear].?!

Dodo’s words are especially revealing because her puzzlement over the “fear” of resisting Russia stems from her conviction that every Georgian is committed to the truth of the Georgian metanarrative and the memory maxims that are built in it. She is perplexed by the paradox of the conflict between historical paradigm that attests to Georgians’ constant resistance and defiance of powerful enemies, on the one hand, and their present unwillingness to enact this paradigm of “true self”, on the other. This predicament led Vaja and Dodo to devise a well-known memory paradigm as the “formula” (as Vaja coined it) for their book to inspire the Georgian nation. The HI textbook is populated with passages that emphasize the role of resistance against the Russian empire, and it frames these various uprisings as part of the nation’s common liberating movement. To illustrate this point I will quote two passages below from separate chapters of the book:

(1): In spite of the defeat, the Georgian people once again showed its invader that it would never be subdued through national oppression; that Georgia would never run out of self-sacrificing patriots. The rebellion also revealed that the Russian occupier was in no way different from ... Turk-Seljuk tribes or Ottoman-Qizilbashs...

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67 Gori is a city in the eastern Georgia, approximately 80 kilometers away from Tbilisi, bordering disputed territory of South Ossetia. The city is known as a hometown of Joseph Stalin. Russian troops occupied Gori during 2008 August war.
(2): The 1841 rebellion in Guria [a region in western Georgia] that took lives of many people was a part of the Georgians’ national-liberation movement, one more example of devoted struggle against Russian tyranny.

If Vaja and Dodo believed that in order to defy the current predicament they found Georgia in, a historical account must posit a model that reaches out toward an absolute ideal, the group working at the FreeU was convinced of the very opposite. The FU textbook begins its narration of Russian-Georgian relations by presenting a jarring image of Georgians that sets up a displacing, deforming accent from the very outset. The opening chapter recasts the very first encounters between Russians and Georgians over the course of centuries in a very different way than Vaja and Dodo envision. Several episodes are covered, but in fact not discussed, analyzed or dwelt upon. Instead, they are merely recalled in a general discussion on the topic: “The origins of Russian Georgian Relations”. The very first image recalled is an episode verified in the texts of the Armenian historian Stephen of Taron. In this connection the author of the FU textbook’s introductory chapter writes:

Although the crucial turning point in several centuries of Russian Georgian relations was the 1801 annexation of the Kartl-Kakheti Kingdoms and incorporation of the country into the Russian Empire, the first verified encounter [of this sort that can be found] preceded [this] by eight centuries. The story [in the Armenian historian’s text] is depicted in the following manner: Approximately in the years of 1001-1002 the Georgians had peacefully concluded negotiations with their neighbors Byzantians. This relieved the tension and animosity between them. But in the meanwhile [while these negotiations were going on], Georgian soldiers robbed some hay from a Russian soldier from the brigade hired by the Byzantine army (at least that is what Armenian historian is telling us), which resulted in clashes between Russians and Georgians that shed blood. The outcome of this was the misfortune that broke over the entire southern-Georgian district, Tao: after the cruel Russian raid the country was destroyed, people were massacred and
not one Georgian nobleman survived (comment in the parenthesis in the original).

What is the sense to be made of this episode? Why did the authors decide to project such an image? Georgians are portrayed not merely as inconsiderate and irresponsible, but are presented as bullies and wrongdoers who initiate a course of reckless actions with devastating effects for the country. If interpreted in relation to the previous textbook and existing normative representations of the past, this episode obstructs the accepted and culturally legitimate image of Georgianness. But its purpose is not to destroy all possibilities of national self-assurance, which would be the case if this were a monologic, self-sufficient text, but to engage in an “antagonizing” critical dialogue with the voice of self-idealization in order to reveal the flaws of the Georgian character.

Re-accenting as a deformative practice not merely diverts the center by reshuffling the content, but produces a different utterance by re-texturing the fabric of the text, creating new nodes for the unfolding of historical events. In order to produce an utterance that responds to the initial one, but shifts its meaning, it introduces a symbolically “polluting” episode like the one above (Douglas 1966) that transforms the tone. Contrary to the HI textbook that posits a model of distant idealism as an example to aspire to, the rival textbook puts forth a “lesson of mistakes”. This form of representation creates a sense of historicity that instead of being mythically abstracting is morally obstructing. As Ana, a member of the group who has worked at the Free University for years and who was instrumental in coordinating the writing process of the

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68 The original text by Stephen of Taron is fully quoted at the end of this introductory chapter. The actions of Georgians seem even more reckless and outrageous in the original source. Here is the translation of the passage from the text: “Some warrior from the Russian infantry was carrying hay to his horse. One Iverian [Georgian] walked up to him and took the hay away from him. Then another Russian rushed to help him [the Russian warrior]. The Iverian called his own people, who rushed in and killed the first Russian. Then all the Russians who were there prepared for battle; there were six thousand of them, infantry armed with spears and shields... The lords and vassals of the Tao [Georgian territory] came out together against them and were defeated.”
textbook, pointed out:

This is an attempt to show that history is not something hanging up in the air and the country is separate from it, but that history is those things happening in this country, those stories, things that were happening to people... We are not judging anyone or asking anyone to be a hero, but saying that there were a hundred thousand martyrs...well maybe there were but there was more of this [by “this” she refers to betrayal, collaboration, practices that reinforced “occupier’s regime”] and in reality there was more of this, because it was with support of such people [collaborators] that everything was being destroyed, which will possibly happen now too, in the near future. (Ana)

What Ana was getting at by pointing out that history should not be abstracted from “things happening” on the ground was that mythic conception of the past and ensuing belief in Georgianness produce a major gap between real actions and their moral evaluations. To put it simply, because the conception of the self is abstracted from reality, it cannot sustain moral registers that enable judgment here and now. During one of the deliberations on the textbook, Bendukidze formulated a similar point in rather explicit terms, grounding historical conception in specific practices of citizenship:

I have formulated for myself two points. One concerns the purpose of general education and another the purpose of this book. The outcome of general education should be that after an individual graduates from school and is asked to serve as a juror, he can reason adequately with respect to a given case. The purpose of this book should be that when one is asked to serve as a juror on the case of espionage he can also reason adequately [italics indicate the point where Bendukidze accentuated his sentence]. (Kakha)

Both Ana’s and Bendukidze’s words attest to the centrality of this historical account for the present context. It problematizes not Russian politics in and of itself, but the treatment and entailments within the Georgian polity. During our interview Beka, one of the FU group members who ran the center promoting religious tolerance\(^69\), pointed out that in his view the textbook on the history of 200 years had to give “realistic evaluation” of that period “which

\(^{69}\)Tolerance Center under the auspices of the Public Defender  www.tolerantoba.ge
means that we Georgians were not only occupied but we, Georgian society, have aided in every way this tragedy to be institutionalized which was reflected in the occupation, in the abolishment of autocephaly, in Russification and so forth”.

