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„Social Movements in Georgia since its  
Independence“

verfasst von / submitted by

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# 1 Introduction

Since the independence of Georgia, the country has been experiencing various kinds of social movements. The given master project aims to classify them, discuss and analyze its dynamics. The central focus of the paper will be a period of countries independence since 1991 although the thesis will undertake past experiences of Georgian people's social movements during 20th centuries in the Soviet Union's period and before that.

The research questions:

- What are/were the dynamics and influences of the social movements on politics and on the creation of the Georgian governmental agenda?
- What types of social movements are able to affect the political agenda and provide more social-economic equality?

Relevance of the study:

The major relevance of this research is that, to date, there has not been a paper published that describes Georgian social movements over a period of time. There exist theoretical analyses of each important protest wave but none of them includes historical analyses from the beginning of the 1990s to the present time using the same research tools.

It is important to make so called “action plans” for the change-oriented movements explainable and understandable with the help of structural analyses.

This way people's awareness and understanding of the structural causes of social-political inequalities can be improved and hence, make political and economic strategies more transparent and understandable, leading to social equality and better social conditions.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 Social movements in independent Georgia (1918–1921)

Since the 1860s, Georgians distinguished themselves with extensive and substantial anti-imperial, anti-Tsarist struggles. The elite of this period were the second generation of Russian educated Georgian intellectuals who largely contributed to the creation of critical literature, raised literacy levels and construct a national identity. The main refrain of their struggles was the motto: ‘Ourselves should belong to ourselves’. The prominent leader of these intellectual-led movements, Ilia Chavchavadze, is regarded up to the present day as the founding father of the modern Georgian Republic. These movements were of a huge importance for the ‘awakening’ and uniting/unification of Georgian society. Instead of a detailed analysis of these movements, I will concentrate on the narratives of two politically and socially progressive events that emerged at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - the foundation of the first Republic of Guria (also known as the Gurian Peasant Republic) and the foundation of the first independent Republic of Georgia in 1918.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social-democratic ideas became widespread amongst Georgians. The majority of the population were peasants and a social-democratic ideology was oriented towards the improvement of their rights. To understand the social movements and their narratives during this period and the preconditions for the first independent Georgian Republic, we have to analyze how The First Republic of Guria was realized as a political project. In addition, it is important to analyze/examine the role of the Menshevik Social-Democratic Party in the context of international movements and

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen F. Jones, *Socialism in Georgian Colors: The European Road to Social Democracy*, trans. Khatuna Chkheidze, ed. Nino Tchiabtishvili (Tbilisi: Ilia State University Press, 2008) pp. 11-21; 182-185.

the legal and economic dimension of their ideology. In 1918, for the first time in Europe, a social-democratic political party won a parliamentary election and the Menshevik Social Democratic Party of Georgia formed a government. This achievement had a huge international resonance and social democrats from all over Europe came to Georgia to analyze and learn from the experience of Georgian social democrats. In 1920, a large group of the Second International visited Georgia and the theoretician and leader of the party, Karl Kautsky, who had a detailed understanding of the local context, expressed his full support for the Menshevik Social Democratic Party of Georgia. It is worth noting, that the Social Democrats were Mensheviks in the Russian context but in Georgia they were/should be regarded as Bolsheviks as they represented the majority in the local context.<sup>2</sup>

Georgia had gained important experience of a democratic struggle and the building of a democratic republic. It was the culmination of the work of social movements and projects of mass mobilization over a period of almost 30 years, including the insurrection that took place in the western Georgian province of Guria against Imperial Russia, prior to and during the Russian Revolution of 1905. After gaining complete control of the province, the peasants established The Republic of Guria (or the Gurian Peasant Republic) but Russian forces crushed the insurrection in 1906. This committed struggle against empire, in defense of public interests, was the longest uprising against Russian imperialism. In contrast with other revolts, the peasants were self-organized and not led by the nobility or intellectuals.

Let us move on to review the ideology of the Menshevik intellectuals and the leaders of the First Georgian Republic that directed their anti-imperial struggle.

The vision behind the political system founded by the Social Democrats can be comprehended from the writings of Noe Jordania, the Prime Minister of the First Republic.

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<sup>2</sup> Jones pp 140-153.

His “National Identity and the Economic Development” was presented in February of 1893 at the conference of the Third League.<sup>3</sup>

As Jordania writes, in order for the nation to unite, a material unification is required, meaning the creation of fair socio-economic conditions that unifies the population in peaceful coexistence. In such circumstances, appropriate political, mental and moral dimensions will be generated. Jordania criticizes particular economic circumstances. He reflects on moneylenders – a topic that is still relevant in Georgia one hundred years later – and observes that since the abolition of serfdom the moneylender entered people’s lives. Jordania highlights that the owner of such money is not a producer. Instead, the money profits money. Without investing, there is no labor order or legality. Because of it, the money demolished the nation and split it into two groups: the owners of the money (the rich) and those who lacked it (the poor). The money and the employed worker become constant adversaries, struggling with each other. The growth of the first is the proportional loss of the other. For that reason, there are unceasingly antagonistic, persistent rivalries with each other.

According to his vision, the following steps should be taken:

1. Economic welfare, as a crucial precondition for human life.
2. Freedom of the whole nation and each individual, as a supporting condition to achieve the supreme desire and as a nearest object for the actions of the vanguard group.
3. The national consciousness of the whole nation and human rights, to guarantee human dignity for each individual.”<sup>4</sup>

To summarize, these were the ideological bases underpinning the political system of the first Georgian Republic. As a result, the constitution of the first Republic was one of the most progressive documents of its time.

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<sup>3</sup> Noe Jordania, “National Identity and Economic Development,” in *A Chrestomathy of Georgian Left* (Tbilisi: Tbilisi Fabian Society, 2015) pp. 174-216.

<sup>4</sup> Jordania pp.171-174.



The governing body was the Parliament, exercising largely extensive authority in comparison with any parliaments of the modern independent Georgia. A fully proportional (without majoritarian system) election system was established and the Parliament was elected for a term of three years. The Chairman of the Parliament was elected for a one-year term, and the post holder could not serve more than two terms. The main goal was to make an emphasis on the power of the political system and not particular political leaders.<sup>5</sup> The judicial branch of the government was elected by the Parliament.

Concerning the political parties, it is worth noting that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Georgian society was broadly politicized by the experience of social and political struggle. Besides the major parties of Social Democrats, Social Federalists and National Democrats there were tens of parties. There was also politically controlled press and independent press with their own editorial policies.

The outcome of such a system was to guarantee several basic rights. One of the most important was the strong will to increase women's political involvement. Women's suffrage and active political participation was guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic. The Parliament of the first Republic had five female members, including from ethnic minorities. The first Republic was one of the first to guarantee political rights for women by 1921.<sup>6</sup>

In the framework of social initiatives, health insurance for unemployed citizens was guaranteed by the Constitution. A minimum wage was determined and several institutions were founded on the one hand, to protect parents and children, on the other, to control the quality of products consumed by the population.

As we see the governing party's ideology and its political will was oriented on basic human rights including protecting labor from exploitation.

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<sup>5</sup> Noe Jordania, "Georgian People and Nationalism," in *A Chrestomathy of Georgian Left* (Tbilisi: Tbilisi Fabian Society, 2015), pp. 28–50.

<sup>6</sup> Jordania, pp. 263-298.

In this period, important free educational centers were founded and food and financial aid were provided for underprivileged pupils. Georgian literature, cinema, theatre and music also enjoyed a golden age during this period.

To understand the First Republic, its political project and ideas of progress, it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of the social-economic narratives of the social movements of pre-Republic times. These narratives kept alive the social movements of this period and created grounds for the new political project that was brought to a premature end by the occupation of the country by the Soviet Russia in 1921.

The social and political narratives from the First Republic informed the protest movements that emerged in 2011-2012 in response to the performance of the government at the time. These movements will be analyzed in detail in the following chapters.

## 2.2 Social movements within the Soviet Union

After the occupation of Georgia by the Soviet Russia, representatives of the old government, opposition political parties and members of society tried for years to return independence to Georgia through various rebellions.

In the summer of 1921, a national liberation movement started to organize various rebellions, which began in Georgia's Svaneti region. Subsequent revolts against the Soviet Revolutionary Committee took place in other regions. The rebels' primary requirement was to hold free elections.<sup>7</sup>

Former government officials approached Western countries for support but this was not forthcoming. A massive revolt (called the August Uprising) intended to restore the independence of Georgia took place in August and September of 1924 but was crushed by

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<sup>7</sup> Konstant Salia, "30 Th Anniversary of the August Revolt," *Faith of Kartli* 18 (n.d.): 13–14.

Soviet forces. The insurrection and subsequent wave of repressions resulted in the deaths of thousands of Georgian citizens.<sup>8</sup>

Soviet repressions continued, culminating in the 1930s, when many Georgian writers, poets, scientists and artists became victims of the Great Purge (also called the Great Terror) that took place throughout the Soviet Union. In Georgia, these repressions were led by Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria.<sup>9</sup>

After World War II and the death of Stalin, national movements began to strengthen again.

The most significant movement was the native language movement. Its victory in preserving Georgian as a state language had a significant impact on Georgian society and empowered social and political dissidents.

After a new Soviet Constitution was adopted in October 1977, the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR considered a draft constitution in which Georgian was no longer declared to be the State language.<sup>10</sup> This initiative resulted in massive protests. Dissidents, students, art and science workers and the public united in their opposition to the proposed removal of Georgian as a State language. On April 14, 1978, the day when the new version of constitution was to be adopted by the Parliament, nearly 100 000 people held a protest. Georgia's political leader, Eduard Shevardnadze (First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party), diffused the volatile situation by negotiating with the central authorities in Moscow and securing their agreement to retain the State language status of the Georgian language in the new constitution.

<sup>8</sup> Irakli Otkhmezuri, "The Days of 24 Year's August," *Gushagi* 6 (1985): 67–71.

<sup>9</sup> Levan Avalishvili, "The ' Great Terror ' of 1937 – 1938 in Georgia : Between the Two Reports of Lavrentiy Beria," no. 22 (2010): pp.2–6.

<sup>10</sup> წ ა მ ა ლ ა შ ვ ი ლ თ ე კ ა , "30 წ ე ლ 1978 წ ლ ს 14 ა 3 რ ი ლ ლ დ ა 5 - ვ ი ს ა ნ ს ო ვ ს დ რ ო ზ ო რ ა ნ ს ო ვ ს ს ა ქ ა რ ო ვ ე ლ ო შ ი ს ა ფ რ თ ე , რ ო მ ე ლ ს ა ც ქ ა რ ო უ ლ თ ე ნ ა გ ა დ უ რ ჩ ა , " www.radiotavisufleba.ge, <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/1557280.html>, accessed November 10, 2018.

It is considered that this fight and significant victory noticeably refreshed and reinforced national liberation and social movements and acted as a catalyst, which eventually led to independence. However, the journey towards national self-consciousness was not without tragedy. This topic will be considered in the next chapter.

### 2.3 Status quo at the beginning of independence after the Soviet Union collapsed, formation of national identity

The 1980s was a period in which national movements strengthened their nationalist narrative with the aim of achieving independence for Georgia. By the late 1980s, the anti-Soviet movement became more active and in the context of the formation of a Georgian ethno-cultural national identity, one event stands out. On April 4, 1989, tens of thousands of Georgians gathered before the House of Government on Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi to demand the punishment of Abkhaz secessionists and the restoration of Georgian independence. On April 9, at 3:45 a.m., Soviet soldiers violently dispersed the peaceful protestors in Rustaveli Avenue, resulting in 21 deaths and hundreds of injuries.

The ethnical conflicts that took place in the 1990s continued to enhance the national narrative and formation of national identity. This was based on a negative attitude towards others (in general minorities) and the development of a national identity civil concept was completely excluded. On the other hand, the breakup of the Soviet Union also facilitated an aspiration of ethnical groups towards their own cultural origins.

The Georgian Abkhazian and Georgian Ossetian conflicts provide particular actuality for historical memory and historical interpretation of this issue. Ethnical conflicts that have political aims lead to the manipulation of historical facts and an attempt by both sides to strengthen their positions and legitimize them. From this point of view, it is particularly

important to know who is considered as an historical owner of a certain territory and who is a guest.<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned above, the tragic nature of the event that took place on April 9, 1989, significantly conditioned the new national identity paradigm. Philosopher Giorgi Maisuradze considers the April 9 tragedy as an example of the destruction of an existing order and using it to form something new. This act of creation implies the existence of a victim, destruction, winner (positive) and loser (negative).<sup>12</sup>

The April 9 tragedy effectively terminated the tradition of pride in a Soviet past. It was no longer acceptable or legitimate to celebrate the existence of a Soviet Georgian nation. The April 9 tragedy resulted in a common feeling of "outraged weakness", which had determined the future relationship between Georgia and Russia as a wayward son (Georgia) and father (Russia), who patronized him. The phrase "we are an orphan nation" (Chabua Amirejibi) that was widely spread after the April 9 tragedy expressed an emotion that was soaked with loneliness and vulnerability. In that moment, it was necessary to create the basis for a new identity and it fell to the Georgian Orthodox Church to help define it. The notion of solitude was replaced by martyrdom and a national identity was perceived in a religious dimension.<sup>13</sup>

On Easter Night after the April 9 Tragedy, the Patriarch's phrase "Christ is risen!", "Christ is risen!", "Georgia is risen" clearly indicated that the Georgian Orthodox Church had fully taken on the guardianship of the nation. Georgian Orthodoxy that had arisen in this process became the primary focus of national consciousness. Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi,

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<sup>11</sup> Stephen Jones, *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence*, trans. Khatuna Chkheidze ed. Marine Chitishvili (Tbilisi: Center for Social Sciences, 2013), pp 57-69.

<sup>12</sup> Giorgi Maisuradze, *Orthodox Ethics and the Spirit of Unfreedom* (Tbilisi: Sulakauri Publishing, 2013), 13-16.

<sup>13</sup> Maisuradze pp. 17-21.

where the April 9 Tragedy occurred, became a holy place where subsequent political performances constituted a permanent reminder of the tragedy.

