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# **GOLDEN DRAGON AND SILVER STAR**

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FEBRUARY 2014





## **NEW GEORGIA: CHANGE OF SYMBOLS AFTER THE FALL OF THE SOVIET UNION**

The present newspaper is result of a workshop held in Tbilisi in February 2014 with the aim in critically reflecting the recent and current politics toward symbols in Georgia.

The workshop was initiated by artist Minna Henriksson and GeoAIR together with the Center for Contemporary Art Tbilisi. Participants in the workshop were Maia Barkaia, Data Chigholashvili, Minna Henriksson, Nata Kipiani, Salome Latsabidze Mariam Natroshvili & Detu Jincharadze.

Target of our focus was on one hand the State's official relation to the past symbols and with that to history, and on another, what kind of symbols the contemporary politics produce. While preparing this publication the controversial Freedom Charter which was set in 2011, is about to come into action. The ban of Soviet symbols is an attempt to erase a major part of 20th Century history in Georgia. But we understand that with removal of past symbols only little is actually done to mend problems in society that are much more concrete than that. Also, the mere removal of the unwanted symbols is challenging the rethinking process of the recent history, and can even be hindrance to understanding the past.

Along with erasure of one history, another is remembered and celebrated by lifting out of oblivion mythical figures such as Prometheus or Saint George. The symbols that the current politics prefers, although not easily recognizable and obvious, are nevertheless highly propagating. They are made of glass, gold and corporate logos. They speak of transparency, economic prosperity, geopolitical orientation, and the holy words of the spiritual leader.

In the workshop we got possession of a large hammer and sickle decoration, which had been discarded from public view due to the ban of Soviet symbols. Already the heavy piece of cast iron has become extinct as doomed illegal.