While it was never brought up during working deliberations, such an outlook on “realistic” history existed as a tacit consensus among all members of the FU group. The “realism” for them entailed emphasis on the mistakes and flaws of the Georgians. The distinction between a mythologized and “realistic” past was stressed more acutely during interviews when I explicitly posed questions about the purpose and mission of this textbook and asked how it set itself apart from other accounts of history.

Zaal’s commentaries on the topic were exceptionally insightful. As a writer and a scholar of literature who had taught at Georgian middle school for years and lectured at the university, his sense of history and temporality was informed with diverse experiences. My interview with Zaal lasted for more than three hours. In his lengthy and rich answers he swiftly moved between discussions of literature, poetry, history, and contemporaneity, and although there were many interesting points made I will quote here parts of his monologues that are relevant to the issue of “realistic” and “mythic” history.

Zaal himself coined it in terms of “dead” or “frozen history” (gaqvavebuli literally means turned into rock. At times he used gaqvavebuli narativi which I translate as lithic narrative) and problematized Georgians inadequate temporal orientation in terms of “frozen” temporality:

Our main problem is that for us... as a nation, as a living organism, time does not exist. We are psychologically static in time. And this is reflected in everything, absolutely everything, beginning from our morality, our urban culture and our daily customs. (Zaal)

While pointing this muteness of temporality and discussing Georgians’ monolithic
narratives of selfhood, Zaal continued by explaining how such backward oriented narratives of
the self create a conflict with reality:

The reason I think we don’t love history... well the thing is that we comprehend, we
understand perfectly well that these obsessions of ours, our lithic stories are not real.
Everyone comprehends this. It is impossible for a person not to understand this; and this
then creates conflict between yourself and that monolithic narrative. You want to
conform (correspond) to it, but you don’t, because you are alive and how can you
conform to the flawless history; so the only way is to lie, not just to lie, but to deceive our
own selves... so that we’ll do some things inside our homes and elsewhere, but it won’t
count. (Zaal)

Zaal’s main point in his problematization of the conflict between real and ideal self was
that this gap creates a site of liminality for morally unaccountable actions. For example, as a
demonstration of his point he mentioned disturbingly littered streets of Tbilisi as a manifestation
of an actual irresponsible and yet unaccountable habit, because in spite of this “reality”, he said,
littering is not viewed as a Georgian habit.

5.5. Memory: Language, Myth, and Metaphor

In spite of the emphasis on “realistic” history, the FU group and the HI historians shared a
common cultural ground in their approach to memory as an important medium for “fixing”
Georgian mindsets. They were united in the belief that re-projecting or re-ordering the past can
create a realm of different order for transcending limitations of existence (Booker 2004).
Throughout my field research I continuously questioned the logic by which Georgians (including
myself) are compelled to think of memory as an ultimate and only resource to create or transform
cultural models of thought—the sole language in which a persuasive and legitimate argument
about Georgianness can be articulated. One way to think of this is that such a logic is itself an outcome of culturally embedded practice. The past for Georgians (and possibly for other collectivities as well) is one of the most powerful metaphors not only on some abstract poetic level, but on an existential, life-forming one; a metaphor that Georgians live by and is itself a product of complex historicity (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).

As Lakoff and Johnson suggested we hardly ever reflect upon the metaphors that “we live by” (2003). Their point that metaphors are inherent not only to language, but to action and thought as well, informs my own understanding of memory-making practice as in its own right a metaphoric and a symbolic action. As a discursive strategy narrating the past creates a metaphor for representing or even untangling present reality. But this form of cultural discourse employs the past not merely as any Aesopian parable, but as a symbol that fuses the abstract with the real to such extent that it no longer stands for its object of representation but is an indissoluble part of that object.

Cassirer’s theory of symbolic forms can be used to account for this phenomenon. His philosophy is concerned with how humans in the process of creating the objective world produce “self-contained communities of meaning” (Coskun 2007, p.153). Cassirer thought that “various products of culture” like scientific knowledge, language, myth, art, religion, comprise symbolic forms that are “directed toward transforming the passive world of mere impressions, in which the spirit seems imprisoned, into a world that is pure expression of the human spirit” (1968, p. 80). In his view, symbolic systems in the process of serving as interpretive tools, become much more than practical mechanisms; they come to represent human effort at self-expression or self-conception. Through that process humans become what he called “animal symbolicum”—dwellers of a symbolic universe. For him, man has “…so enveloped himself in linguistic forms,
in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium” (1962, p. 25). Cassirer’s essay *Language and Myth* provides one of the clearest accounts of his view on myth as a special mode of human thought which not only transforms reality by representing it in a certain light but is impregnated with self-expressive emotions:

The mythical form of conception is not something superadded to certain elements of empirical existence; instead, the primary “experience” itself is steeped in the imagery of myth and saturated with its atmosphere. Man lives with objects only in so far as he lives with these forms; he reveals reality to himself, and himself to reality, in that he lets himself and the environment enter in this plastic medium, in which the two do not merely make contact, but fuse with each other (1953 p 10, italics in the original).

The idea of symbolic objectification suggests that we cannot perceive our own selves unless we project through something else. The need for symbolic objectification in Cassirer’s view is born out of the human urge for the expression of deep emotions. Hence, Cassirer states that what we must seek to learn is not the substance of a myth but rather its function in man’s social and cultural life (1974). This suggests that symbolic forms should be understood in terms of their communicative function within various settings of cultural engagement. Thus we should seek to look for symbolic actions and situate them in the contexts of collectivities’ critical need to resolve certain entanglements (whether political, cultural or existential) through symbolic mediation.