The declaration of independence on April 9, 1991 once again confirmed that an independent Georgia was born out of the emotional spirit of the April 9 Tragedy and was firmly associated with it.<sup>14</sup>

As a result, the new Georgian national identity had a religious foundation, that excluded development of civil identity. As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia suffered from severe economic disruption and high levels of poverty and unemployment. In these difficult circumstances, the Georgian Orthodox Church became an emotional and psychological shelter. State loyalty to the Church increased and was demonstrated with various kinds of benefits.

The relationship between the Church and State in Georgia is regulated according to an agreement made in 2002, which describes a particular role of the Orthodox Church in Georgian history. In addition, there exists an unconditional agreement according to which the State considers the highest authority of the Church and attempts to maintain loyalty through various means.

### 3 Literature and Methodology

#### 3.1 Critical Analysis of the Literature

The method of the research will be a literature review, anthropological observations, and fieldwork. The master project is written by the participant observer and includes an element of action research. In this chapter, the literature and data the author has used for the paper will be reviewed.

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<sup>14</sup> Maisuradze pp. 22-23.

The major publications that helped to provide a clear context were the following:

Stephen Jones, an American historian focused on post-Communist societies and his book “Socialism in Georgian Colors: The European Road to Social Democracy”. This book depicts a full picture of socialist movement in Georgia, which in early period took a distinctive path from Russian socialism and finally fully departed from it. How socialism was born here, how the leaders emerged and what did they want to achieve in the country. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century of Georgia is much neglected by western scholars even though it was a very successful period for the country in terms of fighting against colonialism, creating strong western style institutions, being innovative and very progressive at the time even in comparison with the west itself. Certain civil rights, like women’s rights was lagging behind the Georgian progressive model of civil society. This book can help any interested individual to expand their knowledge about the country, its modern history but most importantly explore the progressive roots of the Georgian state, which unfortunately did not grow after the 1921 Soviet occupation. The second book from Stephen Jones “Georgia: A Political History Since Independence” starts from the early period of reclaiming independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The book generally describes the struggle of the country to bring some stability after a complete transformation from the soviet-communist totalitarian state to a democratic European style country. The book is immensely valuable for analyzing the social movements itself, because it describes what changes it brought to county, how a totally new set of values, interest and aims emerged with the emergence of the state itself, what promises the government gave to people, what hopes did they have, have they failed or not and how the new state performs on the global stage, what challenges Georgia brought to the West itself. Another particularly important book is “Making of the Georgian Nation”, written by Ronald Grigor Suny, Professor of History at the University of Michigan. Ronald Suny is digging very deeply of Georgians ethnogenesis throughout of Georgia History since our era.

It helps us to understand how the nationalism was developed in Georgia and what are its roots. The Author argues that much of what we are thinking being a Georgians means is a product of almost non-stop foreign invasions and even today this historical memory plays a tremendous role in Georgians view of the world. This work is one of the definitive studies about the Georgian people. “Georgia Diary: A Chronicle of War and Political Chaos in the Post-Soviet Caucasus”, written by Thomas Goltz American journalist and researcher of Caucasian issues. This work is one of the rarest comprehensive study of a civil war that took place in Georgia in early 1990s. The book includes the emergence of a new state of Georgia in a chaotic post-Soviet world and describes the power struggle that soon took place. Then the book overviews the Rose revolution, how a new power came after the resignation of Shevardnadze and the changes and challenges faced by the county. Thomas de Waal’s book “The Caucasus: An Introduction”, is a comprehensive overview of Caucasus region. It generally focuses on Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The book is explaining why it is important to know this region, speaks of multicultural nature of it. Once the entire region was, in recent centuries, mostly under serious Russian pressure and occupation the western academia always treated is as something like a part of Russian studies and this is not fair. The book speaks of all conflict that happened in the region in the 90s and the resent 2008 Russian-Georgian war. It describes Caucasus’ potential for the rest of the world its performance in energy business and its perspectives.

The chapter on the Social movements in Independent Georgia (1918–1921) is largely informed by Stephen F. Jones's book – “Socialism in Georgian Colors: The European Road to Social Democracy”. The author very clearly describes the socio-political circumstances in Georgia in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

The texts, electoral letters and political documents written by Georgian intellectuals and politicians that are contained in - A Chrestomathy of the Georgian Left, published by the



Tbilisi Fabian Society. The letters in the book were written before the first republic and published in various newspapers, later collected and in 2015 published. provided an understanding of the socio-political dynamics within the first Republic of Georgia.

In addition, the review of the first democratic constitution of Georgia by Stephen F. Jones informed this paper. Youtube links for this, together with the relevant page of the Georgian Constitutional Court are set out below.

- <http://www.constcourt.ge/ge/publications/books/1921-wlis-saqartvelos-demokratiuli-respublikis-konstitucia.page>

On this link, you can find the constitution of the first republic. The most important point of this document, other than progressive ideas of women's right, protection and representation of minorities, is that it establishes a republic and forbids changing its republican nature, because Mensheviks were afraid of possible revival of monarchy once Georgia was more conservative nation.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEVQdrBSe9U>

This is an interview of Voice of America's Georgian bureau with Stephan Jones, who talks about the first Georgian republic, its founders and founding principles, how progressive it was even in comparison with European states especially in terms of human rights, like minorities' right, women voting in elections and so on. He explains how and when did these progressive ideas emerge. Jones speaks about the differences in understanding socialism between Social-Democratic party (ruling party of Georgia) and Russian Bolsheviks, especially in ruling system. This interview is basically around Stephens Jones's book "Socialism in Georgian colors".

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-F1Xxf6KG4>

Another interview with Stephen Jones where he compares the differences and similarities between two independent Georgia - the first republic and the one after the

collapse of the Soviet Union. Why was the difference so big between them and why the emergence of the second state was followed such painful implications – civil war, Abkhazian and Tskhinvali wars. He argues that the lack of knowledge of how to run a state, the lack of trust among the people and the feeling fear of the future were major factors of a long stagnation and chaos in early times of the second independent state. He also compares the path of European countries to democratization with the Georgia's path and says that while the Europeans sometimes tend to look down on Georgia as less democratic than them, it's not quite like this and that democracy is under serious threat even in Europe. The interview is basically about Jones's book "Georgia: A Political History Since Independence".

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NVWfobeYTc>

The third video with Stephen Jones is once again related to his book "Socialism in Georgian colors" where he once again stresses the uniqueness of Georgian social-democracy, how the private ownership and socialism performed well together and that this type of socialism is something that only later is achieved in Europe.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xupxxQI1g7I>

The final video with Stephen Jones is about the first republic itself once the social-democratic party of Georgia took the power in their hands. Jones is asked about how socialism, nationalism could live together with idea of Georgia being a part of Europe. Here puts a great emphasis that the believe of socialism as an international phenomenon in its essence, that shows no interest in nationalism is wrong and it is well documented and proven if we take a closer look at Georgian and Western European social-democrats, while the radical socialists, Bolsheviks who didn't believe in rule of law and democratic way governing hated any form of nationalism.

The chapter on Social movements within the Soviet Union has benefited by a review of several historical books and articles/papers. Among them are - The Days of 24 years

August, written by Irakli Otkhmezuri. The book is an important Georgian source because it provides a daily account of the rebellion that took place in 1924.

In addition, the paper has benefited from Georgian historian Kalistrate Salia's text "On the 30th Anniversary of the August Revolt", as well as the article "The Great Terror of 1937–1938 in Georgia: Between the Two Reports of Lavrentiy Beria", published by the Caucasus Analytical Digest.

Data obtained from the Georgian press is mentioned in the bibliography.

The chapter - Status quo at the beginning of independence after the Soviet Union collapsed, the formation of national identity - has benefited from Anthony D. Smith's book - National Identity, especially the first chapter National and Other Identities.

Additionally, the book – "Orthodox Ethics and the Spirit of Unfreedom", written by Georgian philosopher Giorgi Maisuradze provided an understanding of how the 9 April tragedy constructed a new paradigm of national identity. Georgian historian Zaza Abashidze's work – "Georgia and Georgians" provided important context. Stephen F. Jones's work – "Georgia: A Political History Since Independence", was also an important source for this chapter.

For the fourth chapter - Three Decades of Social Movements and its three sub-chapters, the paper has benefited from various authoritative local and foreign sources, which are listed in the bibliography.

The paper has also been informed by the book – "Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia", written by Donald Rayfield, a British professor of Russian and Georgian language. The article – "Summarizing a Quarter of Century of Development. 25 Years of Independent Achievements and unfinished projects" - written by Georgian political scientist Ghia Nodia was helpful, along with Stephen F. Jones's already mentioned work, "Georgia: A Political History since Independence", which was essential for this particular chapter.

In order to analyze the implemented neoliberal reforms, the paper has largely benefited from the following important works –“ Do the benefits of growth trickle-down to Georgia's poor?” : a case for a strong welfare system written by Georgian political economist Dimirty Gugushvili; “Development and the Role of the State; Visions of Post-Revolutionary Georgian Government” written by Georgian Political economist Lela Rekhviashvili and the very valuable research – “Economic Regulation, and State Interventions. Georgia’s Move from Neoliberalism to State-Managed Capitalism”, written by German researcher Christian Timm.

For the review of the manifestations, movements and the political crises in Georgia in November 2007, local and an international press have been invaluable, as well as the International Republican Institute’s report on the presidential election in 2008. These materials are listed in the bibliography of the paper.

Media coverage of students' socio-political movements has also informed the paper and the author has benefitted from his own actions and experience, from these leftist movements in which he took place as a follower of the ideas expressed on those gatherings.

For the third part of the fourth chapter, which analyses the dynamics of protests since 2012 - Massive Protests in 2012; Workers Collective Protests; Protests on Cultural and Urban Issues and drug issues - fieldwork undertaken by the author of the paper as well as Freedom House reports and those of the US State Department and local and an international press have helped to inform the paper.

Additionally, this paper has benefited from the research – “The politic of Resistance: Experience and Perspectives. Labor, Cultural, and Environmental Protection Protest” - published by the Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC); and the research contained in - Unethical Drug Policy, also published by the EMC; as well as the personal activist experience of the author.

## 4 Analysis: Three Decades of Social Movements

### 4.1 Two phases of Georgia's experimental ruling of itself (1991-2003; 2003-2012)

#### 4.1.1 Social Movements at the Dawn of Independence

During its long history, Georgia has been the victim of many invasions. The country was mainly targeted because of its important and strategic geopolitical location. The last invader of an independent Georgia was the Soviet Union, which occupied the country in 1921. The occupation continued until 1991, just before the Soviet Union collapsed.

Georgia is located in the South Caucasus, at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. The country may be referred to as transcontinental because of its location. However, according to socio-political and cultural norms, it is part of Europe and is historically identified this way.<sup>15</sup>

The beginning of Georgia's independence was not very promising. Crowds gathered in the city center of the capital, Tbilisi, to protest against the Soviet Union and to support Georgian independence. At the end of 1991, when the leaders of various Soviet countries' were planning to break up the Union, a civil war took place in the center of Tbilisi. As a result, the economic system and public infrastructure nearly collapsed. During this time, the

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<sup>15</sup> George Hewitt, *Edge of Empires. A History of Georgia, Central Asian Survey* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), chapter 1.

country had two ethnic-territorial wars, which led to the loss of the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.<sup>16</sup>

The chaos continued in Georgia until 1995 when the country finally managed to begin its development. During that time, the country was led by President Shevardnadze, who was previously Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union. As of the mid-1990s, the Georgian economy had begun to slowly grow, as the country began orienting its foreign policy after finding partners in the West, especially the United States. Because of corruption problems, in almost every sphere of public life, meaningful development was unachievable and a significant number of the population were still unemployed.<sup>17</sup>

However, during this stressful and chaotic period, the country managed to build its relationship with Western countries and institutions. The first confirmation of this relationship was the recognition of the country's independence by the EU states in 1992. Subsequently there were several important events that brought Georgia closer to western powers and institutions. These were the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), and the EU's decision to appoint a special representative to the South Caucasus.<sup>18</sup>

Georgia worked with the Council of Europe to open the door for cooperation. In 1993, the Georgian parliament asked for a special guest status in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), which was granted in 1996. Between 1996 and 1999, Georgia had bilateral cooperation with the Council of Europe in several areas, such as law, human rights, and media. In 1996, Georgia asked for membership of the Council of Europe, and was accepted in 1999. As such, Georgia became the 41st member state of the Council of

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<sup>16</sup> Gia Nodia, "Summarizing Quarter of Century of Development," in *25 Years of Independent Georgia. Achievements and Unfinished Projects* (Tbilisi: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2016) pp 5-10.

<sup>17</sup> Jones, *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence*, pp. 115-125; 142-145.

<sup>18</sup> Kakha Gogolashvili, "Georgia-EU Relations and Future Perspective" (Tbilisi, 2017)pp 5-7.

Europe. At the same time, the country created ties with the United States, which became stronger after 2003.<sup>19</sup>

The beginning of 1990s was very problematic because of the unexpected wars in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region and the complete collapse of public infrastructure. The economy had been destroyed, there was high unemployment and massive levels of corruption in all areas of public life. This situation galvanized the public will for radical change.

#### 4.1.2 The second decade and Neo-liberal reforms

In November 2003, an event took place that was a crucial moment in the modern history of Georgia. Thousands of people came to the center of the capital city, Tbilisi, to protect their vote and protest against the falsification of election results. The catalyst for the protest was the dismissal of the Minister of Justice, Mikheil Saakashvili, by the Shevardnadze cabinet and a belief that votes for a newly founded political party, the United National Movement, had been stolen. The protestors demanded that the government be dismissed because it had been unable to address the problems of economic stagnation, loss of territory, poverty, and high unemployment. On the 23rd of November, protesters, led by Saakashvili with a red rose in hand, stormed the Parliament building where President Shevardnadze was addressing the newly elected parliament. Following this major protest, Shevardnadze resigned, triggering new presidential and parliamentary elections. This peaceful change of power was named the Rose Revolution.<sup>20</sup>

In the new elections, Saakashvili won, becoming the third president of Georgia. The country's modernization became the number one priority for the newly elected president and

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<sup>19</sup> Jones, *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence* 45-55.

