

Introduction

Contextualizing Gender in Georgia

Nation, Culture, Power, and Politics

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Figure 0.1 Tin Roofs of Tbilisi. Photo by the author

Viewpoints

I introduce this volume on *Gender in Georgia* with my first impressions of a remarkable place that has been undergoing enormous transformation for over two decades since the Georgian Parliament declared independence from the Soviet Union on 9 April 1991. My travels from New York to Tbilisi go by way of Istanbul, where “East and West combine gracefully,” and by means of the International Scholars Program of the Open Society Institute (Smith 2006). As an international scholar, I am formally assigned to students and scholars working to establish and grow the Gender Studies Programme for undergraduate and graduate students at Tbilisi State University (TSU). Over the course of three years (2013–15), I come to know and appreciate the women, the constraints under which they operate, their projects, the contradictions of their efforts and of my participation in them. This book project emerges from that collective labor.

My first trip to Georgia brings unexpected adventure. My plane arrives early on a Friday in late March (2013) and I am brought by taxi to the university where I meet my new colleagues—they include Tamar Tskhadadze, Tamar Sabedashvili, Anna Rekhviashvili, Diana Lezhava, Nargiza Arjevanidze, Salome Tsoपुरashvili, and Lela Kiria. We make social plans for the weekend and work plans for the week. I soon find my way to my lodgings, a modest boutique hotel up a steep hill that reminds me of the streets of San Francisco. The hotel is within a set of eclectic buildings, many of which are in various stages of repair, disrepair and dilapidation. The hotel accommodations are comfortable and sparse, and I have a lovely view from my room. I see mountains in the distance and the tin roofs of Tbilisi directly below. The streets are windy and narrow, and the 1-2-3 story buildings that look like residences are a jumble of styles, sizes, and materials—wood, cement, stone, and tin. I wonder how these dwellings fit into the history of this old city, and look forward to learning more from my new friends in the coming days.

Morning comes and Lela gives me a six-hour walking tour of old and new Tbilisi, making stops at several Georgian Orthodox churches, including the seventh-century Sioni Cathedral, the sixth-century Anchiskhati Basilica and the thirteenth-century Metekhi Church with the tomb of St. Shushanik, a fifth-century martyr who, legend has it, was imprisoned for refusing to give up her Christian faith. The pungent smell of incense stays with me as we move from icon to icon, service to service, and chant to chant. We stroll along the wide boulevard of Rustaveli Street and spy the architectural curiosity that is the hyper-illuminated Bridge of Peace. Each time we cross any of the streets of Tbilisi, Lela takes my hand protectively.

That would be the last day for months I would be able to take such a walk. On Sunday, Tamar Tskhadadze, then chair of the Gender Studies Programme, picks me up by car for a drive to the Mtskheta region and the Jvari Church, a revered, holy Georgian site and favorite tourist attraction atop Mt. Armazi. We pass through remnants marking fifteen hundred years of regional Christian piety and power, catch a vista of the Caucasus Mountains and watch the confluence of the Aragvi and the polluted Mtkvari rivers below. Wending our way home, I ask about the plastic bags tied into bows that adorn the trees alongside the curving road. Suddenly the grill of a luxury Mercedes sports utility vehicle (SUV) accelerates toward us, its 18-year-old male driver crashing head on into Tamar's small vehicle. There are injuries (acute, but not life threatening), delays (after hours, we are brought to a hospital in the city from a countryside clinic), and absurdities, including the sudden appearance of two non-uniformed US Marines, one on either side of me as I sit in stunned confusion alongside the destroyed vehicle, unsure of the extent of my injuries.

Amidst the crisis of the accident, Tamar, her family, my new colleagues at Tbilisi State University and I form a hard and fast bond. The silver lining of the experience is the relationships that we forge. We quickly dispense with formalities, find common ground, and despite the distraction of the injuries and hospitalization, I receive a crash course in the challenges facing Gender Studies at TSU, and of gender in Georgia more generally.