From this perspective, I argue that symbolic action presupposes two kinds of engagement: one in which symbolic forms serve as a medium of objectification and the other in which existing symbolic forms themselves become objects of mediation. In other words, if in Cassirer’s words, reality is only given to us through the “plastic media”, we can only know how to tackle, act back upon reality through these very forms.
A crucial point in all this is that symbolic action (as any other form of human activity concerned with expression and mediation) grows out of a communicative setting. The need for “objectification” is never monologic and fixed, but inherent with dialogism and fluidity. Symbolic forms are properties of a speaking subject whose speech is conceived as being addressed to her imagined (or real) listener seeking to deliver a message.

Although Cassirer did not incorporate this focus on communication in his philosophy, in my view Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of utterance complements and completes the analysis of symbolic action. The views of these two thinkers stem from the neo-Kantian attempt to bridge the gap between “spirit” and “matter” (Holquist, 1999). Bakhtin’s thought on dialogism, as well as Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms can be taken as approaches to the epistemology of knowledge. It is a meditation on how we know and how we conceive of the self. Bakhtin’s idea that being a self is an event, a drama enacted by more than one actor, implies that the construction of self is an ever transforming process, one that is never complete, and always includes a multiplicity of “voices” originating from the external world, from all our experiences and encounters with the others.

“Whatever else it is, self/other is a relation of simultaneity” (Holquist, 1999, p. 99), and this relation is always mediated by symbols, signs, cultural tools, and so forth, but most importantly by language. Bakhtin’s main emphasis is on the latter. But far from being simply a means toward achieving something his understanding goes beyond its expressive function and sees language as a key to consciousness, where there is “an intimate connection between the project of language and the project of selfhood” (Holquist, 1999, p.102).

My understanding of the two discursive genres on Georgianness is informed by such approach to symbolic action. The notion of multivoicedness (Bakhtin 1981) and relation of
simultaneity (Holquist 1999) is at the crux of “memory game” in question. This memory game entails a kind of construction of the Georgian self that is mediated by pre-given symbolic forms and is shaped by addressivity to the other. It emanates the idea that the construction of the self is an incomplete, heteroglossic and ever-transforming process of expression and contestation that takes place in the milieu of multiple speaking subjects. The Georgian “self” is expressed through symbolic forms such as memory narratives, (memory is a collective’s language of “self”-articulation), but these forms embody two polarized yet simultaneous voices that articulate the nature of the Georgian self. One can take a stance, reflect upon things, produce meaning, and so froth, by employing either one of two voices (e.g., as Bendukidze did in employing the self-condemning voice), but it speaks not as a self-contained, isolated or self-sufficient voice of truth, but only in a simultaneous relation to the other one.

The writing of these two textbooks represents precisely this form of symbolic action. Both projects employed the past as a distinct form of speech genre with an aim to say something, to deliver a reality-transforming message (performative utterance), targeting particular listeners. Memory-making here is a way of doing “things with words” with both “constative” and “performative” purpose in mind (Austin 1962).

The recourse to memory in both cases carried a similar mission: to dismantle “the myth” of Russia’s brotherhood and to re-orient Georgian citizens in their political interpretations. But while the intelligentsia historians took on this mission with established modes of “historical” discourse aimed at reinvigorating a voice of “idealism” in dominant memory paradigm, the new intellectuals sought to accomplish the same task by devising the voice of “self-condemnation” and re-accenting the very memory paradigm that was in place.
6.6. INTRODUCTION

Mary Douglas in her influential work *Purity and Danger* wrote that objects that cannot be neatly fit into any of the binary categories of a culture are deemed polluting and dangerous. Such objects generate the sense of ambivalence that upsets the order of the social world and thus become tabooed (Douglas, 1966). But what happens when a group’s conception of order allows for the co-existence of dichotomous qualities? When we-ness is construed in terms of a relationship of simultaneity between the “pure” and the “dangerous,” between ideal and flawed?
When tendencies such as unity and rupture or devotion and betrayal, are conceived as equally inherent and natural to the notions of “selfhood”? What I have argued so far demonstrates that the defining symbolics of Georgian identity embody two contradictory formulas of Georgianness and thus give birth to two counteracting, but mutually constitutive voices. Two discursive genres on the nationhood evolve out of the Georgian memory’s bivocality with two distinct but dialogically interdependent voices.

In the previous chapter I have tried to show how the dialogism between the two voices plays out in the memory game on Georgia’s past with all its social, political and cultural significance, and how it taps into the current socio-political conditions. In this concluding chapter I want to expand the argument on bivocality and explore the simultaneity of “pure” and “dangerous” in a specific memory image. This chapter will bring to the forefront an individual who is possibly the most paradigmatic figure for the memory of Russian-Georgian relations; namely, Erekle II, an 18th century King of the Kartl-Kakheti Kingdom (the Eastern Georgian Kingdom). Erekle was the first Georgian ruler to sign a treaty with the Russian empire, creating a foundation for the consequent annexation of all Georgian kingdoms. His contested image acquires primacy in the context of Georgia’s current geopolitical complexities. And its interpretations and discussions always take on a double temporal orientation, as they critically interweave past and present and embody the simultaneity of contradictory elements of Georgianness. In the context of this study, his figure is significant as a site of contestation, but also as a monumental image – a single embodiment of the all-meaningful, critical, and contradictory categories of Georgianness stemming from the memory paradigm. Erekle II and his decision create a node in historical memory where voices of both self-idealization and self-condemnation collide. These two voices
contemplate Erekle II in two distinct ways and while they unfold into contested visions of Russian-Georgian relations, they conceive of two alternative pasts and presents.

6.2. **Historical Preamble: ’83 Georgievsk Traktat**

In 1783 the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti signed a treaty (Traktat) with Russia at Georgievsk in the North Caucasus. The treaty contained thirteen articles, four additional “secret” articles and an oath of Erekle’s allegiance to Russia.
Treaty provisions maintained the following: Russia was to preserve the integrity of Erekle’s territories; all Georgian monarchs were to be approved by Russia; Georgian monarchs were forbidden to establish relationships with foreign rulers without Russia’s approval; Erekle (and his heirs) was obligated to support Russia’s military campaigns, and the Catholicos-Patriarch was to be subordinated to the Russian Synod. In addition, one of the “secret articles” stated that Russia would serve as the arbiter in disputes between Georgian monarchs (See Rayfield 2012).