<sup>20</sup> Jones, *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence*, pp. 145-149.

the government. The president and his team were young, western educated politicians, who devised a radical neoliberal project as a method of developing and westernizing the country.

Regarding the policies implemented by the new government, German researcher Christian Timm, in his research paper "Economic regulation and state interventions, Georgia's move from neoliberalism to state-managed capitalism" writes: "Georgia's economic policy after 2003 has been perceived as an eminently consequent attempt of turning the liberal economic theory of von Mises and von Hayek into reality".<sup>21</sup>

The first term of the government was focused on a massive and unprecedented privatization process, almost full deregulation, progressive and proportional taxation change, and fully liberalized trade. All neoliberal points of view were fundamentally institutionalized in about two years. After implementing all the above-mentioned reforms, the country was considered as a role model by the IMF and the World Bank, who encouraged others to learn from Georgia's experience.<sup>22</sup>

Reforms continued across the country. In 2006, the labor code changed, becoming fully oriented to the employer. There was a refusal of antimonopoly laws. Medical institutions were almost fully privatized, while the provision of public kindergartens and other social services was minimalized. Later, in the government's second term, the Act of Economic Liberty was introduced, which constitutionally guaranteed the neoliberal point of view. According to the new law, the state could not increase tax rates without a referendum. Also, the Act of Economic Liberty regulated the country's financial flat-rate taxation (20%), as well as budget deficits.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Timm, C. (2012) Economic regulation and state interventions. Georgia's move from neoliberalism to state-managed capitalism. Private University of Applied Sciences.

<sup>22</sup> Dimitri Gugushvili, "Do the Benefits of Growth Trickle- Down to Georgia's Poor? A Case For A Strong Welfare System" (University of Kent, 2014) p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Jones, *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence* pp. 257-263; 281-287.



The first period of neoliberal reforms led to fast nominal economic growth in Georgia. To give an example, in only four years during the period of 2004 - 2008 the GDP increased more than three times, from 4 billion US dollars to 13 billion US dollars.

However, this growth did not come about by developing technology, industry or manufacturing, it happened in the sectors where employment rates were low. Furthermore, the state's minimization focused reforms led to the halving of the number of public officials. Despite impressive economic growth, unemployment increased from 11.5% to 15%.<sup>24</sup>

During the period of neoliberal reforms, poverty index rates rose significantly. In 2004, the poverty index rate was 18.2%, rising to 28.9%, in 2007. In 2011, it stood at 26.2%, which is 44% increase from what it was in 2004. While there was a general increase in poverty, in rural areas the numbers of those impoverished almost doubled. At the same time, targeted social expenses increased, otherwise, poverty levels would have risen far more dramatically.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Rose Revolution and Justice-Based Movements Afterward

Despite all the above-mentioned data indicating a tendency of growing economic inequality the main protests against the ex-government were focused on moral issues. Generally, in a Georgian protest context, accumulating grievances are brought to a sudden, explosive outburst in response to a particular moral issue. Georgian revolutions or important government transitions have so far never expressed the interests of particular social groups. In 2003 as well as in 2012, the polarization of the political landscape was a response to moral

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<sup>24</sup> Gugushvili, "Do the Benefits of Growth Trickle- Down to Georgia's Poor? A Case For A Strong Welfare System" p101.

<sup>25</sup> Dimitri Gugushvili, "Do the Benefits of Growth Trickle-Down to Georgia's Poor? A Case For A Strong Welfare System" (University of Kent, 2014), 137-141.

issues, such as the perversion of the justice system (including the performance of the Prosecutor's Office), the courts, the police, and the security service.

Not very long after the Rose Revolution, several instances of injustice (based on the moral issue of governmental officials misusing their power) led to protests. One of the most significant instances was the murder of 28 year old Sandro Girgvliani on January 28, 2006.<sup>26</sup> It is considered the most controversial criminal case in Georgia's modern history.

The circumstances of Girgvliani's death and the subsequent investigation created a lot of doubts and questions in Georgian society concerning justice and law enforcement.

Girgvliani was severely beaten and killed on January 28, 2006. His body was found with multiple injuries in the suburb of Tbilisi, in Okrokana, near a cemetery. The death of Girgvliani was a consequence of an altercation that took place at the Sharden Bar, an elite bar in Tbilisi. Girgvliani was in the bar with his girlfriend at the same time as a party of high officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs that included the wife of the minister, Tako Salakaia. It is alleged that there was an argument between Girgvliani and one of the ministry's high officials regarding Girgvliani's girlfriend. Girgvliani was later found dead.

Girgvliani's murder resulted in massive protests. According to the Public Defender, Sozar Subar, the investigation of the murder was "a serious test for the government" and detention of only a few officials would not be considered an adequate response.

On March 16, a few days after the Public Defender's statement, thousands of people protested by simultaneously turning on car signals in Tbilisi and other big cities and demanding the resignation of the Minister of Internal Affairs. The President downplayed the

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<sup>26</sup> "ECHR Ruling into Girgvliani Murder Case," [www.old.civil.ge](http://www.old.civil.ge), <https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=23376>, accessed November 8, 2018

protestors' calls for the Minister of the Interior's resignation, calling them 'very funny' and irrelevant. The protests continued with the same demands.<sup>27</sup>

After the governmental change in 2012, the ex-ministers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Defence were found guilty of their role in the murder case. It was clear that aspects of the murder investigation were falsified and there were the inaccuracies in the testimonies of witnesses. Ex-president Saakashvili was subsequently sentenced in-absentia for his role in pardoning the people convicted of the crime.<sup>28</sup>

In 2011, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg stated that the investigation of the murder had "clearly lacked the requisite, independence, impartiality, objectivity and thoroughness". The Court also ordered the Georgian government to pay €50,000 compensation to the Girgvliani family for moral damage."<sup>29</sup>

This case was not only tragic case where people were killed in suspicious circumstances. The murders of Buta Robakidze and Zurab Vazagashvili also resulted in massive protests. However, Sandro Girgvliani's murder is considered the most controversial criminal case in Georgia's modern history. In all cases the public either knew or believed that the officials or policemen were engaged in criminal activities and suppressed the investigations against themselves.

Protests on moral issues continued after the murder of Sandro Girgvliani. The most active phase began in 2007 and resulted in the physical dispersal of protestors, and interference in the broadcasting media by law enforcement officers. These actions fomented a political crisis.

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Coalson, "Sandro Girgvliani: The Ghost That Haunts Saakashvili's Legacy," [www.rferl.org,https://www.rferl.org/a/girgvliani-saakashvili-georgia-killing-case/25030121.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/girgvliani-saakashvili-georgia-killing-case/25030121.html), accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> "Former President Mikheil Saakashvili Found Guilty of Pardoning Convicts in Girgvliani Case", [www.tabula.ge,http://www.tabula.ge/ge/node/128307](http://www.tabula.ge/http://www.tabula.ge/ge/node/128307), accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> "Main Witness in Girgvliani Murder Case Changes Testimony", [www.agenda.ge,http://agenda.ge/en/news/2014/1913](http://agenda.ge/en/news/2014/1913), accessed November 8, 2018.

In September 2007, confrontations within the governing party began. By the end of the month, former Defense Minister, the influential political leader Irakli Okruashvili, left the governing party, accusing the President and other leaders of corruption and other criminal activities, and formed his own political party. Other politicians also left the governing party and joined Okruashvili's group.

Shortly after, Okruashvili was detained on the grounds of financial irregularities. Thousands of people protested, demanding the release of Okruashvili and new presidential elections. Okruashvili's confession about his illegal financial activities was subsequently circulated and he was released in exchange for bail. Later, Okruashvili stated that his confession was made under duress.<sup>30</sup>

Subsequent protests were held in different cities and were focused on the large number of instances of the use of excessive force by law enforcement agencies. On 1 November 2007, hundreds of people came to Tbilisi to take part in protests and demand the President's resignation and a snap presidential election, before his term ran out. These demands were refused by government officials.<sup>31</sup>

On 2 November, the President declared a state of emergency. This action was negatively assessed in Georgia and abroad. Afterwards, the President announced his resignation and appointed snap elections two months early on January 5. He won the elections with 53 percent of the vote.<sup>32</sup> Opposition parties talked about election fraud and protest ensued but these were not as large as earlier and could be explained by people's nihilism that no fundamental changes will ever come and frustration.

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<sup>30</sup> "Former Defense Minister Detained In Georgia", <https://www.rferl.org/a/1078816.html>, accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> J.C Chirves, "Thousands Rally in Capital Against Georgia President", [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com), [https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/03/world/europe/03tbilisi.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/03/world/europe/03tbilisi.html?_r=1&oref=slogin), accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> IRI 2008 Georgian Presidential Election Report (Washington D.C, 2008).

These events were followed by the brief war with Russia in August 2008. Several months later, protests were renewed. However, they did not achieve a decisive tipping point, regardless of a large part of society being involved in the process.

From 2010, it was evident that protests with a similar form (street protests) and content, focused on the need of changing ruling party were ineffective.

However, from the beginning of 2011 the "People's Community" and former Chairman of Parliament Nino Burjanadze (former member of governing party, who decided to leave the party for the opposition after the 2008 August war) began preparing for a protest in May. It should be noted that fewer people were involved in this process than in the protests of 2007 and 2009, and young people were minimally represented.<sup>33</sup>

Based on the experience of previous protests, this particular protest would not attract particular attention if no brutal crackdown and mass arrests of participants took place.

The main protest began on May 21, 2011. At 12 o'clock on May 25, representatives of the city administration of Tbilisi informed the protestors that permission for the protest would expire at 12 o'clock due to May 26, Independence Day, celebrations that would take place the next day.

Protest leaders decided to remain in the city center and continue the protest. Later, the protest was dispersed by force. Four people were killed and dozens of protestors were injured. More than hundred protestors were arrested. In an attempt to justify their actions, the government circulated a video showing opposition leaders talking about a state coup and bloodshed. The government's heavy handed response to this protest drew strong condemnation from the non-governmental and civil society sectors. However, aside from a

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<sup>33</sup> "On Rustaveli Avenue - Protests in Georgia," [www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com), <https://www.economist.com/europe/2011/06/02/on-rustaveli-avenue>, accessed November 8, 2018.

few minor protests a main wave of significant protests did not begin again until the summer of 2012.<sup>34</sup>

## 4.2 Massive Protests in 2012

### 4.2.1 Breaking new ground: the beginning of social protests

While implementing reforms, the ruling National Movement party began facing waves of protests from opposition parties and society in general. The protests were not based on social, economic or moral issues; the main problem was a political one. The government's political agenda was perceived as radical and one from which it never retreated even after obvious political mistakes.

Almost all the protests demanded a more democratic and free country and more protection of basic human rights. Interestingly, protestors did not demand a more social oriented policy. A reason for this, from my point of view, was people's acceptance of the State's minimal role in social welfare. As already mentioned at the beginning of this text, left wing political discourse passed into obscurity after the fall of the Soviet Union and earlier nationalistic and later neoliberal discourses become prominent in Georgia. Furthermore, neoliberalism was strongly supported by the government's social, cultural and intellectual perspectives from 2004 onwards.

In early 2011, students, especially those based in Tbilisi State University, started social protests demanding more social oriented policies from the ruling party. Students organized the movement Laboratory 1918, which for the first few months was focused on institutional problems within the university. In the beginning, the members of the movement

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<sup>34</sup> "The Georgian Political Landscape After May 26," [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org), [https://www.rferl.org/a/caucasus\\_report\\_georgia\\_political\\_landscape\\_after\\_may\\_26/24228715.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/caucasus_report_georgia_political_landscape_after_may_26/24228715.html), accessed November 8, 2018.

thought that Laboratory 1918 would work with students and lecturers to achieve free educational space, which would transform the university as an advance guard of civil society. However, it quickly became the most active and prominent social movement in the country.<sup>35</sup>

Young people from different ideological perspectives focused on social demands but the different ideological preferences, such as social-democrats, socialists, neo-Marxists, anarchists, and feminists sometimes made it incredibly difficult to come to a consensus. A further problem was the adoption of horizontal decision-making principles without any hierarchical structure. Despite these challenges, the movement that started early 2011, developed left-wing perspectives relevant for society without any affiliation and without being labelled as being pro-Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup>

This early movement was an example for many students who developed social-oriented interests and began to learn about social problems such as the plight of industrial workers in the country's different industrial regions. Students made a clear demand for changes to the labor code, which as, I already explained, in the beginning was oriented in favour of the employer.

The movement took a significant role during the big protests in Tbilisi before the parliamentary election in 2012, including protests prompted by reports of torture in Georgian prisons. After the change of government in October 2012, students continued their social oriented demands.

The events that took place in 2012 play a significant role in modern Georgian history. In the second half of September, a few weeks before Parliament elections, a video recording of Georgian prison guards torturing and physically and verbally abusing prisoners was widely

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<sup>35</sup> “ლა ბორა ტორია 1918,” <https://laboratoria1918.wordpress.com/>, accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> გოგუა გიორგი, “‘ლა ბორა ტორია 1918’ - ს უბ კულტურა ს ის ტემ ის პირის პირ - ლ ბ ე რ ა ლ ზ,” [www.liberali.ge](http://liberali.ge), 2013, <http://liberali.ge/articles/view/3171/laboratoria-1918--subkultura-sistemis-pirispir>, Accessed November 8, 2018.

circulated on television and through the Internet. This resulted in outrage amongst Georgian society.<sup>37</sup>

Students and other civil groups organized massive protests. Each day more and more people were involved in the protests. The core of these protests were the students who already had experience of participation in protests but their participation was incomparably smaller than the 2012 September events because the prison torture videos had sparked a nationwide wave of protests. The protests took many forms, including music concerts and marches to prisons. The main message was “The System must be destroyed”.

The radical and irreconcilable position against the government reached its peak before the elections and resulted in an opposition coalition Georgian Dream victory. It was the tensest period before elections in my personal experience and was marked by the opposition highlighting “elite corruption” (corruption among political elites, which in Georgian case means corruption that only existed among the top politicians).