Illuminations

With this brief "impressionistic autoethnography" (Skinner 2003; 2012), I intimate a series of issues and themes that are central to this volume, and which I highlight in this introduction. Embedding myself in this initial narrative suggests that social and geopolitical locations—those of my Georgian colleagues and of mine—are relevant to the framing of gender in the contemporary Georgian context, not least the role of the Open Society Institute that created the infrastructure to make our interactions possible. As an anthropologist, I consider it important to depict place not as abstraction but as physical space that offers clues to influences, power structures, and prevailing narratives—all of which figure in the topics discussed by contributors to this volume. These aspects constitute conditions under which the contributors conduct research and engage activism; they write in and of this place.

Elements of my narrative are suggestive of larger meanings, deeper contexts, and longer histories. For example, anthropologist Paul Manning's

“City of Balconies” (2009; see also Van Assche and Salukvadze 2012) offers tidbits of a history that helps explain the striking clutter of architectural forms and construction materials that greeted me on my first day in town, which I liberally excerpt below:

The coup of 1992 [that ousted the first post-socialist government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia] was not the first time Tbilisi had experienced a violent transformation of its architectural space. In fact, for a city that is sometimes claimed to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited urban areas on the face of the earth (more than 6 thousand years according to Bolkvadze 2003: 28), very little in the way of architecture remains that predates the 19th century aside from the famous baths and a few churches. This is because the city was razed almost entirely prior to Russian occupation by the Persian invasion of the late 18th century ... Unlike many Oriental cities that underwent European colonization ... the opposition between Oriental and European architecture that developed in Tbilisi under Russian rule was not entirely an opposition between the old and the new, but rather, the two architectural streams developed almost simultaneously. Even though the construction process was nearly simultaneous, by mid century Tbilisi already presented an image of continuous opposition of Old Oriental and New European elements ... Tbilisians love the architecture of the old city [although] seemingly no one actually wants to live in such buildings ... [Their] distinctly ‘non-romantic’ view of Old Tbilisi [is of] a place defined by poor infrastructure (narrow streets) as well as the uncomfortable proximity to neighbors because of the proximity of balconies (the ‘second storey’ of the narrow streets). (Manning 2009: 90–92)

Signs of post-Soviet political economy abound in new architecture, the highlighted tourism spots and the active sounds and smells that emanate from the Orthodox churches. Mikheil Saakashvili, credited with leading the Rose Revolution in 2003 and who subsequently served as Georgia’s “pro-Western” president (2004–2013), ushered in the era of democratic reform (e.g., addressing police corruption, revising school curriculum) and neoliberal development, with new building construction a central focus (Van Assche and Salukvadze 2012: 10). With Saakashvili at the helm, Georgia’s “modernization” project included the construction of the amusing Bridge of Peace, designed by an Italian architect and illuminated with twelve hundred LEDs. What anthropologist Martin Demant Frederiksen describes for Batumi, Georgia’s second largest city, is true also for Tbilisi: “It is not surprising that ‘lights’ became such a common mechanism for symbolizing change following the [Rose] Revolution: lack of electricity had dominated much of the 1990s in Georgia (Devlin 2004) and a relatively stable supply of electricity was an accomplished goal of Saakashvili’s government” (Frederiksen 2013: 37). Architecture, lights and the development of Georgia’s tourism industry come together in “officially chosen illuminated sites” (ibid.: 36–37). These sites include centuries-old churches,

newly built government buildings and the renovated balconied structures of Old Tbilisi that some consider a “Ye Olde” form of facadism and “slapdash commercialism over historical authenticity” (Levine 2013).

Behind the illuminated facades are layers of the hidden, unspoken or lost, that which and those whom Frederiksen says are “condemned to a life in the shadows, unwanted” (2013: 37). Land use planner Kristof Van Assche and human geographer Joseph Salukvadze argue that “untempered, neoliberal enthusiasm” has left Tbilisi and its residents without systematic urban planning, and with limited public sector housing, homelessness (a new phenomenon) alongside gated communities (also a new phenomenon), environmental problems, poor quality construction, and a transportation system in crisis (Van Assche and Salukvadze 2012: 1, 14, 17–18). On the ruinous impact of new construction, Manning observes it is a particularly threatening form of destruction “because it is wrought by the wheels of commerce, visible everywhere, the aggregate irrational and destructive product of the individually rational and creative actions of newly liberated liberal subjects” (Manning 2009: 93; see also Gordillo 2014).