6.3. A BIVOCAL KING AND THE RUSSIAN DILEMMA

“King Erekle had a bitter war with Dagestanis and defeated them. After the victory the King was returning home with his army…Erekle entered a country road…Suddenly someone threw a fistful of plums at him. Astounded King stopped. So did his army. They looked around and saw a twelve year old Ingilo girl sitting on a huge plum tree…The King’s accompanies rushed toward the fence and yelled at the little girl: “You fool, what have you done? How dare you throw plums at the King?” “What? King Erekle you say?,” exclaimed the astonished girl from above. “What are you saying? Had it been our celebrated King Erekle, would he put a Persian hat on his head? No that is a lie, I threw plums at a Persian, our vicious enemy and not King Erekle who every Georgian loves as his God…”

Iakob Gogebashvili, *Folk legends on King Erekle*

“Once when Georgians suffered in war, King Erekle asked the Russian general Totleben for help, only with the purpose of uniting the country and successfully conducting the matters of his homeland. But Totleben betrayed him and ran away in fear”

“People lovingly referred to Georgian King, Erekle II as “little Kakhi”

*Stories of King Erekle*

70 Ingilo is a 19th century term describing someone from Saingilo, the district that was initially part of the Caucasian Albania, incorporated in Georgia in 8th century. After Russian annexation of the Kartl-Kakheti kingdom, Saingilo became part of the Russian Empire. It is currently a territory of Azerbaijan.
Many of the key issues constituting the memory discourse on the Russian-Georgian relationship unfold in terms of the competing perspectives on King Erekle II’s decision to sign the Georgievsk Treaty with Russia in 1783. A result of this treaty was that Georgia became a colony of the Russian Empire. In many conversations I have been part of, the disagreement on the “Russian issue” somehow leads to mentioning of Erekle’s decision as a fateful act of a man upon which the destiny of an entire nation has hinged. “Erekle’s decision” has been an issue of contention and contestation not only today but in the 19th and early 20th century intellectual terrain, and this is reflected in poetry and prose (e.g. N. Baratashvili’s poem *Fate of Georgia* 1839).

The debate on Erekle’s decision to sign the treaty with Russians is one of “what if” contemplation: What if Erekle had not allied with Russia? It takes a stance based on an alternative present and alternative future which could have been, but did not come to be as a result of one man’s decision. It presents a conundrum of an alternative reality, and because of that, this historical momentum and Erekle’s figure is invested with insurmountable ambivalence and undefiable gravity at the same time. In all instances, Erekle’s decision is judged from the perspective of the present context based on what Georgians already know about Russia and about what has happened since 1783.

But Erekle represents a paradigmatic figure not only because of the historical momentum that he was an indissoluble part of, but because his own image incorporates the dual paradigm of Georgianness and invokes the ambivalence of Georgians in judging both their respected King and the outcome of his decision. To employ Douglas’s conceptual framework of binary opposition, Erekle II’s iconic figure can be read in both a “pure” and a “dangerous” way. He is both a venerated King, defender of Christianity, skillful and brave warrior as well as an
uncertain, naive, misguided, failed politician who carries the burden of the nation’s “tragic” fate.

Nevertheless, rather than being silenced or tabooed Erekle is an indissoluble part and an anchor of the political debates on Russian-Georgian relations. Interpretations of this memory image, the ways in which individuals judge this decisive moment in time and the King who belongs to that moment (or to whom this moment belongs), once again demonstrate the dialogism of the two voices in Georgian memory. In that sense, Erekle represents a sort of prototypical case among all memory images in that it fuses two contradictory tendencies in a single body.

Erekle’s decision is justified, especially when Russian-Georgian religious kinship is employed as an interpretive schema vis-à-vis the existing “threat” in 18th century. At the time Georgia was at risk of remaining under pressure from two Muslim empires, the Ottoman and Persian. In a column titled “Erekle II – The Tragedy Of An Enlightened King” that was published in 2013 in a popular online magazine Georgia Today, the authors pose “Erekle’s Dilemma” in the following manner:

The country was too weak to remain independent, and Erekle was forced to sup with the devil. Faced with the choice of making a pact with greedy Russians in the North, who were Orthodox Christians, or with the less imperialistic but more aggressive Persians in the South, who were Muslims, he opted for the Russians. How would you have decided?

At the same time, many Georgians evaluate Erekle’s move as a political failure, a misjudgment of Russia’s political agenda based on naiveté and the weakness of Erekle’s character. For instance in the same article the authors write:

Erekle arguably underestimated what it meant to invite the Russian Bear to his kingdom, and probably he did not expect his decision to have consequences that would reach into the 21st century. Nonetheless, he well understood that Russia was a dangerous ally, and he tried hard to instead get the French on board.
The dualism becomes even more acute with the fact that in 1789 Erekle rejected the possibility for the unification of the western and eastern Georgian kingdoms. As Donald Rayfield writes (2012) the prospect of unity was undermined by royal feuds between Erekle’s heirs: “Erekle’s heir Giorgi eloquently evoked the dangers of disunity. But Erekle’s second wife Darejan disliked her stepson Giorgi she wanted her daughter’s son, Solomon II, to rule Imeretia (the western kingdom of Georgia) in his own right. Erekle tended to yield to Darejan and her clique: Imeretia and Kartl-Kakhetia remained separate…” (2012, p. 254). This fact is silenced by those who prefer to frame Erekle’s actions in rather positive terms, but underlined by those who ascribe many of the king’s decisions to his narrow, particularistic concerns to keep the throne within his royal clan.

In all instances, these evaluations look backward in time from the perspective of consequent processes as Russian-Georgian relations unfolded in the way they did, and as such, they carry the mystic scent of retrospective mind-reading, entertaining the versions on “what Erekle thought” or “what Erekle knew.” In the end, Erekle in his own image embodies the bivocality of Georgianness—a heroic King who gave in and made a decision that is justifiable, but inexcusable because of the competing voices of Georgianness. This was one of the debatable issues for the FreeU group in writing 200 years of Georgia’s Occupation and the point where their voice counteracted the voice of “intelligentsia” historians.