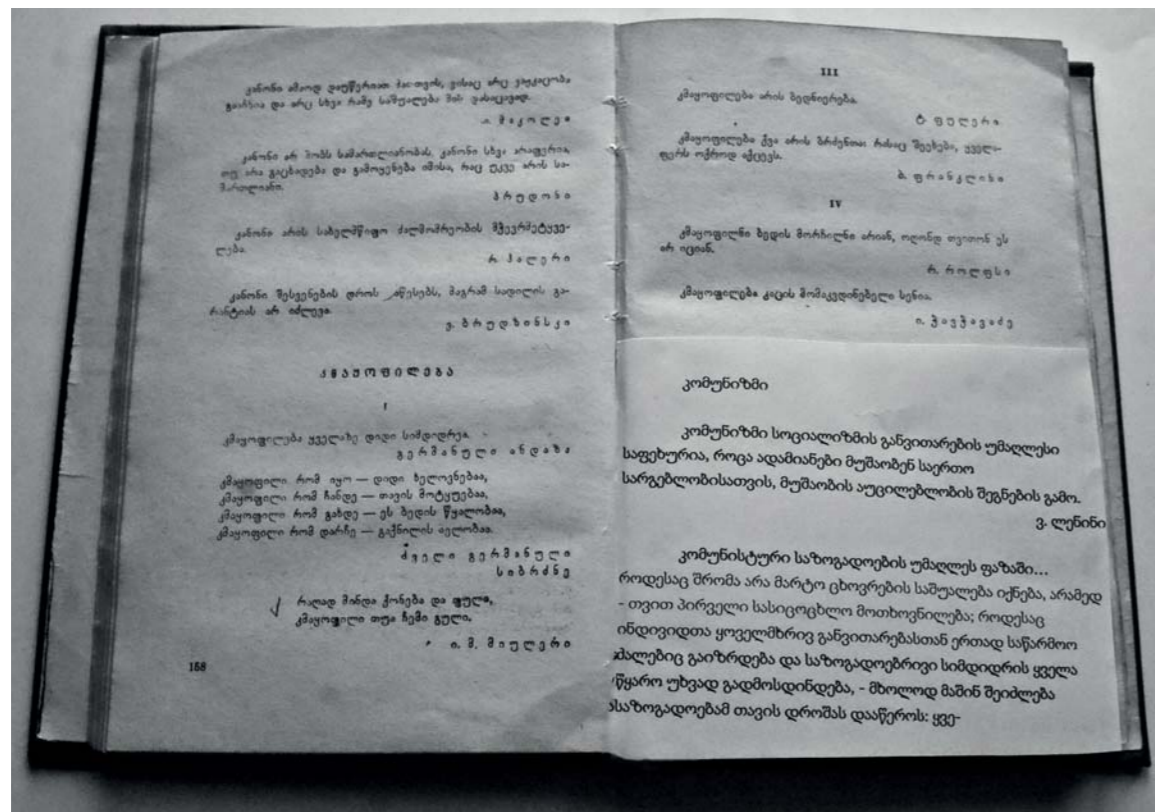
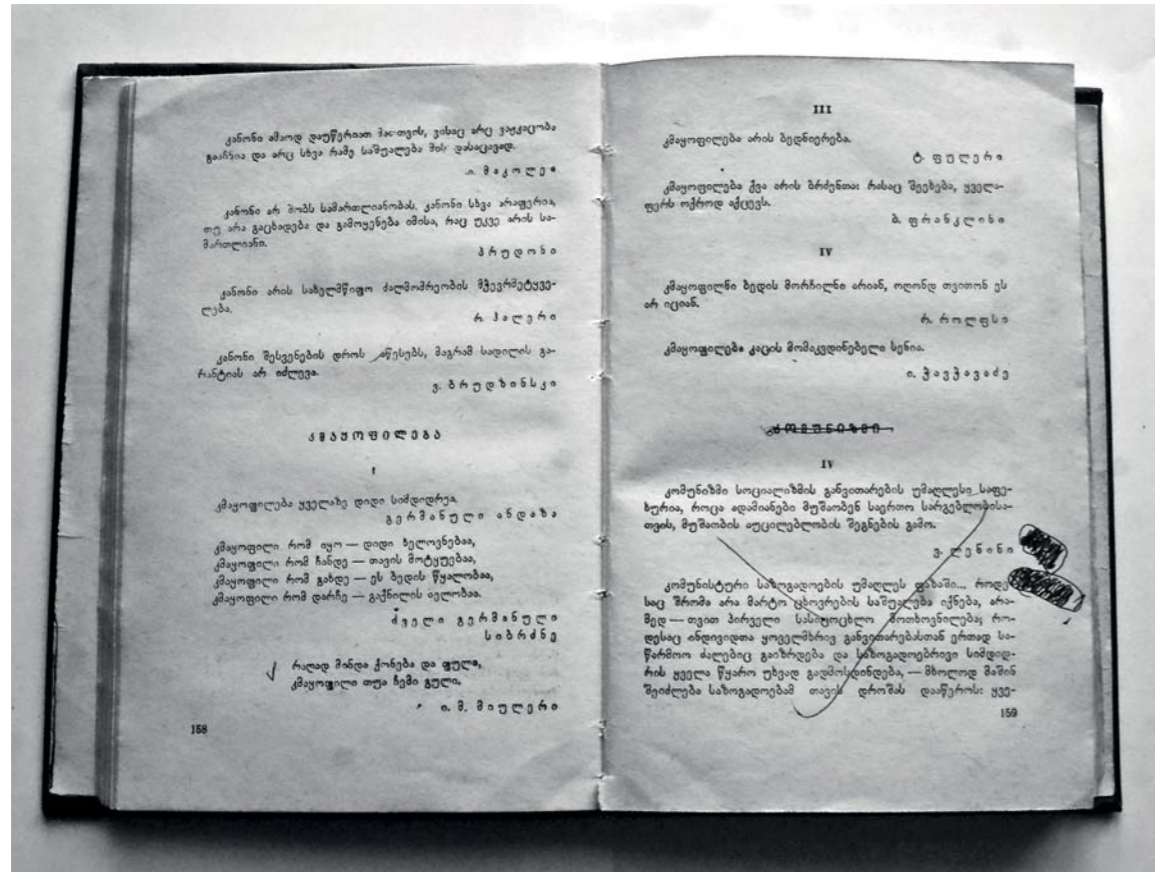
This symbol was starting point for each of our individual reflections on the theme that resulted in this compilation of contributions. We had a vast

topic and restricted amount of time. Nevertheless we hope that the reader will get some new input into the complicated issue of symbols and politics from the pages of this newspaper.