The wheels of commerce include, literally, the rise in the number of private automobiles across Georgia but especially in the metro Tbilisi area, a mix of very old (generally compact sized and in poor condition) and very new (generally large SUV) vehicles (UNEP-EEA 2007; Adeishvili et al. 2011; Pkhaladze 2015). According to an NGO-supported environmental assessment report endorsed by Tbilisi City Hall, during the Soviet period, urban transportation in the city was “well developed and diverse”; in contrast, during the post-Soviet period, “this smoothly operating system almost collapsed and eventually the number of private cars increased dramatically” (Adeishvili et al. 2011: 2). In describing the ever-intensifying “colonization” by cars of the sidewalks of Tbilisi, anthropologist Perry Sherouse recalls his experience crossing its busy streets. As Sherouse and his colleague Paul Manning “scurried across a hazardous intersection,” the latter “likened crossing Tbilisi streets to a real-life enactment of the arcade game *Frogger*,” the goal of which is to survive a deadly game of traffic (Sherouse 2016: 2). Thus I came to learn why Lela took my hand each time we crossed the street, and to understand that the car “accident” had resulted from a set of circumstances set in motion by that very “untempered, neoliberal enthusiasm,” its harmful effects too often hidden and unspoken.

The Georgian Orthodox Church is neither hidden nor silent in my impressionistic autoethnography, or in Georgia more widely. Churches figure prominently in my short story and first visit. Over a twenty-four-hour period, I stepped into or passed by at least half a dozen of them; indeed my fateful accident occurred on my way from the most holy of Georgian

sites. In Georgia too, the church figures prominently, having undergone an enormous rise to power and prominence during the post-Soviet period in stark contrast to its “dilapidated state” in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (Rapp 2010: 152). The 1995 Constitution of Georgia privileged the role of the church in the nationalist narrative and provided an infrastructure on which the church could expand its reach even as it institutionalized the separation of church and state in Georgia: “The state shall declare complete freedom of belief and religion, as well as recognize the special role of the Apostle Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia in the history of Georgia, and its independence from the state” (Parliament of Georgia 1995: 3). In 2002, an agreement was signed between the church and state (the Concordat), which affirmed the Orthodox religion “as a marker of national identity, its pivotal role legally recognized” (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2016: 7). Then, in a controversial move, Saakashvili’s administration began granting many millions of dollars to the Georgian Orthodox Patriarchate, and gave each of the ten archbishops a luxury SUV (Corso 2009; BBC News 2013).

The contradictions that pervade this seemingly cozy relationship between the twin icons of “modernity” (the state) and “tradition” (the church) suggest the need for a deeper exploration of post-Soviet political economy in relation to competing forms of nationalism and nationalist identity. Scholars making headway on these concerns include the philosopher Giga Zedania, whose article “The Rise of Religious Nationalism in Georgia” identifies key paradoxes in the dynamics of ethnic, civic, revolutionary, and religious nationalism in post-Soviet Georgia (Zedania 2011). Zedania observes that the religious renaissance in post-Soviet Georgia, which “took a stronger and more vital form than in the other countries of the region ... gained popularity after the revolution of 2003, that is, after the modernization project had been explicitly endorsed by the political elite with its strong revolutionary-nationalistic sentiments” (ibid.: 123–24). Likewise, historian Konstantine Ladaria’s article, “Georgian Orthodox Church and Political Project of Modernization,” explores the “cohabitation of religion and liberalism in contemporary Georgia,” and the irony that “the Church emerged as the primary advocate of anti-Western sentiments in society; paradoxically, it is one of the institutions that incurred greatest losses during the Soviet totalitarian regime” (Ladaria 2012: 110–11). In succinct terms, Ladaria captures the ideological tension between the state and the church (although scholars have yet to fully draw the power and resource connections that make for these strange bedfellows):

The government-led modernization project in Georgia proposes close ties with the West, integration into NATO and EU structures, and participation in global

politico-cultural and economic affairs as a solution to the country's problems. This is a classical Western project of modernization, which suggests that Western cultural program of modernity and its major administrative institutions will eventually spread throughout the modern world. The Georgian Orthodox Church, on the other hand, presents Western "soulless" humanistic culture as the main menace for Georgia. (Ladaria 2012: 112)