6.4. EREKLE’S WINDOW TO EUROPE AND HIS STEP TOWARD RUSSIA

Dimitri (mentioned in chapter 5) was a historian in his 60s who thought that it was of paramount importance to realize Erekle’s figure correctly. During our interview, it became clear to me that Dimitri approached this issue not merely out of scholarly (or even political) curiosity.
It rather seemed that he was battling his own sense of ambivalence and sought to resolve Erekle’s dilemma with a different interpretive frame, first and foremost for his own moral certainty. In the introduction to his book *Georgia and Russia: Lessons on the 500 Year Relations* (unpublished draft given to me by author) Dimitri wrote:

One of the most demonstrative examples of subordinating the interpretation of historical processes to political interests is the battered figure of Erekle II. Today, so-called pro-Russian circles use him as their historical symbol and project him as a devoted warrior for the advancement of Russian rule in the Caucasus. At the same time they try to fit the 18th century context into present reality and in this way justify their pro-Russian foreign orientation. Such a stance gives rise on the one hand to the contemplation of Erekle II as a pro-Russian politician, and on the other hand, yields the contradictory, radical assessment according to which “little Kakhi” is represented as a destroyer of the Georgian state, as a foolish and naive politician. It is exactly such mutually exclusive logics that couch discussion on the centuries long history of Russian-Georgian relations.

Having read this introduction that juxtaposed two opposing perspectives with a hint that neither one did justice to the matter, I asked Dimitri:

(NB): What kind of figure is Erekle II for you?

(Dimitri): Well, this is an unresolved issue not only for historiography but for our society too, and neither my nor any historian’s opinion will solve this issue because our society is divided in two. One party absolutely adores him, and another one [despises] him. Now where is the solution? Well, here’s my solution and I am looking at this a little differently, although I do not possess much evidence to support it. Nevertheless I think that Erekle thought not so much of preserving his state or anything else. Instead, his main aim was to lead the Georgian people and the country out of [and here he spelled each word, stressing meticulously the point he was making] the Ottoman-Kizilbash environment. He wanted to move them away from any sort of Asian developmental path. This was most important for him, his imperative idea. Georgia’s Europeanization was his major strategy. This perspective sets Erekle apart from the rulers who preceded him. They viewed Russia as an ally, as a protector. Erekle’s line was different because his aim was to drive the Georgian people out of this environment. Even if it cost him the loss of statehood. What are we to do?! (Dimitri sighed) We were in a tragic circumstance. Erekle could have remained under Persian protection. Agha-Mohammed-Khan was even begging him to do so, but to this [Erekle] was not responding.
(NB): Yes I know of that letter Agha Mohammed Khan sent him…

(Dimitri): Yes, [Agha-Mohammed-Khan said to Erekle] if only you remain [under my protection] I would subdue the entire Caucasus to your rule. But now, I am asking you…we should approach this problem more existentially… well, because states are much like humans. A nation is a living organism and is like individuals, because after all it’s a collection of individuals and the state is a guardian institution. So, here I am asking you as an individual and we can discuss this together: Is a human’s sole purpose his/her physical existence? Well there are people for whom it is the only purpose, but aren’t there people who along with physical existence deem spiritual, intellectual…development to be important?! Is that not so?! So I think, Erekle viewed his state from this perspective. He wanted the Georgian people to distance themselves from Asian development and progress toward a European path of development. This was a path of intellectual, economic and cultural development…

There are two culturally meaningful elements that allow Dimitri to make his interpretive schema work (for justifying Erekle’s decision) in a way that makes sense not solely to him, but in terms of a culturally acceptable logic. The first one concerns the idea of the statehood being secondary to the purpose of the nation. Here Dimitri relies on what is given in Georgian historic ideation (see chapters 2 and 4) and is justifiable in terms of Georgia’s memory maxims. As we have seen in the analysis of textbooks, preserving Georgian spirituality is a mission of a much higher order than sustaining a political entity. Such an interpretation of nationhood stems from the conception of Georgia’s past as a repeated cycle of invasions and occupations. From this perspective, Georgians preserved their nationhood under the rule of various invaders because of

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71 In 1795 Erekle received the following notice by Agha Mohammed Khan: “Your Highness knows that for the past 100 generations you have been subject to Iran; now we deign to say with amazement that you have attached yourselves to the Russians, who have no other business than trade with Iran... You are a 90-year-old man and how are you making such a mistake: you have let these impious in, attached yourself to them and even given them rights! Even though your faith is different from ours you always had a connection with Iran...It is now our will that you, an intelligent man, abandon such business and cease relations with Russia. If you do not obey this order, we will shortly carry out a military campaign in Georgia, we will shed blood of Georgians and Russians together and will let it pour like river Kura. We deemed it necessary to notify you...so that you take our order into account and realize your situation” (partially quoted in Rayfield, omitted parts translated by author)
cultural and spiritual steadiness. This memory maxim underpins Dimitri’s reasoning mode.

The second element Dimitri employs in his framework concerns the current political ambition of Georgia with regard to being part of Europe. But here again Dimitri follows the line of reasoning that is already part of the public discourse and the statist rhetoric of Saakashvili’s government that Georgia’s European orientation is a perennial aspiration and not a contemporary invention.

Dimitri’s interpretive frame that echoes the present political discussion is founded on the modern understandings of the nation and essentialist views on nationhood and closely resembles the reasoning mode we saw in the Georgian students’ discussion of tradition and modernity (see chapter 4). As one student wrote in his essay for “independent reasoning”:

Culture is directly related to the existence of a nation and its definition as an independent entity…To me, generally, a nation does not mean a group of people who have territories and sovereign state. A nation may not be independent, but it still exists as long as it preserves its culture and traditions (Tengo, 18 years old)

Dimitri’s interpretation suggests a similar understanding of preserving nationhood and assumes that Erekle saw Russia as a window to European civilization and a secure gatekeeper of Georgian Christianity. Incidentally, Donald Rayfield in his discussion on Erekle makes the similar point that “Russia was Georgia’s door to Europe”, but he also points out:

*Traktat* ...was the deadliest document any Georgian king signed. Many Georgians saw the *Traktat* as a greater infringement of sovereignty than even the shah’s suzerainty. Prohibiting independent foreign policy, ...the implied Church union threatened Georgian autocephaly. King Erekle knew the danger: he suffered recriminations for collaborating with Russia in the 1770s... He knew how Catherine had divided Poland. But he...thought the *Traktat* was their sole option: Russia was relentlessly conquering the Caucasus, the Black Sea and the Caspian. [Erekle] had to side with the victors (2012, p. 251 italics in the original).