The last protest manifestation prior to the elections was organized by the main opposition coalition and involved thousands of citizens. The Georgian Dream coalition victory was celebrated on the city streets with people expressing their happiness.

The new government shared an uncomfortable one year cohabitation period with Mikhail Saakashvili as the incumbent president.<sup>38</sup>

To sum up we can say that the opposition coalition “Georgian Dream” managed to obtain power through the accumulation of multifaceted dissatisfaction within society. The primary and perhaps the most significant dissatisfaction was the distorting of human rights

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<sup>37</sup> Markian Ostaptschuk and Amalia Ogandjanian, “Prison Torture Scandal Rocks Georgia” [www.dw.com](https://www.dw.com/en/prison-torture-scandal-rocks-georgia/a-16255549), 2012, <https://www.dw.com/en/prison-torture-scandal-rocks-georgia/a-16255549>, accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Jim Nichol, “Georgia’s October 2012 Legislative Election: Outcome and Implications,” *CRS Report for Congress*, 2012.



and democracy principles, which had triggered a series of protests based on moral issues, like protecting human dignity in the first place and not the socio-economic.

Another important factor was the former government's neoliberal economic policies that had widened the gap between rich and poor citizens. Alongside this factor was public awareness of the significant illegal interference in the private sector, in particular, the persecution of businesses and the violation of private property rights. The "Georgian Dream" coalition pre-election promise was elimination of these abuses, together with positive change.

The new government's obvious and unambiguous promise was the protection and strengthening of democracy and human rights. Freedom to express thoughts without fear was promoted and accepted as a huge step forward by society but it also served to divert attention from other concerns, such as social-economic problems.

However, over the years since the new government has taken power, various notorious cases destroyed this promised strengthening of democracy and human rights. An example concerns so-called judicial reforms, where generally discredited judges (Girgvliani's case judge and other judges that had overseen dubious trials) not only remained on their positions but also got lifetime contracts. This was interpreted by society, as the new government being willing to use such people for "uncomfortable" court cases.

In addition, there are other notorious cases that were not investigated in a timely fashion, including attacks on opposition representatives, hidden video and audio recordings cases, the disappearance of journalist Afgan Mukhtarly from Tbilisi and his delivery to the authorities in Azerbaijan, the attacks on broadcasters, such as Rustavi 2<sup>39</sup> and Iberia, and

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<sup>39</sup> Cory Welt, "The Curious Case of Georgia's Rustavi-2," [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net), <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/cory-welt/curious-case-of-georgia-s-rustavi-2>, accessed November 8, 2018.

others.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, despite the fact that a democracy consolidation process is ongoing there are concerns, questions and doubts.<sup>41</sup>

The Georgian Dream government has focused more on social issues compared to the former “National Movement” government. Expenditure on social issues has grown, a General Insurance project is now in place, certain study programs are now free in state universities, and agricultural subsidies have been introduced. However, the previous government’s right-wing economic policies have not been fundamentally reassessed. Minimal engagement in market and institutional support for economic independence continues and there is a lack of public investment that could realize the country’s industrial potential.

As for third factor, unofficial interference in business activity, it is clear that this is not occurring at the same level as the previous government was doing, but every day we hear more and more scandalous information about interference in business activity involving corruption undertaken by the political elite.<sup>42</sup>

Now I will describe particular social movements and protests.

In December 2012, the newly elected government decided to review some of the principal articles in the labor code and several changes were made. The changes were widely criticized by the student movements and trade unions, and were thought to be, “one of the worst cases in Europe as far as the rights of workers are concerned” by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Irakli Petriashvili, of the GTUC said, “The latest changes and amendments in the Georgian Labour Code represent an important step forward

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<sup>40</sup> “Iberia TV Briefly Suspends Broadcast amid Claims of Pressure – Civil.Ge;” [www.civil.ge,https://civil.ge/archives/253469](https://civil.ge/archives/253469), accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>41</sup> “Nations in Transit 2018,” [www.freedomhouse.org,https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/georgia](https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/georgia), accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>42</sup> “Nations in Transit 2018: Georgia Country Report”, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/georgia>, accessed November 8, 2018.

although they are the minimum of what the Georgian people expected.” Students and other social groups continued to fight for a better labor law.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Workers Collective Protests

Protest movement in Chiatura and Tkibuli Manganese Mine industries. Interviews with Chiatura local trade unions representatives (Interviews conducted by myself last summer).

Chiatura is a poor industrial town in western Georgia. However, it was quite prosperous during the second half of the last century in the Soviet period. A manganese company employs 3700 workers who work in several manganese mines in the city.

Georgian Manganese/Georgian American Alloys has operated in Georgia since 2007. It owns seven mines and more than six factories in Chiatura, the ferroalloy industry in the neighboring city of Zestafoni and the hydroelectric station Vartsikhe in Samtredia, another neighboring city.

There are three different trade unions in Chiatura's manganese industry.

The biggest one is Georgia's Miner's Trade Union, which is the oldest, operating since the Soviet Union and again in 2008 with new management. It has the highest number of members with 2300 out of the 3700 workers.

The second largest one is Chiaturian Miners' Professional Union, which was created after protests and a strike that took place in 2012. It has a membership of 700 workers.

The third one is the Georgian Trade Union, which was also created after protests and a strike that took place in 2012. It has 400 members and is a sister organization of the central Georgian Trade Union.

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<sup>43</sup> “Georgia’s New Labour Code Marred by ‘Loopholes and Gaps’ - Equal Times,” [www.equaltimes.org](https://www.equaltimes.org/georgia-s-new-labour-code-marred?lang=en#.WdENS9MjE6g4), <https://www.equaltimes.org/georgia-s-new-labour-code-marred?lang=en#.WdENS9MjE6g4>, accessed November 8, 2018.

Here I will describe the issues faced by the trade unions in Chiatura. This information is based on my research interviews and my interpretation based on an analysis of the following materials: interviews of different activists, union members, more than 20 workers, and representatives of two NGO's focused on this issue.

The first and the biggest trade union - Georgia's Miners' Trade Union - is the oldest trade union. It restarted operations under new management in 2008. Interviews with all the above mentioned parties showed me that in reality, this is the mining company's puppet, the so-called yellow trade union that ignores workers actual problems and indirectly works for the company's management. During a 40-minute conversation with the chairman of the union, I did not hear anything about the problematic conditions of the workers. The chairman did mention that the union was the biggest and wealthiest and gave presents to its members every New Year's holiday.

In the second largest union - Chiaturian miners' professional union – membership is comprised of ordinary workers only. This union was created straight after the 2012 strikes, which were widely supported by the student movements. In the beginning, this union did its best to protect workers' rights but after the resignation of the first chairman the situation dramatically changed. The new chairman confronted all union members who wanted to be more actively represented in the media, organize strikes and be more confrontational with the mining company. The chairman even asked for the closure of the union's social media account on Facebook (which was one of the main sources for organizing and promoting protests for student movements). All these actions indicated to some members that the union was indirectly cooperating with the mining company. To address this, four of the nine central council's members (with their supporters) demanded the resignation of the chairman. Otherwise, they planned to join the third largest trade union in the industry. To conclude, it is

legitimate to say that these trade unions became institutionally controlled by the mining company.

The third and smallest union is the Georgian Trade Union. This one was created after the massive protest that took place in 2012. It is the smallest but is the most influential, as it is the sister organization of the main trade union in Georgia. It therefore has good contacts with international trade unions and NGO's working on labour issues. Presently, they are the only open trade union and because of this, local and international organizations are able to provide training, seminars and the like. Despite the fact they are well connected, there is still some pressure on their members by the mining company.

In this section, I will examine the methods used by the administration of the Georgian Manganese Company to influence and control the workers. One of them is to create a financial dependency. This method is widely known in Chiatura where the majority of workers have taken small or medium size loans from the banks and sometimes find it difficult to manage and pay monthly installments on time. The Georgian Manganese Company offers its workers 3-4 month salaries in advance, without any additional interest. This offer is attractive for many of the workers. However, the application form to apply for the pre-paid salary asks additional non-relevant questions such as, "Are you member of the trade union?", "Which trade union are you in?", "Did you participate in the strikes?", and the like. In addition, it is stated that if the company discovers that particular worker oversteps his or her authority, the company has the right to ask its workers to give back 100 percent of the prepaid salary. Of course, the phrase "oversteps his or her authority" has a wide scope for interpretation. This is one of the significant ways to pressure workers and prevent their protests and strikes. Furthermore, this kind of pressure is the main reason why most workers are members of the so-called „yellow trade unions“.

As the given master paper is written from the perspective of the participant observer, the research contains particular observations that I have recorded during my own activist and civil experience while visiting and observing the different industrial regions.

During Soviet times, the industrial town of Chiatura was one of the richest areas in the country but it became one of the poorest because of the lack of a robust economic policy.

There are quite a few differences between a generally accepted modern, safe working environment and the situation in the mines and factories in Chiatura. The same is true for labour rights, working conditions and salaries. During my interviews, I had the opportunity to speak to many workers and I will use extracts from my interviews to point out the actual problems faced by the workers.

Lali Chiladze, an industry worker said that, “There is a catastrophic asymmetry between the huge gap in salaries of the labor force and the administrative units. In most cases, our salaries are even much lower than a minimum living wage. There are no primary medical centers in all the mines, which has already led to the death of 21 miners including the current year.<sup>44</sup> It is important to note that a big budget is not necessary to organize primary medical centers in the mines, but this problem is still not solved by the company, the labor code is still weak and according to law, the company is still not obliged to have one.”

“The insecure labor conditions are exacerbated by transportation, cable cars installed in 1957 are the main method of transport for the workers,” said Pavle Tsutskiridze.

Many workers do not have permanent contracts and they have been working for 5-6 years with 3-6 month temporary contracts.

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<sup>44</sup> “რამდენი ადამიანი დაიღუპა მინდელის მახტაში 2010 წელს და დღემდე რამდენი რეგულარი იყობს ელს უფლებების გამომამაურება უბედურ შემთხვევებზე?” [www.allnews.ge](http://www.allnews.ge), <https://www.allnews.ge/sazogadoeba/159795-რამდენი-ადამიანი-დაიღუპა-მ%E1>, accessed November 10, 2018.

“Due to the wrong and improper transportation of manganese, our historic city is facing an ecological catastrophe,” said Lali Chiladze. “It is not mining of manganese but plundering, and the government does not react, the governmental changes of 2012 are not enough to overcome our unendurable challenges, the government only want us to vote for them. We appreciate students and youth always visiting and standing with us, and we hope we can effect some change together. In our city there is only one industry so this job is our only chance to work.”

From my talks with the respondents, it is clear that students' groups, non-governmental organizations as well as informal groups have played a significant role in highlighting the economic inequality and hard working conditions experienced in Chiatura.

Since 2011, the miners decided upon strike action in Chiatura, demanding improvement of labour conditions and salary. Miners in Tkibuli also decided upon strike action. The trade union requested social guarantees for miners.

The resultant strikes and protests were the biggest until another long strike in Tkibuli in 2016. From 2011, students were very active in both cities and during visits, they had discussions with workers, helping them to organize small protests and raising their awareness of other social and labor struggles. The workers' problems were widely publicised in social and traditional media by the student movement 'Laboratory 1918' and other smaller groups. The student movement also organized discussions on social rights, workers' rights and conditions at universities and supported a group of students who provided training to mining workers and representatives of trade unions to help them better organize themselves and articulate their problems in order for their protest to have as much resonance as possible.

The supportive role of student movements was also significant in Tkibuli. In February 2016 the workers of the Tkibulian mine organized unprecedentedly long strikes for almost

two weeks. The company - Saknakhshiri - employs around 1500 workers in the mine industry.<sup>45</sup>

Different left-wing student movements supported the biggest movement in Tkibuli, which demanded changes to unbearable working conditions. During the entire process, the student movements played an important role in planning strategic actions that aimed to fulfill the workers' demands.<sup>46</sup>

The workers were demanding a 40% pay rise and changes to outdated and insecure working conditions. The important battle finished with a consensus between workers, central trade unions, representatives of the Ministry of Health, and the company - Saknakhshiri. The workers did not get what they demanded but did secure a 5% pay rise in some cases and a 7% pay rise in others.<sup>47</sup>

To an external observer, it is unlikely to be considered a huge success, especially after the massive and radical protest and strike movement supported by a wide range of social groups. However, it is almost the only case where a strike by workers achieved a small, yet real improvement.

Furthermore, these actions made workers problems more real for the media and society in general. The protest waves that started in 2012 led to the restoration of the Labor Conditions Inspection Department in 2015, after a gap of 9 years without any labor inspection office. However, the situation remains problematic, as according to the law, the Labor Conditions Inspection Department is only allowed to check the working conditions of a particular industry if they are invited to do so by the industry, which is to be checked. A

<sup>45</sup> “Coal Miners in Tkibuli Strike over Wages, Working Conditions,” [www.civil.ge](http://www.civil.ge), <https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28996>, accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> რეკრუტინგის და, “ტყობიანობის აქციის და მწვანე მუშაობის და რამდენიმე დღის ტყუილ ტყუილ შუამდგომლობა”, [www.rustavi2.ge](http://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/40265), <http://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/40265>, accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> გოგუა გიორგი, “ტყობიანობის აქციის და მწვანე მუშაობის და რამდენიმე დღის ტყუილ ტყუილ შუამდგომლობა”, [www.radiotavisupleba.ge](http://www.radiotavisupleba.ge), <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/tkibulshi-gaficva-sheckda/27582827.html>, accessed November 8, 2018.



number of movements continue to protest this situation but are waiting for the right political opportunity and relevant moment when the issue can be energetically moved forward.

#### 4.2.3 Protests on Cultural and Urban and Drug Issues

The somewhat faded tradition of environmental protests in Georgia, which began with the famous 1989 protests of Khudon, experienced a resurgence in 2013 with protests about the same hydroelectric power plant.<sup>48</sup> In subsequent years, a series of demonstrations took place to protest about the government's plans to build further power plants (Samegrelo-Upper Svaneti, Racha-Lechkhumi-Lower Svaneti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti) and high voltage power lines (Qsani-Stepantsminda).