Contextualizing Gender in Georgia

Ladaria's summation gives context for understanding the dynamics of gender in Georgia. As a post-Soviet state, Georgia is at once its own nation and its struggles are in some ways emblematic of those of other post-Soviet states (Banović 2016). The country is at a critical juncture, still in process of reinventing itself as a nation-state in what is a long post-Soviet "transition." The ongoing transformation is gendered; "gender," broadly speaking, is the lightning rod issue in Georgia around which controversy swirls and contradictions are revealed. Georgian women writing in this volume are maneuvering to cope with and accommodate the new (neoliberal) economic, social, and political order. They do so as self-proclaimed feminist scholars and/or activists demanding social and political change and policies to transform discourses and women's lives. Many are supported by international (mostly Western) nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and foundations, even as they investigate, document and theorize gender in Georgia on their own terms. Several have been at the forefront of the struggle to institutionalize and professionalize Gender Studies at Tbilisi State University, the country's oldest university.

Gender in Georgia is groundbreaking work, not least because there are few scholarly works published in Gender Studies by Georgian scholars. This volume offers a corrective on a number of fronts. As the first edited volume that brings together an international group of feminist scholars to explore the political, economic, social, and cultural conditions that have shaped gender dynamics in Georgia from the late nineteenth century to the present, it provides an important opportunity for dialogue between Georgian scholars and scholars in the international English language academy. The project enables the volume's contributors to share with scholars their important work in deconstructing and challenging the grand narratives on gender in Georgia that have been or continue to be nurtured by proponents of deeply entrenched, sometimes unyielding, ideologies. It also provides information and insight on the instrumentality and complexity of gender roles in a nation that historically has been embedded in "East-West," "metropole-periphery," and "Soviet-post-Soviet" tensions.

In the context of Georgia's strategic geopolitical location at the intersection of Europe and Asia, and with its contested northern border with Russia, knowing how gender fits in the country's turbulent history and how gender is performed, reinforced, and interpreted has broad implications for understanding larger global processes and dynamics.

This project is itself an instance of decolonizing post-Soviet gender research and an alternative to androcentric knowledge production. As co-editor of the volume, my socio-political location and professional position as a tenured professor in the United States with knowledge and experience in scholarly publishing has enabled me to facilitate access to resources. I have multiple motivations for engaging this project. For one, it is a response to the call by my discipline of anthropology to recognize one's own location in multiple fields of power and to act accordingly in a responsible and ethical way. At least since the mid-1980s with the publication of the widely referenced *Writing Culture*, anthropologists have reflected deeply on the politics and poetics of representation, questioning the right, ability, and reasons for speaking on behalf of others (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Many anthropologists have come to understand, as Gupta and Ferguson put it, that all participants in any project are situated within a field of power relations and are products of shared historical processes that operate in a world of culturally, socially, and economically interconnected and interdependent spaces (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 14–17; see also Harrison 1997). With this understanding, and appreciating that I both represent and seek to resist Western global hegemony, in this project I adopt Paul Farmer's "Partners In Health" credo to shift resources from where there are too many to where there are too few, and to use my privilege where I have it to support others seeking their own flourishing.

I am well aware of the contradictions of my position and my effort, starting with my status as International Scholar of the Open Society Institute, an INGO that has had a presence in Georgia since 1994 "to help the country pursue the development of a democratic and open society after [it] gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, [using] donor funding, partnerships, and training to help [its] transition process move forward and to meet the economic, political, and social challenges it ... faced" (Open Society Georgia Foundation). That the Soros Foundation "actively assisted the opposition" leading up to and after the Rose Revolution, means the organization is a vested stakeholder and operator in the unfolding of Georgia's political economy (Wheatley 2005: 189; Esadze 2007: 112; Machavariani 2007: 45). The organization's interests are not necessarily aligned with the interests and motivations of actors on the ground, who receive support from the Open Society Foundations or from

one of the hundreds of NGOs operating in Georgia (Ritvo et al. 2013: 14; Dunn 2012, 2014). Nevertheless, they are a significant force in fashioning the contours of a field of action that make some things possible and other things impossible for local actors operating on that constructed and structured field. In the Georgian case, the contemporary field of action is shaped in large part by that Western project of modernization, with its newly made liberal subjects and neoliberal capitalist political economy.