But why would Erekle think of Russia as a door to Europe? Dimitri’s comments on this question led him to a different genre of socially and politically significant issues that again, points to the
situativeness of this memory discourse and reflects the dialogic nature of Dimitri’s interpretations; suggesting that his frames are meaningful in how they respond to others’ voices in the Georgian public sphere:

At the time, although I am utterly against Russian politics, I think that Russia of the time, despite its barbaric nature, compared to Qizilbash and Ottoman countries was kind of a European state. A brilliant Russian aristocracy was raised on French and European literature and this was the Napoleonic period...French was in fashion...and our aristocracy imitated Russian aristocracy. At least Russia was a window to Europe. That is why I do not criticize this big decision of Erekle’s...but I completely dissociate myself from these Russophiles...these Russophiles use Erekle’s personality as their flag. Poor Erekle! These black nationalists... This dark black, irrational nationalism. I feel so bad that Erekle is a symbol of this Russophilic political camp. (Dimitri)

By Russophile nationalists who use Erekle as their “flag” Dimitri was referring to the “Society of Erekle II”, an organization that has been promoting the idea of “regularizing” relations with Russia and abandoning plans for Georgia’s Euro-integration. This is the society that enlisted a couple hundred individuals (no official record exists) and was in charge of organizing protests aimed at shutting down the Museum of Occupation in 2012 (see previous chapter). They have been especially vocal in blaming Saakashvili for the deterioration of Russian-Georgian relations (see chapter 5), and while accusing liberal-intellectuals of being “traitors sold for American dollars” they claimed that the Orthodox kinship with Russia was of paramount importance for preserving Georgian nationhood.

So, although one might be puzzled by the fact that Dimitri describes pro-Russian groups as “dark nationalists”, in fact these groups in their rhetoric employed a juxtaposition of Russian versus Western culture associated with the discourse on “pure Georgian traditions”. These overtly pro-Russian groups emphasized the threat that European culture may pose to Georgian spirituality, especially to Orthodox Christianity as a pillar of Georgianness.

However, this in a sense paradoxical symbiosis of Russophilia and nationalism was not (and
is not) confined to the extremist groups like “Society of Erekle II”, but with varying degrees has found resonance in a number of social circles, especially among individuals who unquestionably adhered to the rhetoric of the Georgian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Ilia II. As pointed out earlier (see chapter 1) the rhetoric of the Georgian Patriarch had played a crucial role in advancing public sensibilities in this respect. The implicit aversion toward Georgia’s Europeanization was articulated in terms of nationalist claims that at the same time fused national identity with Georgian Orthodoxy (this is also evident from some of the students’ essays in chapter 4). The individuals Dimitri had in mind have appropriated this religiously framed argument along with somewhat chauvinistic attitudes in their pro-Russian claims. Although, I was aware what Dimitri had in mind when he mentioned “irrational nationalism” of the pro-Russian “camp”, I asked him anyway:

(NB): Don’t you think that Russophilism and nationalism are mutually exclusive? How is that possible?

(Dimitri): Yes, but that’s how they understand, for example Dima… what’s his last name, an actor from Sokhumi?\(^{72}\)

(NB): Jaiani

(Dimitri): Yes, Jaiani. Considered separately as a person, he is a man who loves his

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\(^{72}\) Sokhumi is the capital city of Abkhazia, a disputed territory on the eastern coast of the Black Sea (see chapter 1). All ethnic Georgians fled Abkhazia during the conflict in 1990s.
country, his homeland, and he is an excellent ‘tamada’ [toastmaster of the ritualistic Georgian feast]. There’s nothing better than sitting with him at the table, he will tell you poems and you will think there is no greater patriot than him. But he is a distinguished Russophile. He despises Europe, he despises the West, hates America. Well, what can one do?!! This was caused by our geopolitics - that one part of our society sees salvation there and another one sees it in Europe.

After few more comments on the intelligentsia’s ideological outlook and their political attitudes, Dimitri concluded his monologue with the following:

Here, again we are facing Erekle’s dilemma: his dilemma was Asia or Russia and he chose Russia. But don’t forget! He did try to contact Europe and did not receive anything in return. We should never forget this! And here we have a new choice: Russia or the West? (Dimitri)

Dimitri’s response suggests, that apart from the religious rhetoric, Russophilia has its basis in different socio-cultural domains attached to the Russian space, especially as it concerns the intelligentsia circles. But it also shows how society’s present anxieties find articulations mediated through images from the past; how memory and in this case memory of Erekle becomes a site of contestation for legitimizing political claims.

\[73\text{Incidentally, intellectuals who critically reflected on idealized versions of Georgian history associated these “mythic” notions on “Georgianess” to the domain of Georgian feast and performative toasts. As one of them commented: “when I think of all these idealized notions of Georgianness, all that comes to my mind is the Georgian toast.” Toast-making is a semi-stylized ritual performance during Georgian feast (Georgian supra literally means tablecloth) that for Georgians occupies central place among their unique and distinguishing cultural forms. (Some of the students discussed in chapter 4 mentioned this custom to claim that such traditions should not be abandoned for the sake of modernity because they represent unique qualities of the nation). There is a certain order of toasts that needs to be followed, with slight variations depending on the occasion. For instance, there is always a toast for God, homeland, family, siblings, and so forth. As Beka who was a scholar of theology, noted (see chapter 5) “the Georgian feast is a tradition strengthened during Russian [imperialism] and this relates to the fact that the real life confiscated from the Georgians was compensated in the domain of toasts, for instance he [a Georgian, fought [the battle] or had his own church, none of this existed any longer in his real space and the only arena for him was the supra. That is why toasts resemble religious service this much.” The Georgian language has no gender and the pronoun is refers to both female, male, animate and inanimate objects. But I translate here specifically as “he” because supra is a dominantly male domain in Georgian culture.}\]
6.5. **WE DIDN’T PASS THROUGH TO EUROPE, DID WE?!**

“This was, a huge... how to say, timebomb planted in Georgian politics - the ’83 Traktat.”