The wave of regional protests against the policy of maximum utilization of hydro-resources were not based on a thorough technical knowledge, neither were the issues framed primarily as environmental ones. Rather, these mainly came as reactionary outbursts that were at times joined, supported or led by Tbilisi based NGOs and movements such as Green Fist and Green Alternative. Awareness of environmental issues grew mainly parallel to the geographic pinning of new energy projects. In their arguments, the protesters highlighted the damage to the environment, but also raised ethical and political economic issues, as well as problems of national security. According to local protesters in villages directly affected by the proposed energy schemes, the energy projects (unlike projects investing in tourism and state supported agriculture) would do little to improve their economic situation. Aside from

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<sup>48</sup> “კვიდედონ ჰიდროელექტროსადგამის აგების წინააღმდეგოდა ქვეყნის მთელი სივრცითი მოძრაობის და მისი ტერიტორია,” youtube.com, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJaIM\\_VLXys](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJaIM_VLXys), accessed November 10, 2018.

the environmental damage, the local protestors believe that such projects in the northern border regions increase the risk of losing the border regions in which they are situated.<sup>49</sup>

These protests were met with police repression and political marginalization (protesters were often labelled as anti-progressive). Government special forces were sent to Chuberi in 2016 to disperse the protestors' blockade of the Nenskra power plant building facility. Eight protestors were arrested.<sup>50</sup> A local activist protesting the installation of high voltage electricity lines in Kazbegi was also arrested in 2016; and there were several attempts to arrest protestors in May 2017 when a new wave of demonstrations against the construction of power transmission lines took place in Khando Gorge, Pasanauri in northeastern Georgia.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the repressive measures and a lack of thorough knowledge of environmental issues, the protestors in these regions managed to consolidate. This wave of protests is remarkable for their use of democratic processes, such as engaging with village or regional councils, as well as petitioning, legal advocating through NGOs, and public discussions.<sup>52</sup> Activists started to display a relatively higher level of political and economic awareness, speaking for instance, of a “neoliberal system”, and employing strategically the practice of

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<sup>49</sup> Khatuna Qeburia and Tatuli Tchubabria, “The Politic of Resistance: Experience and Perspectives. Labor, Cultural, and Environmental Protection Protest” (Tbilisi, 2017) pp. 162-164.

<sup>50</sup> “ნენსკრა ჰესის წინააღმდეგ საპროტესტო აქციაზე დაკავებული ჯარიმის სანაცვლოდგაათავისუფლეს - YouTube,” [www.youtube.com, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHnugtfOSj4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHnugtfOSj4), accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>51</sup> “მალაღობავის სამშენებლო ტექნიკას ფასანაურში ქვები დაუშინეს - YouTube,” [www.youtube.com, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZzWQllvgMQ&t=72s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZzWQllvgMQ&t=72s), accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> “ნენსკრა ჰესის გენდერულ შედეგები 31,” 2016.

icon vowing in Svaneti in order to make heard their demands and increase the reach of the protest.<sup>53</sup>

This was not the only case when campaigners in Svaneti resorted to the practice of icon vowing in the face of government counter measures. Protesters of Ieli village gave a new impetus to their vow by bonding together against a common enemy when a mining company sued the villagers for violent acts. As one of the members of the leading group said, “Everyone prefers to fly from a cliff than break a vow.” The Svaneti region was also an exception in terms of waged work leveraging; increased salary opportunities were least successful in this region in undermining protests directed against mining practices.

Deposit extraction licensing has been almost fully deregulated (except oil and gas). The law of 2005 exempted all companies from environmental harm assessment procedures and consultation with local inhabitants, and permitted auction licensing.<sup>54</sup> From 2013, regional protests against deposit extraction became commonplace in mining-dependent towns like Chiatura, Tkibuli and Bolnisi. However, these movements, like those protesting hydroelectric power plant projects, lacked institutionalization and their protest strategies were rarely ever elaborate. Although there was criticism of the State’s minimal intervention, there were cases of letters to municipal governments that contained harsh ultimatums.

Interestingly, the protests were hardly ever rationalized within the context of environmental damage but were often spoken of in nationalist terms of resisting the invasion of foreign businessmen, just as people had resisted historical invaders of Georgia). More often, the problem was articulated as relating to private property and individual business opportunities.

This caused separate interest groups; those who were self-employed in tourism and

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<sup>53</sup> Khatuna Qeburia and Tatuli Tchubabria, “The Politic of Resistance: Experience and Perspectives. Labor, Cultural, and Environmental Protection Protest” (Tbilisi, 2017), pp. 162-164.

<sup>54</sup> “ს ა ქ ა რთვ ე ლობ მ ი ნ ე რ ა ლჟორი რე ს ურს ე ბ ი ს მ მ ა რთვ ე ლობ ი ს ა ქ ტუა ლჟორი ს ა კ ი თ ე ბ ი ,” [www.greenalt.org](http://greenalt.org), [http://greenalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/mining\\_report\\_2017\\_geo1.pdf](http://greenalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/mining_report_2017_geo1.pdf), accessed November 8, 2018.

agriculture protested against the ore extractors, while those in the industry (or indirectly benefitting from it) tended to support the extractors. This revived among society a conviction from Soviet times - that the system is maintaining pliant and controlled workers who know the extent of the destructive effects of the industry. From the accounts of locals from Kazreti, it appears that the protests in Svaneti were not the only case of perseverance of political will against economic leverage. In 2014, a majority of workers boycotted a counter demonstration organized by the mining company “RMG Gold”. However, it should be noted that the Kazreti protests were much less local, variegated in composition, and had a different conjuncture.

In 2013, a newly formed commission in the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia<sup>55</sup> annulled the status of cultural heritage for an ancient mine Sakdrisi-Kachaghiani, allowing “RMG Gold” to conduct large-scale extraction activities. This sparked a huge wave of protest that began among students and academics of Tbilisi State University and spread to encompass “RMG Gold” workers protesting work conditions. The protest rapidly engaged the wider society, involving ordinary citizens around the country, professional circles, NGOs, and environmental movements. Political parties such as the Patriot Alliance joined the protest. A very small number of government representatives also participated. Radical supporters of the first president Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the Orthodox Christian organization ‘Davitiani’ also protested. The Georgian Patriarchy subsequently called the destruction of the ancient mine, which was cultural heritage, by exploding it for new research purposes “An indefensible act directed against state reasoning”. During the period of the protests, the protection status of Sakdrisi-Kachaghiani changed several times in response to political developments but the situation changed when, in a matter of hours, four official decisions were made and seventeen actions undertaken that sanctioned the destruction

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<sup>55</sup> “Statement of the Georgian National Committee of ICOMOS on Recent Developments in Heritage Sector in Georgia,” [www.rcchd.icomos.org.ge](http://www.rcchd.icomos.org.ge), <http://rcchd.icomos.org.ge/?l=G&m=4-4&JID=5&AID=36>, accessed November 10, 2018.

of the mine.<sup>56</sup> To date, no State officials or other representatives have been charged with any kind of offence.

2013-2014 witnessed perhaps the largest defense of cultural heritage in Georgia, but it lacked cohesion and trust among its constituent member groups. It was ultimately unsuccessful, despite several victories during the process of the protest. GYLA (Georgian Young Lawyers' Association) attempted a legal assault and sued.<sup>57</sup> The Green Fist movement organized several protest actions, including one on May Day in Kazreti that linked two directions of the protest and positioned it on the nexus of the social and the cultural, thereby attacking the argument of non-reconcilable economic, rights, and cultural concerns. This had a considerable effect on the development of the process. The workers protesting intolerable working conditions played a significant role and together with the specially set up "Sakdrisi Defence Committee", built a watchtower overlooking part of the mine, and organized a human chain blockade around the whole territory of Sakdrisi-Kachaghiani. These "territorial advancements" as protesters chose to call them, assumed a certain symbolic weight but proved unable to prevent the later partial disintegration of protesters on ideological grounds and distrust among groups and individuals. Liberal protesters had quite different concerns than traditionalists and Orthodox Christians, for whom it was primarily a matter of national and religious sentiments. Conflicts and paranoia spread throughout the protesters who struggled to prevent each (with chaotic, not coordinated actions) other manifesting their symbols.

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<sup>56</sup> "ს ა ი ა -ს ა ყ დ რ ი ს ი -ყ ა ჩ ა ლ ი ა ნ ი ს ა ფ ე თ ე ბ ი დ ა ნ ე რ თ ა წ ლ ს შ ე მ დ ე გ , ბ ე ვ რ ი კ ი თ ნ ვ ა კ ვ ლ ვ ა ც პ ა ს უ ნ გ ა უ ც ე მ ე ლ ა - ს ა ქ ა რ თ ე ლ ო ს ა ნ ა ლ ა ზ რ დ ა ი უ რ ი ს ტ ო ა ს ო ვ ი ა ც ი ა ," [www.gyla.ge](http://www.gyla.ge), <https://gyla.ge/ge/post/saia-saydrisi-yachaghianis-afetqebidan-erti-tslis-shemdeg-bevri-kitkhva-kvlavac-pasukhgaucemelia#sthash.GMefV4I3.dpbs>, accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>57</sup> Sul Khan Saladze, "Sakdrisi-Khachaghiani. From Cultural Heritage to Modern Mining" (Tbilisi, 2014) pp 17-33.

However, these internal conflicts did not prove to be the prime cause for the loss of the mine and were overshadowed by larger-scale political events and considerations. Today, some of the local Sakdrisi-Kachaghiani protesters complain about a wrong strategy. In their view, the protest could have taken a different turn had its actions not been limited to “intellectual locution by the media” and by a physical presence on site. Informed by the relatively successful stories of street demonstrations of previous years in several villages and cities, they consider it would have been better to protest in the streets at crucial moments in the process. Whether more street demonstrations could have resulted in a more desirable outcome for Sakdrisi-Khachaghiani protesters is difficult to determine but the protest as a whole marked a rare moment when the wider society remained more or less consolidated around a cause until the very last moment.

It should be noted that after the abovementioned renewal of the Khudon power plant demonstrations in 2013, in response to the government’s abandoned pre-election promises, street protests have assumed an important role in the struggle against the destruction of urban, cultural, and natural environments. In relation to the Khudon plant in 2013, Nenskra plant in 2015, and the Kazbegi power lines in 2016, people demonstrated political economic resistance - boycotting job opportunities and refusing to sell land for energetic projects, but their role was even more central in cities like Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi.

Batumi has the most successful record of protests for conservation of the urban environment but social consolidation has not been so strong as in the two other cities mentioned above. People in Batumi began to express their concerns, on and beyond the streets, for the preservation of their urban environment in 2011 when the reconstruction of the Batumi coastline was announced. The modernization project involved the gentrification of an

area of the city that had commercial potential.<sup>58</sup> A newly formed civil, non-professional organization called ‘Batomi’ led the campaign that managed to preserve the “three [pedestrian] lines”, which was the theme and main demand of the protest. The demonstrations were successful and laid a foundation for a tradition of relentless defense of the urban and cultural environment that would be maintained in the ensuing years. In 2014, protestors managed to prevent the old ‘Octopus’ monument from Soviet times from being replaced by a private business initiative.<sup>59</sup> At other times, protests achieved relative success by democratically hindering bureaucratic processes. This approach was applied when cultural heritage, such as Soviet-era school buildings, a one hundred year old Magnolia tree, and the house of Soviet artist Odysseus Demetriades were threatened by the modernization of Batumi Boulevard in the period of 2015-2016.<sup>60</sup>

Despite a lack of financial and intellectual resources, and political willfulness on the part of the wider society, ‘Batomi’ managed to engage a significant number of professionals and lay people who would passionately articulate their demands, and highlight government incompetence and corruption in the sphere of urban development.

While Batumi established a tradition of protesting, protests in other cities, such as Kutaisi, were less frequent and less successful, for example, the non-systematic, spontaneous failed attempt at resistance to the renovation of the unique pedestrian White Bridge.<sup>61</sup>

Movements trying to protect urban and cultural environment in Tbilisi have been equally

<sup>58</sup> “ს ა ვ როტე ს ტო ა ქ ც ი ა ბ ა თუ მ შ ი ,” [www.youtube.com, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXITj0i1MFM](http://www.youtube.com/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXITj0i1MFM), accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>59</sup> “რ ვ ა ფ ე ხ ა ს დ ს ა ც ა ვ ი ა ქ ც ი ა ბ ა თუ მ შ ი ,” [www.youtube.com, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycCqD5bOW1k](http://www.youtube.com/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycCqD5bOW1k), accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>60</sup> “#ს ა მ ი ვ ე - ბ ა თუ მ ი ს ბ უ ლ ვ ა რ ი ს დ ს ა ც ა ვ ა დ ს ო ც ი ა ლ უ რ ი კ ა მ პ ა ნ ი ა შ ი ა ს ე უ ლ ო ბ ი თ ა დ მ ი ა ნ ი მ ო ნ ა წ ი ლ უ ო ბ ს ,” [www.ambebi.ge, https://www.ambebi.ge/article/153062-samive-batumis-bulvaris-dasacavad-socialuri-kampaniashi-aseulobit-adamiani-monacileobs/](http://www.ambebi.ge/https://www.ambebi.ge/article/153062-samive-batumis-bulvaris-dasacavad-socialuri-kampaniashi-aseulobit-adamiani-monacileobs/), accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> კ ა ჭ კ ა ჭ ი შ ი ვ ი ლ თ თ ა , “ი ს ტ ო რ ი უ ლ თ „თ ე თ რ ი ხ ი დ ა“ ქ უ თ ა ი ს შ ი ,” [www.radiotavisupleba.ge, https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/tetri-khidi-kutaisshi/28900411.html](http://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/tetri-khidi-kutaisshi/28900411.html), accessed November 8, 2018.

unsuccessful, despite their constancy and perseverance. In previous years, groups like Green Fist and Partisan Gardeners have managed to raise awareness of how businesses may exploit environments for financial benefit, and how corrupt politicians may be supporting them, but it was not newsworthy and did not stimulate a population, so accustomed to petty political wrongs and more inclined to accept economic arguments.