The above discussion offers another layer of context to reading this volume. *Gender in Georgia* is created almost entirely by Georgian women—scholars and activists who live, work, think, act, and write within the field of action delineated by the forces and factors outlined above. Nearly all contributors have been supported by INGOs operating in Georgia, including the Open Society Georgia Foundation and UN Women, which provide career opportunities and stable employment in a place with a decidedly unstable labor market (Sulaberidze 1999; World Bank 2013; Frederiksen 2013). At play in the Georgian setting are the kinds of tensions identified by Kristen Ghodsee resulting from “the hegemony of Western cultural feminism” delivered via women’s NGOs, including the potential pitfalls of a “gender first paradigm” that can occlude identifying and challenging the very socio-political-economic relations that ensure the flourishing of patriarchy (Ghodsee 2004a: 727–28, 733; see also Roth 2008).

Feminist Perspectives on Culture, Nation, and History in the South Caucasus

At its core, the volume provides the first-ever, woman-centered collection of research and analysis on Georgia. It offers a feminist critique of power in its many manifestations, is itself an assessment of women’s political agency in Georgia, and reclaims a history that is in the process of being written. Contemporary debates in Georgia about women’s rights, gender relations and sexuality—which in some situations have led to violent confrontation—must be understood in terms of contingent history, a past that is worth recounting because it informs the present. Indeed, the volume traces developments relevant to women’s rights and gender relations in Georgia, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century when Georgia was a province of the Russian Empire, then briefly an independent country (1918–1921), and extends to the Soviet period (1921–1991) and the post-Soviet period (1991–present). This volume treats gender as social construct, personal and social experience, political focal point and analytic category in relation to the social forces of class, religion, and local and global political economy. Taken as a whole, this work demonstrates

the value of foregrounding gender in this way in order to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Georgian culture, nation, and history.

Part I on “Power and Politics” provides important historical perspective and theoretical grounding essential for assessing the arguments, data, and issues raised by contributors throughout the volume. The five chapters that comprise “Power and Politics” are in conversation with each other in terms of questions of historiography, and of the meanings and make-up of “modernity,” revealed in the details of Georgian women’s lives and their gendered personal and political struggles across a complex history. The chapters are also in conversation with one another in terms of Georgia’s relation to the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, the West, and Orthodox Christianity in the past and present—a complex of relations and dynamics that have too often been collapsed into simplistic, dualistic ideological constructs that tend to erase substantive history. On this point, the combined chapters in Part I are especially illuminating.

The volume leads with “Pioneer Women: ‘Herstories’ of Feminist Movements in Georgia” (Chapter 1) by activist-scholar Lela Gaprindashvili who is professor of philosophy and, for nearly twenty years, chair of the Women’s Initiative for Equality, an NGO located in Tbilisi. She provides an overview of women’s activism in Georgia, starting in the late nineteenth century by depicting three women activists and their political biographies: Barbare Eristavi-Jorjadze, Ekaterine Tarkhnishvili-Gabashvili and Kato Mikeladze. Gaprindashvili challenges what she considers the prevailing perspective that feminist activity has been newly brought to Georgia by the West, a process that some argue began with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In her revisionist history, she demonstrates early linkages between nineteenth-century Georgian “feminists” and those in the United States and parts of Europe, and the establishment in pre-Bolshevik Georgia of a particular form of feminist activism. In recounting the three “herstories,” Gaprindashvili details a form of women’s advocacy centered on emancipation through writing and education, activities directly linked to Georgia’s nationalist struggle. It was no accident that their form of activism centered on writing in Georgian and on other forms of resisting Russification, as well as advocating access to education for girls.

Whereas Gaprindashvili sees Georgian women’s activism as “interrupted by the Russian imperia and later by the Soviets,” Gender Studies scholar Maia Barkaia, author of “‘The Country of the Happiest Women’: Ideology and Gender in Soviet Georgia” (Chapter 2), explores the project of women’s emancipation in Soviet Georgia, with a focus on the 1920s (“the era of ideological radicalism”) and the 1930s (“the era of conservatism”). Both Gaprindashvili and Barkaia reference writings as key indicators of emancipatory projects in Georgia. In Gaprindashvili’s case, these were the

writings of bourgeois feminists for literate audiences. In Barkaia's study, writing was tied to an official women's publication (*Chveni Gza* [Our Way], later *Mshromeli Kali* [Woman Worker]), authorized by the Soviet authorities as a tool for consciousness raising and political organizing, and targeting proletariat and peasant women listener-readers (the magazine was used also in literacy campaigns).