This is what Dodo a historian who co-authored the state ordered textbook on Russian-Georgian relations pointed out to me. I met her for an interview at the History Institute. We sat at her desk in a shared office with four other deserted tables. Our interview started off with the discussion on the unpublished history textbook she had co-authored (HI textbook). In a few minutes, as we got to the actual historical questions charged with political context, Dodo’s responses flowed almost as if she unleashed a stream of consciousness displaying the carnival of historical imaginary, interwoven with present political exigencies. Dodo was so in synch with my questions that I almost did not have to ask any. Her monologues embodied chains of texts in which her dynamic speech wove together all the issues I was interested in, one flowed into another almost without interruption. Much of the way she articulated historical issues vis-à-vis Georgia’s present social and geopolitical challenges corresponds to how these issues are interwoven in the public discourse. Her way of conveying thoughts reveals how this discourse flows in real life debates and the extent to which individual utterances are shaped by the “sideward glance” toward others’ words (Bakhtin, 1981). As we touched upon Erekle, Dodo commented on 1783 Georgievsk Treaty

When you are signing this treaty, you are ceasing foreign relations with everyone, [you are] not conducting [any relations] without Russia. What kind of politics will Russia allow you to have with the Khan of Ganja, the Khan of Yerevan or any other North Caucasian Khan...?! It [Russia] will let you conduct politics that benefits itself, is that not so?! And up until then, the Khan of Ganja, the Khan of Yerevan were subordinate to Erekle, practically they were under Georgian protection...and all of this was destroyed...of course that’s what... (here she cut her sentence short with another intervening thought)...we talk with Dimitri very often about this and we fall into this [self] contradiction, but we justify [Erekle’s decision] by the fact that Georgia wanted
Europe and Europe rejected it altogether and it [Georgia] was induced to pass through to the European world via Russia. This was certainly a benevolent [intention], but we did not pass through, did we?! In no way did we pass through, because Russia, to this day despises Europe. Even today there is a big deal about Europe. Go see! Listen to the Russian Duma, politicians, that NATO, that this EU!...maybe they have their negative sides, every union does, but our natural path, a Christian one, is European. We had a Byzantine orientation, which was a European orientation. Yes, it was on the territory of Turkey, but it was a European country based on Christianity and European culture...(Dodo)

Dodo’s monologues were lively and dialogic, not only because her speech addressed my questions, but because she constructed her utterances in response to the chain of texts, debates, and counter-arguments that were out there in the public realm. She responded to disparate speakers and at times her speech would have seemed incoherent, inarticulate unless the listener was already aware of the voices she was chasing in her answers.

Dodo’s criticism of Erekle takes a stance based on a present reality, it retrospectively projects a historical outcome to judge actions in the past. Her rhetorical question “…but we did not pass through [to Europe], did we?!…” points to this retrospective projection of the present reality. It inscribes Erekle and his decision in an existing network of geopolitical relations in which “Russia despises Europe”.

Both Dodo’s and Dimitri’s mode of reasoning demonstrate how issues of Georgia’s present geopolitical entanglement enter into the interpretive realm of historical processes. The opinion that “we have no other choice than to deal with Russia,” expressed to me (among others) by a taxi driver is intimately intertwined with this memory discourse of “what if” contemplations. For

74 The verb she uses in Georgian for “pass through” gasvla (gavedit evropaze) denotes action when one gets through some barrier and arrives from one place to another, for instance in a competition getting to finals would be finalashi gasvla. In the verb gasvla, prefix “ga” denotes outward movement, root svla is moving or walking, thus gasvla in daily speech stands for exiting, going out e.g. saxlidan gasvla exiting home. The phrase “passing through to Europe” (evropaze gasvla) is a peculiar form for Georgian speech, in terms of type of action or movement the verb gasvla implies, and while Dodo is not the only one who employs such a linguistic form, it is not a generic phrase.
instance, for the FreeU group an alliance with Russia was not “the only alternative” Erekle was facing. This is because for them “Orthodox Christianity” is not the ultimate paradigm through which Georgianness is, or must be conceived. Hence, for them this retrospective “what if” contemplation allowed for the alternative “routes” of Georgia’s geopolitical alignment. During one of the deliberations Bendukidze entertained the idea of including “a game” in the textbook, an exercise for pupils (for whom the textbook was intended) to debate: “What if Georgia chose a different orientation, for instance Iranian, which probably would have been the most right one or Turkey if you will?” (meeting at Free University, September 3, 2011).

However, the ambivalence that is implied in this multivalent and historically charged political debate sometimes boils down to the following question: Would Russia eventually invade Georgia anyhow with or without Erekle’s decision? How one answers this question is not a matter of ability to imagine an alternative past, but is an issue of a specific stance that an individual takes toward present geopolitical challenge. This is how Dodo reflected on this question:

Yes, Russia could have invaded [us anyway], just as in 1921 … When you begin to fight, nobody knows who will win and who won’t. In that sense Germany started WWI being convinced it would win, in the second [WWII], too, but…it is often said that small nations should not go to war, because they will be destroyed and it’s better for them to be submissive. This is completely…completely unacceptable! Even though I am a mother, I have children and war is awful, yet if a small country does not fight…in the way we always fought against big countries, I want to say, never once did Georgia have an enemy of its own size. The Persian Empire was huge, the Ottoman Empire was huge, and…I don’t know…here we were fighting Russia, there were rebellions. We were always bitterly defeated, but in any case, humans fought and this heroic spirit and this consciousness that a nation must fight for its integrity and for its statehood, this must not be lost, otherwise a nation will become obedient, and nothing, nothing…(Dodo)

In answering this question, what matters for Dodo is not the outcome of Georgians’
resistance against a big enemy, but the act itself as a testament and guarantor of nation’s existence. This is why in the state sponsored textbook that she co-authored the emphasis is on Georgians’ ability to fight great battles; they appear as brave warriors who have helped Russians win some of the most important military campaigns, and they would never resign themselves to accepting defeat.

The way Dodo related to Erekle’s decision (among other things) during our interview stood in stark contrast with the embellished portrayal given in her textbook. While in conversation, Dodo admitted the “self-contradiction” that she and other historians encountered in evaluating these historical events, the textbook representation of Erekle embodies the voice of self-idealization and transposes events and actions into a veiled and much less conflicted narrative:

At the end of 18th century, the interests of three states were facing one another in the eastern part of the Caucasus: Iran, the Ottoman Empire, and the Russian Empire. The Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti did not have much choice: there was no alternative to Russia, being closest to the European civilization. King Erekle tried to gain support from Europe in 1781. With the help of Italian missionaries he sent letters to the Emperor of Austria, Joseph II, Doge of Venice, and to the kings of France, Naples, Sardinia, and to the Pope…In 1782, in parallel, he asked Catherine II for assistance…Russia’s new political and diplomatic agenda included eradicating Persian-Ottoman influence in Georgian and the Caucasus and establishing Russian dominion… With the fear that European monarchs would get involved in the matters of Caucasus, Catherine II ordered [her representatives] …to sign a treaty with the kingdoms of Kartl-Kakheti and Imereti…According to Georgievsk Traktat the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti accepted the Russian Emperor’s supremacy…As for the internal affairs Kartl-Kakheti, they were to be maintained in an independent way. Russia in turn was taking responsibility for [Georgia’s] everlasting protection…the Emperor pledged to make every effort to return to Georgia every single territory seized by its enemies…

The section on Georgievsk Treaty is concluded with the following paragraph that is highlighted in bold font:

…The insistence by Russian historians that Georgian Kings willingly handed the country to Russia is inconsistent with historical reality. None of the Georgian kings gave up his kingdom…Limited sovereignty does not amount to the abolition of the statehood, and
against the background of serious political processes, according to existing norms of jurisprudence, signing such agreement was a normal phenomenon. Russia exploited the Traktat and by force, and piece-by-piece, seized Georgia, abolished its longstanding monarchy… which until then had not been done by any other invader.