Some extreme activists and leaders often provided unpopular representations of themselves - jumping on police cars, and at times discoursing on media in vulgar language, positioning themselves as libertarian anti-traditionalist elite. This had the effect of alienating themselves from their target groups and making joint actions with the majority of Georgian citizens unlikely.

Ever since the Rose Revolution, identity related emotional shortcomings have often damaged protests in the extremely unbalanced social landscape of Georgia. Urban, cultural and environmental protests that have taken place in recent years have been no exception in this respect. However, these shortcomings should not be regarded too negatively. Protests held in recent years have occurred at the intersection of three main elements. Firstly, big political and financial pre-decisions, the ends of which, in hindsight, often appear pre-destined. Secondly, the reactionary and/or non-systematized actions of activists and liberal/libertarian elite, a lack of political competence, strategic resource, and pragmatism, as well as adequate regard, in some cases, of the wider society's ways of apprehension, values and concerns. Thirdly, a lack of environmental and political awareness amongst the wider society. This triumvirate only properly emerged after 2011, when the points became increasingly visible and heard, and started to relate to each other in what can be called a democratic political struggle.

Addiction and drug abuse emerged as a problem in Georgia in the 1980s and grew significantly in the 1990s when the country was undergoing an all-encompassing social



economic crisis. From the very beginning, drug enforcement policies (Soviet as well as Georgian) were always harsh, oppressive and exclusionary, but protest movements only began to emerge later.<sup>62</sup>

On 2 June 2013, a group of people organized a small demonstration demanding decriminalization of marijuana. They formed the ‘2.06 movement’, which organized campaigns appealing for individual liberties and the right of leisure. The first phase of the struggle to reform the drug policy is marked mainly by their activities. During the same month, future Georgian drug policy activist Beka Tsikarishvili was arrested for possession of 69 grams of marijuana. Beka and his friends organized a campaign, “‘Beka is Not a Criminal’”, that ended with a victory in the constitutional court, de-penalizing possession of up to 70 grams of marijuana.<sup>63</sup> Beka’s protests led to the formation of the ‘White Noise’ movement (WNM), who continued to demand the decriminalization of all drugs and a shift of policy from repressive to harm reduction, care oriented practices and institutions. ‘White Noise’ wrote and published papers, worked with all relevant NGOs to advocate for policy change, and set up a small scale legal consultation service for people having problems with the police on drug related matters. The movement, succeeded in convincing the constitutional court to decrease substance amount levels (all amounts were large amounts according to the existing code). The movement has planned and executed small scale popular media communication campaigns, worked as a grassroots organization with the victims of repressive policy, and organized memorable protests. This gradual ascendance of WNM on the scene of popular politics and its introduction of clearly articulated policy demands, marked the beginning of a second phase, when, after two years of street activity the 2.06

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<sup>62</sup> Sofo Verdzeuli, “Unethical Drug Policy”, Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (Tbilisi, 2014) pp 5, 52.

<sup>63</sup> ქვევანი იმ ვიდეო კა, “„ბეკა კრიმინალ არ არის“, ანუ EMC არა ეთა კური ნარკოპოლიტიკის შესახებ,” [www.radiotavisupleba.ge](http://www.radiotavisupleba.ge) <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/25400005.html>, accessed November 8, 2018.

movement gave way to and supported the initiatives of WNM. The latter was richer in resources and presented itself in the eyes of wider society more respectably as an organization with societal goals than “a bunch of potheads asking not to be punished.” On the other hand, the WNM was often easily discredited by traditionalist groups and government officials because of their affiliation with and loyalty for the nightclub ‘Bassiani’, which had in recent years been at the forefront of LGBTQ and drug policy activism. It had also become popular with drug consumers and ravers, which did not go unnoticed by groups with conflicting values.<sup>64</sup>

Another player that emerged in the context of the drug policy struggle during this second phase was Girchi, an otherwise marginal political party that managed to become influential in the sphere of drug policy due to their successive provocative actions, including a live broadcast of planting marijuana on New Year’s Eve. Girchi was also successful in bringing a case to the Constitutional Court that was responsible for decriminalizing the use and possession of small amounts of marijuana. The party was also famous for supporting the idea of legalizing all drugs and for establishing a religious organization called Biblical Freedom which serves both as a protest against mandatory military service and as a solution for it. Young men who want to avoid conscription are ordained as priests by Biblical Freedom (priests are exempt from conscription in Georgia). Their radical expression and emphasis on personal liberties attracted a small number of clubbers and other youngsters, but the party remains unpopular due to its anti-traditionalist, extreme libertarian positions, and forms of irony rendering the party more and more unsuitable for participating in politics in the eyes of wider society. There are also growing convictions within society, that although at first sight the political actions of Girchi are intended to shake the order and discredit the

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<sup>64</sup> “Protests in Georgia after Police Raid Tbilisi Nightclubs Bassiani and Café Gallery,” [www.factmag.com](http://www.factmag.com/2018/05/12/protests-georgia-tbilisi-bassiani-cafe-gallery/), <http://www.factmag.com/2018/05/12/protests-georgia-tbilisi-bassiani-cafe-gallery/>, accessed November 8, 2018.

existing government and its practices, they have never truly worked against them and is a covert project conceived by the ruling party. This, together with the fraction divide within the UNM and the abovementioned constitutional court case, is believed by some to have prepared the grounds for the government's yet unrealized plan for the legal production of marijuana for pharma and other business purposes.

Girchi's success in the constitutional court is now the main legal condition determining the agenda following the decline of WNM during the 'Bassiani' club protests that took place in June 2018. The struggle for a humane and inclusive drug policy in Georgia came to a halt on the 13 June when a major rift in society regarding drug culture, liberties, religion and national pride proved itself deeper than drug policy activists had anticipated. Despite having evolved in the previous decades, the social landscape is still extremely unbalanced in Georgia in terms of income, which is sufficient conditions for drug abuse, as well as repressive exclusionary practices. Neither of the three movement actors have reached the end of their political pressings but at this stage, the 2.06 movement (June the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement for drug decriminalization) has no *raison d'être*, having completed their recent drug policy goals. Girchi is now working on a presidential elections campaign in their own traditional genre, and WNM sounds not much more than a June hangover. However, looking over the previous years of activity, one gets the impression that activist practices have evolved and become differentiated but the same cannot be said about their political strategy and discourse. Their narrow rhetoric always prevented the possibility of seeing the broadest picture and undertaking complex reflection on social economic factors. The framing of problems in terms of personal liberties, harm reduction, anti-traditionalism, as well as the alignment with nightclub culture got the non-partisan activists confronting popular values; and political positions were distributed into another stalemate that further erodes the prospects of positive development in any relevant sphere.

The segmented social oriented protests organized since 2012 were not primarily moral based, asking for protecting human dignity. However, over the last few years, society has reacted to a perceived perversion of the justice system.

One of the widely known examples is the dramatic event which took place in December 2017. Two 16 years old boys, David Saralidze and Levan Dadunashvili, were killed during an altercation between students from two different schools.

An investigation began but after a few months the father of David Saralidze, Zaza Saralidze, decided that the investigation process was being subverted and he started protests demanding a fair investigation. There was a suspicion that one of the killers was the son of a high profile official and that was the reason for subverting the investigation.<sup>65</sup>

Massive protests took place in May and June, just after demonstrations protesting police raids on the Bassani Club. The Chief Prosecutor resigned and the parliamentary majority decided to form a parliamentary investigative commission headed by an opposition party - European Georgia.<sup>66</sup> Despite this, father of the brutally killed boy Zaza Saralidze believes that justice will not prevail and his protest continues.

This protest movement has been lightly discredited within society as it was informally controlled by the ex-ruling party UNM but it seems the issue won't be forgotten until the murderers are identified.

It has to be pointed out that the government still reacts to particular demands by the segmented protest movements, however improperly. An example of this is the response to calls for the liberalization of the existing draconian drug policy.

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<sup>65</sup> “Court Verdict Stirs Controversy on High Profile Murder Case of Teenagers”, [www.agenda.ge](http://agenda.ge), <http://agenda.ge/en/news/2018/1173>, accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Margarita Antidze, “Georgia’s Chief Prosecutor Resigns over Teenagers’ Murder Case”, [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-prosecutor/georgias-chief-prosecutor-resigns-over-teenagers-murder-case-idUSKCN1IW273>, accessed November 8, 2018.

### 4.3 Assessment of the three decades

As we can see the last three decades in Georgia's history was very turbulent, experiencing the civil, Abkhazian, Tskhinvali wars, changing of the three governments and only one of them with a democratic election process, full economic and political collapse in the early 90s and extreme socio-economic reforms and changes in 2000s. All of this was in a very short period and each government and decade had its features and mission. Therefore the social movements and demands coming from the general public to the ruling class differed as well.

After the early catastrophe, mentioned above, the sole mission for the Shevardnadze government was to bring some sort of stability by any means, which he, with great struggle, but still accomplished. For a distant observer it still would look very terrible, the system he created, but after experiencing it from within one could argue that hunting down various armed gangs like "Mkhedrioni", that greatly helped him to get to power, its criminal leadership and eliminating their direct influence on the government was an achievement the government could be proud of<sup>67</sup>.

Other than the internal issues, he also started to shape the country's foreign policy. It is often said or believed that so called "Europeanization" of Georgia was a product of the Rose revolution, but in fact it was more of an act of speeding up this process. Shevardnadze and his government was the first to take a clear stance on where is the place for Georgia on the world political map, will it remain on the so-called "Russian Orbit" or change the course.

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<sup>67</sup> Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Nicholas Sambanis, *Understanding Civil War, Europe, Central Asia Etc., Understanding Civil War, Evidence and Analysis* (Washington D.C: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2005)pp 266-275.

He chose the latter and in the second part of the 90s as shown above Georgia became a member of some major European institutions.<sup>68</sup>

But because of what the country had gone through earlier this time governmental institutions, public infrastructure, utilities were in awful shape. Corruption was institutionalized in every branch of the government, maybe the gangs were not ruling the streets any more but influence of criminals on politicians was still high, so the government could not move itself forward, the country was in full stagnation, having no financial resources, no power and maybe not even a will to use the existing stability for the next steps needed to be taken for the future development. Due to this status quo the project of detachment from the Russia's orbit and becoming a European country remain in fragile embryonic form. This was well seen and felt by the public and after the 2003 election fraud they decided that the time has come to move on to the next chapter.

The Rose Revolution was a result of this stagnation and very young, talented and motivated young politicians led by the third president Saakashvili came to power. At the beginning he had a tremendous success in final elimination of criminals' influence on politics, developing public infrastructure, creating and strengthening governmental institutions. This certainly was something that the general public demanded, but his impatience, almost wild "neo-liberalization", as discussed above in this chapter, brought serious problem in socio-economic life of the people. He was more formally democratic, but in fact did have a very centralized, autocratic ruling. The justice system was in firm control of the executive branch. He and his inner circle members were engaged in mass violation of human rights. The public felt defenseless while confronting the government and there was not an institution or a place where you would find justice. This still haunts him and his political party.

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<sup>68</sup> "Chronology of Major Events of EU-Georgia Cooperation," <http://georgiaembassyusa.org>, accessed November 11, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2QqBOZU>

Feeling of insecurity greatly shaped the social movement. This movement became moral based, the general public wanted a new government, for which protecting human dignity would become a central issue.

The third decade with the new government started with exactly this upheaval. The system became much more human oriented. Fear of the government and feeling of insecurity decreased very much. The pace of neo-liberalization was slowed. The government started to take more leftist stance on social issues.

This marked a turning point in social movements. Personal rights became a new driving force for the movements in general, but if during the previous administrations' ruling the demand was too broad like protecting human dignity, now the entire society grew up and moved to the new level where we get demonstrations asking for defending specific groups like LGBTQ, which is a completely new phenomenon. New organizations emerged asking for protecting wild life, ecology, nature, also workers' movements, asking for improving working conditions, animal rights groups, others asking drag decriminalization and legalization. These issues more or less started to pop up from the very bottom and later even moved up to the level of politicians and we are today witnesses of discussions on these issues at the parliamentary level, which is also a new phenomenon as well.

This does not mean that justice system is functioning completely freely. As said above in the chapter, still much needed serious systemic reforms are lagging behind these new movements and if they fail to catch up and give them free hand of action and developing the entire process may fall in a stagnation.

In the end by overviewing this chapter briefly we can conclude that there was a hidden force among the Georgian people all this time since reclaiming independence from the Soviet Union but it waited a long time until finally expressing itself and that happened when a little shake up in the justice system and protecting basic human dignity was no longer a barrier.

## 5 Case Study of IPP

As previously mentioned, this paper is written from my perspective as a participant observer. One of the main purposes for me, being the author, within this master project is to make a case study after seeing the challenges and context the country faces.

Within that setting too, the writer has a role of participant observer, as the organization - the paper makes a case study - is directly connected to the author and his like-minded colleagues.

After the rich experience of being part of different activist groups and movements, a group of seven people founded the social and political organization, 'Initiative for People's Politics', which aims to analyze and problematize the above-mentioned socio-political issues more efficiently, as well as propose positive alternatives to different social groups via a media platform and other activities.

In this case study, the first project of the organization will be discussed – the creation of a media platform – as well as its plans.

The case study aims to set out the organization's social and political viewpoints, together with detailed study plans. Implementation of the first project is expected to start soon.

### Summary

The proposed project aims to foster democratic process and socio-economic empowerment in Georgia through the development of a civic politically conscious society able to promote their interests and demands. The specific objectives of the project are:

- intensifying public discussions around social, political and economic issues



- promoting timely/urgent political solutions through active engagement of wider society

Different types of analytical content (video blogs, articles, translations, and policy papers) will be produced and proactively promoted through a media platform and networking with civil society organizations nationwide.