Grounding Soviet practice in classical Marxism, and tracing the theoretical bedrock from which the Bolsheviks drew their agenda (including that of Lenin and Kollontai), Barkaia explains the Marxist premise that "women's participation in the labor force was a key challenge to the gender division of labor, and a necessary condition of the proletarian revolution and of women's subsequent emancipation." Through the lens of decolonial feminism, Barkaia's brilliant exploration of Georgian women's emancipation as it unfolded in peripheral Soviet Georgia reveals Soviet conceptions of modernity vis-à-vis its Georgian subjects. She demonstrates the ways in which the notion of "the East" was invoked in different localized contexts reflecting this modernity project, which led to a set of inconsistent depictions of proletarian women (as backward, as progressive, as downtrodden, as emancipators). In all, Barkaia explains how the discordance between the ideal and the real was played out in actual policy and practice, first under Leninism and then Stalinism. In this way, she identifies how motherhood, family, domestic labor, and gender "came to occupy a central place in the discourses of the new socialist state."

In "'The West' and Georgian 'Difference': Discursive Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Georgia" (Chapter 3), philosopher and Gender Studies scholar Tamar Tskhadadze offers a challenge in relation to a central theoretical and political concern of this volume: how to resolve the contradictions inherent in Georgia's condition as an independent nation-state that has historically been, and continues to be, situated at the crossroads of competing empires and imperialisms. The discursive politics at the center of Tskhadadze's chapter reflects the difficulty of coming to terms with the immediate problems faced by people in Georgia today (material needs, physical dangers, ideological threats) and their "choice" of solutions, which come with unwanted consequences (must Georgia keep the dirty bathwater in order to keep the baby?). Operating in the world as it exists rather than as how people may want it be, Tskhadadze asserts that Georgians must come to terms with its history and positionality—"how colonial thought works on us," and "how the normative idea of the West functions in post-Soviet Georgia, which may not necessarily be to our benefit."

Tskhadadze offers a rich, multi-dimensional interrogation of the role of "the West" as the norm in the Georgian political imaginary and in relation to contemporary debates on women's emancipation and the status of sex-

ual minorities in Georgia. She argues that the discursive politics during Georgia's post-Soviet moment have been linked to the idea of the West (the US and/or the EU) as the standard, the source of modernity, progress, human rights, and economic prosperity, and at the center of various claims for gender equality by those who are concerned with such issues, and by feminist and LGBTQ rights advocates. This stands in contrast to conservative nationalists and religious leaders who openly challenge and critique the West as a vector that imposes ideas about gender equality from the outside and against so-called local tradition. Like Barkaia, Tskhadadze unpacks a series of simplistic, essentialist binaries operating here, and inquires about the contexts within which the idea of the West is conceived in opposition to that which is "Georgian, Eastern, Soviet, Russian, or even anti-Western." Thus, Tskhadadze offers a corrective to—or at least a caution about—those histories, including feminist histories that rest on shaky assumptions about Georgian Europeanness and Georgian non-Europeanness, of which the transition narrative is a symptom (see also Gal and Kligman 2000: 10–12). At the center of Tskhadadze's critique is an instruction on reading history and the contemporary moment: we must see continuities in history where they exist (not only the ruptures), and we must see the oppressive, regressive, and reactionary elements inherent to neoliberal modernity (*ibid.*: 12–13).

If Tskhadadze regrets the lack of nuanced history, Magdalena Grabowska seeks to reclaim it in "Overcoming the 'Delay' Paradigm: New Approaches to Socialist Women's Activism in Georgia and Poland" (Chapter 4). Grabowska, a Gender Studies scholar who works in Poland, offers a comparative history of the two post-Soviet states noted in her title. Grabowska brings readers into the homes and histories of an aging cohort of women who lived, worked, and engaged in political activity during the Soviet period. Their words are telling. Halina, for example, feels attacked by those contemporary feminists and others who dismiss women's activism and agency of the communist period as irrelevant, and their recollections as distorted memory or mere nostalgia (Pine 2002; Ghodsee 2004b; Todorova and Gille 2012). In keeping with Tskhadadze's instruction, Grabowska provides a more complete genealogy of women's movements by including socialist women's activism and socialist state feminism as significant in efforts to advance gender equality.