This portrayal accomplishes several things. On the one hand, it not only maps Russia onto the list of Georgia’s enemies, but exacerbates its negative nature by emphasizing that none of the other invaders had abolished a Georgian monarchy up until then. This is why it was important for Dodo (as she pointed out earlier, see chapter 5) to approach Russian-Georgian relations from the standpoint of Georgian statehood and judge events based on such a perspective. She devised it as a lens that implicitly rendered Russia as a greater villain than for instance, Persia or the Ottoman Empire.

On the other hand, in representing the historical processes leading up to 1873 Traktat, she and Vaja devise a perspective that frames Erekle’s actions as the only logical alternative. Specifically, the following elements justify the king and unburden him from the responsibility for committing a fateful mistake: a) “The Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti did not have much choice. There was no alternative to Russia, being closest to the European civilization.” This statement not only presents things from certain perspective e.g. “Russia being closest to European civilization,” but imposes an evaluative judgment “there was no alternative to Russia” for justifying the choice made by the King of Kartl-Kakheti; b) the comment that “King Erekle tried to gain support from Europe in 1781” emphasizes the point that Erekle made every effort before turning to his last and only resort: Russia; and c) the argument that “according to the existing norms of jurisprudence, signing such an agreement was a normal phenomenon” stresses that Russia breached the agreement that under “normal” circumstances would not impinge on Georgian statehood.
6.6. THE CONDEMNED KING

Contrary to justificatory frameworks devised by an older generation of historians, the FreeU group’s perspective on king Erekle relied on the voice of self-condemnation. It grounded the discussion of historical processes and political actions in the “realistic”, down to earth portrayal of a Georgian monarch guided by particularistic or pragmatic interests. This team sought to re-accent “idealized”, “exaggerated” or “embellished” narratives by de-monumentalizing historical figures like Erekle. In their discussions and text, political actions were not framed in terms of Georgia’s perennial mission or spiritual ideals; instead, historical figures were stripped of such monumentality. A dialogic interchange from one of the deliberations exemplifies their approach:

(Beka): We should write this, that Erekle did not unite Georgia, have we written this anywhere?

(Merab): Yes you have raised a good issue, I agree.

(Beka): There is a text by Amirejibi75 on why Georgia should have united

(Ana): Oh right, I have read it…

(Beka): In any case, that’s that! We should write that he did not unite Georgia and he changed the rule of throne inheritance, this played a huge role in the abolition of the monarchy [by Russians]; it was an absolutely senseless rule.

(Ana): So we are writing that he did not unite Georgia because of his grandson (Ana is making notes while everyone is expressing ideas on what kind of material should go in the chapter)

75 Shalva Amirejibi (1887-1943) was a Georgian poet, political actor. He was the founding member of the National Committee that declared Georgian independence in 1918 before Red Army invaded Georgia in 1921.
(Beka): Yes let’s write that, by all means.

(Irakli): We should also write about Darejan.76

(Beka) Right, she said [Darejan] that “I want to be just like Catherine” [Russia’s Emperor]; and she even organized a small revolt against Giorgi XIII, I mean XII…

Their insistence on portraying Erekle’s and his wife’s clan interests detaches Erekle from the idealized narrative. The king no longer appears as a monumental figure who made a decision after thinking through his country’s spiritual ideals or perennial geopolitical aspirations. Instead, he is portrayed as an individual caught up in typical royal intrigue and disoriented by a set of complex circumstances. The FU Textbook has no highlighted paragraphs with justificatory statements, no assertions on Erekle’s European aspirations. Instead, it emphasizes the negative outcome of the Georgievsk Treaty:

Signing the Georgievsk Traktat irked both Ottomans as well as Persians. In 1785 with the encouragement of the Ottoman Empire, a Dagestani army (of 20,000 warriors, but according to some other sources 11,000) invaded Kartl-Kakheti. Erekle was unprepared for this campaign. Russia on the other hand did not provide assistance…The Georgievsk Traktate aggravated Kartl-Kakheti’s political situation. At the beginning of ‘90s Erekle II’s relationship with Iran became tenuous…In 1795 the Shah of Iran invaded Kartl-Kakheti with the army of 25,000 warriors.

Against the HI historians’ efforts not to disgrace Georgia’s legendary King, the FU group’s perspective strips Erekle of his monumentality and benevolence (even naiveté) and inscribes him into a domain of the profane. But abasing Erekle is not the raison d’être of this text. Instead, the intended purpose of their deformative practice is to deconstruct the discursive frame on the inevitability of a Russian-Georgian alliance. Re-casting Erekle’s figure rewrites the context of his decision and disenchants the reader from the coherent narrative (like the one in HI

76 Erekle’s second wife.
textbook) that stretches to the ideal but reinforces the idea that “Georgia had no other choice.”

6.7. CONCLUSION

The case of memory discourse on Erekle is telling in several respects. On the one hand, what is remembered and what is forgotten about Erekle is very much shaped by the current political setup and discursive demands in Georgia that are underpinned by socio-political conditions. In this respect it shows how remembering and forgetting of the historical past adapt to the present needs of the group; how memory images are appropriated depending on one’s ideological or political standpoint; and how memory becomes a metaphor, a symbolic resource for making and contesting political claims.

Nevertheless, the memory dispute on Erekle instantiates the bivocality of Georgian memory. Contesting representations of this historical figure invoke both the voice of self-condemnation and the voice of self-idealization. The polemic on the “1783 dilemma” is sustained by the dialogicality between these two voices. At the same time, this case demonstrates the primary claim of this study, namely, that a memory game, whatever the given socio-political conditions are, remains grounded in the pre-shaped discursive traditions and is bounded by the culturally pre-fixed paradigms of historical thinking.
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