Organization's task is to reach out to the part of the society that is most affected by economic and social policies and at the same time is excluded from discussions and decision-making processes. Through the activities, indicated in our project, we aim to explain with clear and accessible language what role a state should assume and what policies it should exercise in order to achieve inclusive and equitable economic development and welfare of the population.

#### Political Background

Georgia has been facing socio-political challenges for years. Gaps within society, caused largely by the social and economic marginalization of its majority, have created a crisis<sup>69</sup>. Simple statistics describe the existing situation: the upper-class constitutes five to six percent of the population, the middle-class – around four to five percent, while the rest of the population faces economic hardships, nine out of ten being below the poverty threshold<sup>70</sup>. It is one of the world's highest-ranking countries in terms of its population's bank indebtedness.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> "Distribution of Family Income," [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2172rank.html>, accessed November 8, 2018.

<sup>70</sup> <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/980951472223098077/Georgia-PPA-FY16-presentation-AUG2016-final.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> Davit Keshelava, "In Debt & Broke in Georgia," [www.georgiatoday.ge](http://www.georgiatoday.ge), <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/6880/In-Debt-%26-Broke-in-Georgia/>, accessed November 8, 2018.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and for more than a decade, the country was struck by absolute poverty, engulfed in corruption and civic confrontations. 2003 gave start to a modernization project at a hopeless and penurious moment. Mikheil Saakashvili won the presidential elections, becoming Georgia's third president in 2004. His goal and that of the government was to modernize the country. However, the chosen process evolved into a dangerous economic experiment. Saakashvili and his young, western-educated set out to implement a radical right-wing project of development and westernization of the country. Almost full deregulation and unprecedented privatization took place, a flat-rate system was introduced, and the number of ministries was almost halved. In less than two years, a radical right-wing policy was fundamentally institutionalized.<sup>72</sup>

On the one hand, the period was marked by institutional development and the elimination of corruption at low and mid-levels, but on the other hand, heavy socio-economic reforms, infused with Social Darwinism, and full deregulation and privatization brought the majority of the population to a critical economic condition. This precluded the development of a pluralistic democratic landscape and fomented resentful, reactionary outbursts. All relevant research testifies that the program of reforms increased the level of inequality between the rich and the poor<sup>73</sup>. The non-competitive and fragile democratic system was unable to prevent the subsequent financial and moral harm and deprivation of primary social rights. Economic growth was shown in absolute numbers, but it was not simply nominal for the biggest part of the population who were unable to engage in social life and eliminated from the political arena.

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<sup>72</sup> Davit Aprasidze, "25 Years of Georgia's Democratization: Still Work in Progress," in *225 Years of Independent Georgia. Achievements and Unfinished Projects* (Tbilisi: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2016) pp. 120-130.

<sup>73</sup> Gugushvili, "Do the Benefits of Growth Trickle-Down to Georgia's Poor? A Case For A Strong Welfare System", pp 75-90.

After the change of government in 2012, the socio-political landscape notably improved. Bit by bit, certain social rights, like healthcare and education, began to be minimally guaranteed. However, since coming to power the economic policy implemented by the ruling party has been of an expressly anti-social character that is not adjusted to the principles of liberal democracy and remains outside the boundaries of balanced western capitalism. The given political agenda is principally exclusive and fitted to the interests of economic elites, which automatically limits the development of democratic processes. In spite of the change of government, the government's economic strategy has created an exclusive labor market and imbalanced cultural and social spaces. The absence of public welfare infrastructure continues to undermine all prospect for development of the majority of society and further marginalizes it.

A modern state does not presuppose only legal equality. This principle, taken in isolation, does not suffice for what is to be a purpose of every progress-oriented government – to acknowledge unequal opportunities and strive for a balance among social groups in order to organize society in accordance with the principle of justice. Liberty can only be exercised with the availability of basic social welfare in some form of healthcare, education, and other principal social rights.

It is now critical to bring the long awaited developmental course back on its track. The ultimate challenge for society is to see a broader picture and understand the underlying problems of the social, political and economic crisis and to become aware of their true determinants. At the same time, there is a need to avoid the xenophobic, ultra-nationalist discourses of the far right extremists, which engender aggressive confrontation and cause a faulty displacement of political focus, ultimately maintaining the given order and making it even more exclusive.

Through the activities, indicated in our project, we aim to explain with a clear and accessible language what role a state should assume and what policies it should exercise in order to achieve inclusive and equitable economic development and welfare of the population.

Our task is to reach out to that part of the society which is mostly affected by economic and social policies and who are at the same time excluded from discussions and decision-making processes. We will lay out for them, expounded from the angle of political economy, all of their common, troublesome problems, be it unemployment, high interest rates in banks and microfinance organizations, inconsistent agriculture policy resulting in an economic catastrophe, inaccessibility due to monopolized spheres of banking, pharmacy, communications and healthcare, or labor conditions. This will help them gain a structural perspective. We will speak with them about democratic ways to achieve solutions and policy options. Ultimately, vigorous articulation of the concerns and demands of society will diversify the political landscape, encourage, and enable the emergence of new electoral alternatives.

We deem it important to set a precedent for an organization that works to address social and developmental problems in a way that avoids the traditional narrative of previous liberal NGOs that appear hackneyed in the eyes of social groups. We are aware that aggressive liberal rhetoric and a one-sided emphasis on lifestyle issues will not resonate with many people. Instead, our organization will promote and raise awareness, among the major part of society, of the idea of pluralistic democracy and political engagement.

#### Project objectives

Our organization will deploy alternative strategy and political technology. The aim of this project consists, partly, in managing field communication and a proactive awareness

raising campaign, which will foster a more complex understanding of the issues mentioned above and increase the potential for society's engagement in the political process. In addition, we aim to support pro-social organizations and movements for future large-scale political activities. The purpose of the initiative is to encourage democratic processes and socio-economic development in Georgia. It aims to contribute to the development of civic political culture; to raise awareness of social and political economic challenges; to initiate discussion and to deliver structural and systemic analysis of a variety of political and economic problems; to encourage the development of the society as politically conscious groups able to promote their interests, and to increase their political engagement.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- intensify public discussions around social, political and economic issues
- promote timely/urgent political solutions through active engagement of wider society
- network for future coordinated actions/movements

Project activities

To achieve the abovementioned specific objectives, the project will:

- A. Provide critical analysis of social and economic inequality and its causes.
- B. Proactively propose/promote democratic, judicial solutions for current social and political problems.
- C. Advocate/support/endorse development focused and knowledge-based economic policies.

Other main objective is to move people's attention from moral based protest issues to importance of the socio-economic rights.

Throughout the project, the development of an internet media platform will be of utmost importance, as it will serve as a nucleus for institutional development. In order to lay a solid foundation for future large-scale political activity, we are planning to open up the grassroots movement dimension of our organization's work by networking throughout the country.

Over a period of twelve months, regular meetings will be held at our office with organizations and movements who separately conduct small-scale political activities supporting vulnerable groups and advocating social rights. The goal is to establish our office as a central information hub, to gather and consolidate pro-social organizations and movements for future large-scale political activities.

Throughout the project, the team will have active communication and consultations with national and regional CSOs. The meetings will be held in Tbilisi, Gori, Telavi, Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, Batumi, Rustavi.

The purpose of the working meetings will be as follows:

- Introduce the project objectives and planned activities, as well as topics on which analytical content will be produced;
- Map CSOs working on social-economic issues nationwide;
- Map specific vulnerable groups, professional or other social groups and the challenges they are facing in particular municipalities and regions;
- Identify communication channels with the project target groups and specific segments of society.

## Internet Media Platform

A media platform will be a mechanism to unite and deploy the other two dimensions – grassroots and academic (for full description see below, ‘Organizational Background’). The content of the platform will be based on and derived from the values mentioned in the above narrative part of the project.

Throughout the project the following types of analytical content will be developed:

### Video content

- Video Blog I (48 releases throughout the project; on a weekly basis)
- Video Blog II (36 releases throughout the project, 3 videos per month)
- Video Blog III (48 releases throughout the project; on a weekly basis)
- Video Blog IV (36 releases throughout the project, 3 videos per month)

### Witten content

- Blog/Article (36-40 texts throughout the project, 3-4 during a month)
- Translations (48 texts throughout the project; on a weekly basis)
- Policy papers (4-5 papers throughout the project)

### *Video Blog I*

Video Blog I will be based on the classical reality/fact check model. A good example of the abovementioned format is Al Jazeera's ‘Reality Check’ hosted by Mehdi Hasan. Each video blog will provide information about a particular issue, presenting the facts and data in plain and simple language accompanied by a visualization and eye-catching graphic design. The aim of this method is to make information clear and easy to understand, without requiring strenuous intellectual effort from the viewer.

The Video Blog aims to inform the viewer with balanced and objective data about the social, political and economic reality of Georgia. It will cover topics that are mostly marginalized from the mainstream social-political discussions or are discussed superficially from particular politically motivated, skewed perspectives, without considering their structural causes.

Like the Al Jazeera's format, the video blog will have a regular presenter and will focus on unraveling factual inconsistencies. However, in cases where structural deficiencies are revealed there will be an indication of possible political action.

The blog will endeavor to increase society's structural awareness around a variety of major issues including food and silent hunger problems among the population; the emigration related and demographic challenges of the country with its assisting social practices, which are largely due to economic hardships; so-called unfortunate accidents (accidents that actually is a result of the lack of protective infrastructure) at work places, and their political determinants; monopolized spheres of banking, pharmacy, communications, and healthcare etc.

### *Video Blog II*

The idea of this format is born out of necessity of the society's reflection on labour, labour relationships and related rights. In the majority of cases in Georgia, legal setting and discursive space confine people - who constitute labour power – to an economically pliant and politically inert state. Relatively sound sustenance and related social status are often misconstrued as a higher personal achievement, while the lack of such success is mostly taken as one's own fault, a token of fate.

The video blog, focusing on labour rights and relationships will serve in this context to fill a huge information gap. The task is to analyse for the audience the state of political



economic affairs that determine their everyday life experience. The target segment of this blog is made up of professional groups of employed, self-employed and unemployed people. The work experience of particular occupations will be analysed in each release; unraveling structural defects and organised interests, but also pointing to realistic solutions.

Apart from the standard releases, some of the blogs will be theoretical and historical in character. These will feature (1) discussion and analysis of common problems, like minimum wage, labour safety, unpaid internships and overtime; and (2) an historical, as well as a present day review and analysis of labor related facts, movements and institutions.

The format will have a regular presenter, but media content will be enriched with animated infographics and field recordings. Formally, thematic mainstream news reports can be taken as an example, although with significant differences:

- The audience – the entirety of people of a particular occupation – are considered, not as consumers of the media product, but as an interest group with political potential;
- The issue at hand is brought under the spotlight, not according to the criteria of media popularity, scandal or gossip, or the interests of elite players, but is focused solely on the everyday concerns of the abovementioned interest groups;
- Apart from presenting analysed data in a simplified, schematic form, the format addresses the questions of legal ways of improvement and realistic possibilities of action for the particular interest groups

The given format is aimed at raising the awareness of the rights of employed and unemployed citizens and the consolidation of societal groups. The ultimate success of this endeavor would be in bringing political possibilities to the interest groups, as well as in the development and promotion of new voices within the civic domain. Data will be collected and analysed throughout the process of blog preparation and provide a foundation for relevant policy documents and suggestions.

*Video Blog III*

The purpose of this video blog lies in addressing a lack of knowledge, and engendering reflection within the spheres of social and political philosophy, as well as the philosophy of culture. It will differ from the three other formats in a number of respects:

- Essentially, the video blog will be elaborated on the model of Big Think, but will be more dynamic and enriched with visual elements, including dates, figures, maps, images, animation, etc.;
- Different releases will be prepared and presented by members of our organization, as well as invited academic and public intellectuals;
- Ideas of different philosophers, ranging from antiquity to contemporary times, will be explained in a simple, introductory form;
- Theoretical economic and ideological topics will be expounded in the light of concrete real time challenges and problems. For instance, when the principles of free trade and protectionism are discussed, they will be considered in relation to the prices of actual and current agricultural products, and the changes in the price and the market, in order to make the theoretical corpus more relevant and attractive to the audience;
- The blog will focus on subjects bearing political, social and cultural significance; be it the social contract, economic policy, violence, or any other issue that are inseparable from, and determine the transformations of everyday society.
- Students, as well as wider society, interested in the abovementioned topics, comprise the segment for this format.

The given format will support the engenderment of thought processes, indispensable for the formation of society into politically conscious groups. It will serve the purpose of fostering a philosophical disposition in relation to the political. The format is intended on the one hand, to make available for the audience the perspectives of various thought systems, and to enrich the understanding of the principal issues for contemporary human beings, and on the other, to kindle philosophical interest and direct further efforts towards a more profound apprehension of different subjects.

#### *Video Blog IV*

Video Blog IV's format aims to make an intellectual analysis using unambiguous language accompanied by visual material in order to make the interpretations clear for wider society. Therefore, the video blogger will try to delve deep into analyzing social and political issues and make their cultural determinants and preconditions understandable. The blog will focus on particular problematic cases and challenges in healthcare, education and other socio-political issues. The blogger will critically analyze the issues within the Georgian context of the radical conservative and the liberals, who are less popular but well established and largely oriented to the interests of the economic elite.

The presenter will identify the deleterious effect of these socio-political discourses in the Georgian context by revealing their anti-social character and confronting them with pro-social and welfare oriented political-economic arguments.

- The audience are considered not as consumers of a media product but as interest groups with political potential.
- The topics will be selected and discussed not with the intention to discredit different ideological standpoints but to underscore factual deficiencies, and highlight the everyday concerns of the abovementioned interest groups.

*Blog/Article*

Articles, blogs and other works published on the media platform are intended to present critical analysis of political-economic inequality, promote sustainable economic development and practice, and support political pluralism and democratic processes, with the aim of encouraging the participation of the wider society in politically conscious groups. All the published texts will be focused on the discussion of actual social and political challenges from the standpoint of values and societal interests.

The series will have various authors from academic, civic and activist circles.

*Translations*

The media platform will systematically publish translations (1000-2000 words) of articles from prominent scholars/academics and journalists. Articles will be published in the Georgian language and will cover a range of topics, including economic development, political pluralism and the development of the democratic process, critical analyses of political and economic inequality, as well as other important and current social and political issues.