Part I closes with "Women's Political Representation in Post-Soviet Georgia," (Chapter 5) by Ketevan Chkheidze, who is a Gender Studies scholar and consultant on gender issues for the Asian Development Bank. Focusing on the post-Rose Revolution period between 2003 and 2012, Chkheidze identifies specific factors that have led to dashed hopes for a gender-sensitive multiparty and inclusive political system in Georgia. On

the basis of empirical data, she concludes that in Georgia, men hold the key leadership positions in political parties and in the Georgian Parliament, suggesting that the promises of democracy and of progress, prosperity, and equality have not been fulfilled. Considered in the context of the previous four chapters, Chkheidze's findings are not surprising. Indeed, sociologist Silke Roth, writing on gender politics in the expanding European Union, notes that EU directives for post-socialist states (such as Georgia) looking to join it, have prioritized "social and economic reforms based on neoliberal principles that are characterized by an implicit anti-equality bias"; the mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of gender equality directives are weak (Roth 2008: 6). This point gives further context to Chkheidze's assessment of party level characteristics and features of the Georgian electoral system that shape women's low representation in the Parliament.

The four chapters that comprise Part II focus on "Violence," with two chapters devoted to the social problem of domestic violence and two to the violence of displacement, dispossession, and war. Tamar Sabedashvili, who chairs the Gender Studies Programme at Tbilisi State University and is program specialist for UN Women, offers a historical consideration of domestic violence in the Soviet period. In "The Domestic Violence Challenge to Soviet Women's Empowerment Policies" (Chapter 6), Sabedashvili provides a review of the historical trajectory and legacies of identifying domestic violence as a social problem. She seeks to document trouble on the Soviet family front, identifying the key ideological and political factors in official acknowledgement and/or disregard of the existence of domestic violence. Sabedashvili concludes that for the Soviets to recognize domestic violence would be to admit state failure in achieving women's liberation. She also suggests that recognizing domestic violence would directly challenge the Soviet "grand narrative" that gender equity was achieved. Turning to the post-Soviet period, in "Domestic Violence in Georgia: State and Community Responses, 2006–2015" (Chapter 7), psychologists Nino Javakhishvili and Nino Butashvili critically analyze state and community responses to gender-based domestic violence. They describe the domestic violence problem in Georgia, document its prevalence based on available evidence, and explore perceptions of the domestic violence problem by various stakeholders. Their analysis reveals an interplay of factors that constitute obstacles in efforts to combat domestic violence, including structural gender inequality, patriarchal attitudes and beliefs among a significant swath of the population, and a lack of cooperation and coordination among local actors and those responsible for implementing policies to combat domestic violence. Taken together, the two chapters on domestic violence raise a series of additional questions. Does the presence and

prevalence of domestic violence suggest that an indictment of the state is in order? Put another way, is the state delegitimized by its failure to address domestic violence? Also, if the Soviet state under-acknowledged the presence and prevalence of domestic violence, as Sabedashvili asserts, is there hyper-attention to the issue now? If so, what accounts for that attention? Does denoting this form of violence as a domestic crime obscure the magnitude of a deep social malaise (Manz 2009: 154)? Finally, does the focus on visible interpersonal violence in the domestic sphere in effect divert attention from larger-scale, more invisible structural violence?