*Policy Papers*

During the 12-month project, the platform analysts will propose several policy papers. In the process of their preparation, the platform will cooperate with various NGOs and academics to secure additional expertise.

Policy papers will critically analyse and develop specific strategies around problematic topics related to economics, healthcare, education, and environment – the

fields/areas that need to be regulated in accordance to western standards. The mentioned topics will be reviewed and advocated/endorsed through writing and video channels as well.

### *Communication Strategy*

All content will be published and promoted on Facebook and a web page, as well as other media channels.

The internet platform will mainly be focused on Facebook, which is extremely popular in Georgia (2,700,000 users in total; 2,500,000 above 18); people over the age of 55 (250,000 users). People living in the regions and using Facebook are increasing (536,000 users, excluding four major cities: Tbilisi (1,700,000), Batumi (210,000), Kutaisi (170,000) and Rustavi (84,000)). Our goal is not only to reach as many users as possible but also to ensure maximum engagement and an increase of organic engagement over time. For this reason, we are opting for smart, selective targeting, based on constant analysis, rather than choosing an extravagant “push” strategy, which relies on paid reach, and which often leads to a decrease in organic reach over time, due to a low percentage of engagement. Different types of content will be targeted for different segments of Facebook users, according to their geographical location, pages they have liked, interests, behavior, age, occupation, institutional affiliation, student status, devices used, etc. We will also cooperate with other relevant organizations for reciprocal social media cooperation.

Alongside Facebook, the media platform will use the organization’s web page, and other media and social media channels such as YouTube, Myvideo.ge, and Twitter. Search engine optimization will be undertaken. The webpage, as well as Facebook page, will also help us build a solid email subscribers’ list.

A significant number of people who constitute our target audience are not Facebook and/or internet users. In order to bridge this gap, we will also cooperate with local radio stations and regional TV broadcasters (through a regional broadcasters' hub) to secure airtime for our media content. Communication is ongoing, and we have already reached preliminary agreements. Further strategies for reaching this segment will be one of the topics for discussion at the regional CSO meetings in the first phase of the project.

For the elaboration of a long-term, comprehensive communication strategy, our organization will also cooperate with creative agencies.

The scale of outreach will be defined through measuring the number of users of the project internet platform and the content published through various communication channels (Facebook, YouTube, Myvideo.ge, regional media and local CSOs networks). The project team will track and analyse the number of shares, likes, those who have seen the video and commented. Media coverage as well as dissemination of the analytical content by other media outlets will be additional indicators for analysing project reach.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis of responses and feedback from public discussions will allow us to gauge whether public discussions around social, political and economic issues and policies have intensified among political circles, target social groups, CSOs and other actors as a result of the project.

### *Organizational Background*

Our organization is membership based, civic, non-commercial and non-profit. The idea to create this organization has been developed over time and it was recently formally established. The organization includes professionals with an academic and activist experience who have during the last years, together and independently, worked in the academic field, taught, conducted research, and led the organization of academic and semi-academic projects

as well as conferences and public discussions. Several members of the organization have extensive activist experience of founding and participating in student movements that have made a solid contribution to several important political advancements.

Our organization focuses on:

- Supporting political pluralism and strengthening democratic processes;
- Advocating sustainable social and economic development and development policy;
- Critical commentary and analysis of political economic inequality;
- Encouraging the inclusion of the wider society into politically conscious interest groups.

To achieve our goals, our work will focus on three activities: (1) internet media platform, (2) grassroots movement and (3) academic activities.

1. The media platform will serve as a medium that unites and informs our other activities. It will focus on critical analysis of inequality and other systemic flaws in order to broaden society's understanding of these issues. In this way, our Internet media platform will stand out against the existing background of an undifferentiated, debilitating media morass.

2. The grassroots movement will include sub-projects on agriculture, social and labor rights and other primary causes of inequality that currently hinder the improvement of welfare indicators and impede democratic development of the country. It will be focused on field communication taking place in cities as well as in rural areas where it is hard to reach the population due to the shortage of media pathways, and where people are alienated from the political currents but feeling the adverse effects of the agenda implemented in the political center.

Within the given project, first steps will be taken in the grassroots direction. This dimension also focusses on community building for the consolidation of different social groups, and organizations and movements working on social rights.

3. The academic activities will focus on the translation of papers and books, and the organization of public discussions, lectures and winter and summer schools. This will help to fill the vacuum of contemporary knowledge among young people in particular and everyone who is or could be interested in social and political issues. Educational projects will be undertaken to help young academics to become qualified analysts in social, economic and political spheres.

## 6 Results of research

The paper has described the dynamics and narratives of the protest movements in Georgia. The main goal of the research was to show the activities of social movements in their unity since Georgia regained independence and to describe the attitudes and responses to protest movements since the 1990's. In addition, the research sets out the narratives behind the social movements and describes how the political context influenced the global content of the protests and vice versa; and how particular social movements affected the political agendas. Through analysis, the framework was elaborated and social movements were divided into three phases. The research generated associations between each phase and an analysis indicated that during the first decade public attitudes were determined by ethnic and religious nationalism – '9th of April paradigm', that dominated the whole discourse. This was followed by post-revolutionary radical political and economic change. As demonstrated by the research, the protest waves of this period were completely driven by moral issues that were the result of the problems in the police and penitentiary system and in the cases of abuse



of power. It was observed that the period of transition – the election of 2012 and the changes in the political agenda were also based on a major moral issue alongside social protests. The research demonstrated how the narratives of the protests evolved, how it became more segmented and directed towards specific interests by particular groups in society. From this period, the author continues the discussion of the dynamics and narratives of the protest movements as a participant observer. In addition, it was pointed out that the segmented social movements that emerged after 2012 were critical and directed towards the issues that were the result of the political and economic order established after the Rose Revolution. In particular, those concerning the drug policy, the protection of public spaces from privatization, the demand for the restoration of workers rights and other social issues. As it was revealed, the multiplicity of the basis of moral protests of the previous years delayed the establishment of targeted social movements to some extent. However, moral issues remain a public concern to this day. The research clearly showed that certain principal changes were an essential feature for driving the dynamics of the social movements. There have been reviews and reports on certain Georgian social movements. However, none has demonstrated the dynamics of the protests in its unity and they have not analyzed observable changes in its features in relation to the epochs and to the changes of the political agenda.

The narratives of the social and protests movements revealed an impact of the movements on the governmental political agenda. The fact that the protest movements in the post-revolutionary Georgia were mainly focused on moral issues became a cause for a decrease and actuality of such movements after 2012.

Analysis and obtained knowledge of these matters will give an advantage to various activist and social groups to determine the content and identity for future movements. This will hopefully have a positive effect on their political agendas and make them more socially oriented in their efforts to achieve more social and economic equality.

The case study of the organization holds the same objective - to determine what steps are required for public concerns to be problematized and addressed correctly and, to stimulate more inclusive formats for protests that will provide a possibility for uniting and protecting common interests for the various groups in society, whose social and economic inequality has a common basis.

The presented work is not a classical master paper but it is a master project in a specific format. It lacks a theoretical framework to some extent, which might make it less useful for readers who use a particular theoretical framework to examine social movements from a certain sociological perspective. The given research has its own limitations. Readers will not find detailed information about particular social movements, but the main goal for the author was to make the general dynamics and the connections inside it visible to readers.

Being a participant observer of these process, especially since the late 2000s, I had a huge privilege and advantage to see and feel the developing of social movements, which is a reason of starting my own organization. The organization aims to be part of the ongoing process and encourage the general public, especially young people, to think about their social and political rights.

The social movements here are analyzed from one prism. It is analyzed only Georgia's case. Writing a general theoretical framework of what is a social movement, history of it, how and when it became popular, could have helped much better to understand the development of ours.

The collapse of the Soviet Union triggered world politics to start looking to the world from different lenses once the bipolar system was over. It did the same for the politicians and people of the former empire. The new world had to be learned and the new system of life was needed to be imposed. The comparison of how the social movements took place in the rest of the republic would give us a much clearer picture of where Georgia is in this sense. How other

countries dealt with the same problem or did they have them at all, has to be analysed in the future.

While the participation of the author makes this master project unique in one sense, had more fieldwork been done it could have served well.

## 7 Conclusion

The work, as it has represented Georgian social movements in its unity, is a useful contribution for analyzing Georgian society.

The research has explicated the changes in society's attitudes and mindsets over time, which gives an important indication to groups interested in planning and implementing new social movements, especially for those focused on social and economic equality.

Additionally, the case study of the paper and its analysis of the political background and discussions regarding future plans essentially directs and guarantees that objective.

The research has clearly demonstrated a political background for the beginning of the targeted and segmented social movements. It provides an opportunity for society, social groups and main actors of the social movements to consider if it was possible to start targeted social protests earlier and how detached were the reasons that provoked the moral protests for minimalizing the segmented social movements that much.

The paper has clearly shown how Georgian society reacts to the various obstacles and difficulties that the political class provokes. The history of their radicalization during the different governments and eras has been explained; as well as how people and particular social groups are able have more targeted goals in order to achieve their purposes.

It seems an urgent necessity to continuing research that would be more focused on the particular actors within the social movements, and on their represented problems. Additional

research could analyze the purpose and application of the movements and include interviews with the main actors that could inform an analysis of the reasons for the lack of success.

It is important to focus and concentrate on the strategies of the social movements from 2012. In particular, to analyze how they managed to send their messages to the ordinary people, how they managed to ensure the integrity of their demands and how they ultimately effected the decision maker's agenda. This kind of research would identify structural problems and help existing and new social movements to plan and implement their actions.

## 8 Abstract

### 8.1 Abstract (English)

Since Georgia gained independence in 1991 there have been divers social movements but within each subsequent decade, the character of these movements changed.

For the first ten years following independence there was tension, chaos and an economic stagnation in Georgia that resulted in dramatic conflicts within the different strata of society and prevented an authentic logic and meaning for social movements. At the beginning of the second decade following independence, social movements precipitated a peaceful revolution, a new government and radical reforms. However, social movements soon reacted to the governing style of the new government (2003-2012) by protesting about moral issues, abuses of power and injustice. Engaging with the government on moral issues continued to be the focus of the protest movements at the beginning of the third decade in 2012. In that year, pre-election periods were accompanied by massive protests which resulted in a change of government. Since this change, social movements have become more focused on the rights of particular segments of society with the aim of improving their social-

economic conditions. In addition, social movements began raising awareness of cultural and environmental problems.

This research aims to discuss and analyse the dynamics of the social movements in Georgia since its independence. Background analyses have been undertaken, including the analysis of social movements that existed before the Soviet Union's occupation of Georgia and of several important movements within the Communist era. However, the main focus of the thesis paper will be on the period after the country's independence, the so-called "modernization project", and an analysis of its antisocial character and the reaction of social movements.

The challenges currently faced by social movements will be reviewed and will provide a critical commentary on the issue of social-economic inequality. Also, this research will highlight possible actions that could have been undertaken. Additionally, a case study of a new social organization that promotes a democratic process and socio-economic empowerment in Georgia, will show that transforming the wider society into politically conscious groups will enable them to promote their social interests and articulate their demands.

## 8.2 Abstract (Deutsch)

Seit Georgien im Jahre 1991 seine Unabhängigkeit errungen hat, gab es verschiedene soziale Bewegungen, mit jeder der aufeinanderfolgenden Dekaden änderte sich jedoch der Charakter dieser Bewegungen.

Während der ersten zehn Jahre nach der Unabhängigkeit herrschten in Georgien Spannungen, Chaos und ökonomische Stagnation, die zu dramatischen Konflikten innerhalb der verschiedenen gesellschaftlichen Schichten führten und eine eindeutige Logik und Bedeutung der sozialen Bewegungen durchkreuzten. Am Beginn des zweiten Jahrzehnts nach

der Unabhängigkeit führten soziale Bewegungen eine friedliche Revolution herbei, ein neues Regime und radikale Reformen. Soziale Bewegungen reagierten jedoch bald mit Protesten in moralischen Fragen, gegen Machtmissbrauch und Ungerechtigkeit auf den Stil der neuen Regierung (2003-2012). Auseinandersetzungen mit der Regierung über moralische Fragen blieben der Fokus der Protestbewegungen am Beginn der dritten Dekade im Jahre 2012. In jenem Jahr begleiteten Massenproteste die Vorwahlzeiten und führten zu einem Regierungswechsel. Seit dieser Veränderung zielen soziale Bewegungen stärker auf die Rechte bestimmter Gesellschaftssegmente mit dem Ziel, deren sozioökonomische Situation zu verbessern. Außerdem begannen soziale Bewegungen das Bewusstsein für kulturelle und Umweltprobleme zu stärken.

Diese Forschung will die Dynamiken der sozialen Bewegungen in Georgien seit seiner Unabhängigkeit diskutieren und analysieren. Es wurden die Hintergründe einschließlich der sozialen Bewegungen untersucht, die vor der sowjetischen Besetzung Georgiens und einiger wichtiger Bewegungen während der kommunistischen Ära. Der zentrale Fokus der Masterarbeit liegt jedoch auf der Periode nach der Unabhängigkeit des Landes, der Zeit des sogenannten „Modernisierungsprojekts“, und auf der Untersuchung von dessen antisozialen Charakter sowie der Reaktion der sozialen Bewegungen darauf.

Die Herausforderungen, denen sich soziale Bewegungen aktuell gegenübersehen, werden aufgegriffen und liefern einen kritischen Kommentar zum Thema der sozioökonomischen Ungleichheit. Diese Studie will darüber hinaus die Handlungsmöglichkeiten aufzeigen. Schließlich soll mit einer Fallstudie zu einer neuen Organization, PIC, die den demokratischen Prozess und sozioökonomische Ermächtigung in Georgien vorantreibt, aufgezeigt werden, dass die Transformation der Gesellschaft in politisch engagierten Gruppen diesen ermöglichen kann, ihre gesellschaftlichen Interessen zu verfechten und ihre Forderungen zu artikulieren.

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