The two subsequent chapters on displaced women's experiences in pre- and postwar Georgia provide insight into the "dynamic discrepancies between discourses, institutional practices and subjectivities" (Gal and Kligman 2000: 12). In "Remembering the Past: Narratives of Displaced Women from Abkhazia" (Chapter 8), Nargiza Arjevanidze, a doctoral student and recipient of an Open Society Foundations academic fellowship, gives readers a glimpse into descriptions, memories, and assessments by those who lived through a history marked by calm and turbulence, work and leisure, stability and precarity. A work in progress, Arjevanidze's intimate ethnography captures women's voices as they construct their past prior to armed conflict, and how they link these constructions to their current circumstances—their lives in protracted displacement. By invoking women's own stories and the words they use to tell it, Arjevanidze moves from the abstract to the experiential, providing a moving portrait of past and present joys, struggles, adaptations, and resiliency for a heterogeneous group of Georgian women. Moving to a larger sample of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a result of separatist conflicts and the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, Gender Studies scholar Joanna Regulska and her US-based co-authors, geographers Beth Mitchneck and Peter Kabachnik, examine how the upheaval has impacted on how Georgian women claim identity and agency. In "Displacement, State Violence, and Gender Roles: The Case of Internally Displaced and Violence-Affected Georgian Women" (Chapter 9), the authors acknowledge that conflict, displacement, state violence, and the post-Soviet "transition" have significantly influenced gender practices, discourses, and identities. The authors find that these conditions have led to the expansion of women's role as the household breadwinner and as caregiver to their families, leading them to conclude that, "[f]or some Georgian women, the return to 'tradition' may be the very enactment of their agency." The data and interpretations offered by Arjevanidze and Regulska et al. suggest the need to flesh out subjective meanings and analytic treatments of what constitutes the "traditional" when it comes to gender attitudes, beliefs, roles, duties, norms, and behavior.

The five contributions in Part III on “Identities, Representations, and Resistance” can be seen as an effort to question “tradition” from a number of vantage points. Tsopurashvili has a doctorate in gender studies from TSU and was recipient of an Open Society Foundations academic fellowship. Her contribution, “Images of ‘The New Woman’ in Soviet Georgian Silent Films” (Chapter 10), offers an intriguing deconstruction of 1920s representations of women in film. In a close reading of three representative films, Tsopurashvili finds the not-so-subtle inversion of male–female essentialisms: “[T]he [female] characters achieve full agency at the expense of traditional feminine attributes such as maternity, affection, love, sexuality, and beauty ... [here] femininity is not redefined as something positive and powerful; instead women acquire agency by adopting normative masculinity.” In “Gender Equality: Still a Disputed Value in Georgian Society” (Chapter 11), psychologist Nana Sumbadze does not so much problematize the notion of traditional gender beliefs, roles, and behaviors as assert its prevalence in the contemporary Georgian context. In the following chapter, sociologist Tamar Zurabishvili and her co-authors psychologist Maia Mestvirishvili and sociologist Tinatin Zurabishvili take us in a different direction with “Georgian Women Migrants: Experiences Abroad and At Home” (Chapter 12), highlighting the transformative experiences for these women who are part and parcel of “the feminization of emigration” phenomenon. On the basis of interviews they conducted with migrant women, the authors discover that the women themselves attribute the experience of “going away” to a new awakening and a newfound ability to critically assess “tradition.”

The final two chapters directly call tradition into question. Natia Gvianishvili, a self-proclaimed lesbian feminist activist and researcher, traces the relatively recent emergence of transgender persons in Georgian public space. In “Being Transgender in Georgia” (Chapter 13), Gvianishvili describes the difficult life conditions in Georgia for transgender persons, including their vulnerability to physical violence, public humiliation, and demonization by powerful social actors and ordinary citizens. Likewise, in “Tracing the LGBT Movement in the Republic of Georgia: Stories of Activists” (Chapter 14), Anna Rekhviashvili (a doctoral student in Canada and recipient of an Open Society Foundations academic fellowship) reconstructs the LGBT rights movement in Georgia. She recounts the spring day of 17 May 2013 when a small group of activists gathered for a peaceful rally to celebrate the “International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia” on Rustaveli Avenue, the main street of Georgia’s capital city, Tbilisi. The peace was short lived: it became a day of unprecedented violence. As a scholar-activist involved in the movement, Rekhviashvili analyzes the events of the day and the movement itself in relation to the

political and social scene in contemporary Georgia, revealing how gender is indeed the lightning rod political issue involving the Georgian Orthodox Church, homophobia, rights, nationalism, and public opinion. The narratives provided by Gvianishvili and Rekhviashvili are particularly relevant to the significance of this volume. As with other geopolitical locations across the globe, the social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of gender in Georgia are an indicator of lived reality, ideological manipulation and contestation, cultural meaning, and the constancy of social change.

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