We think that by looking at history, and especially what is being told of it, and how, the true politics of today are revealed.



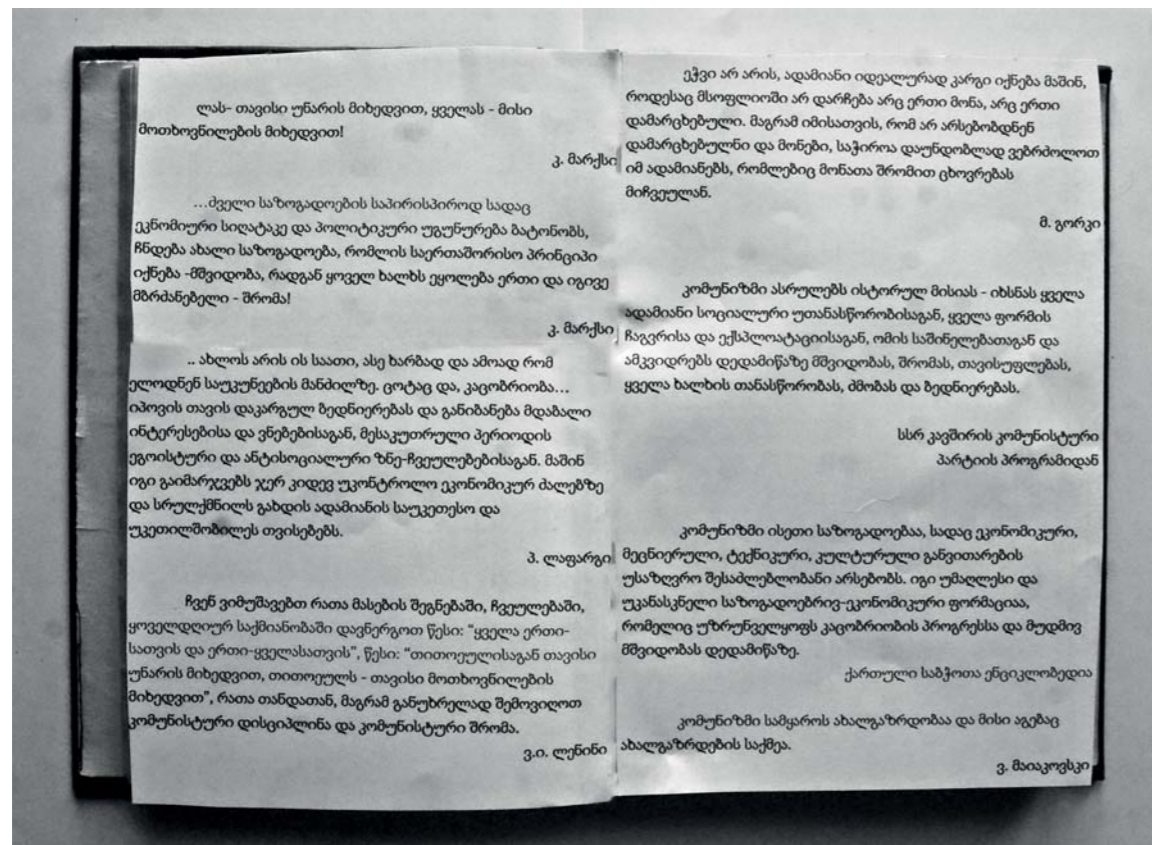
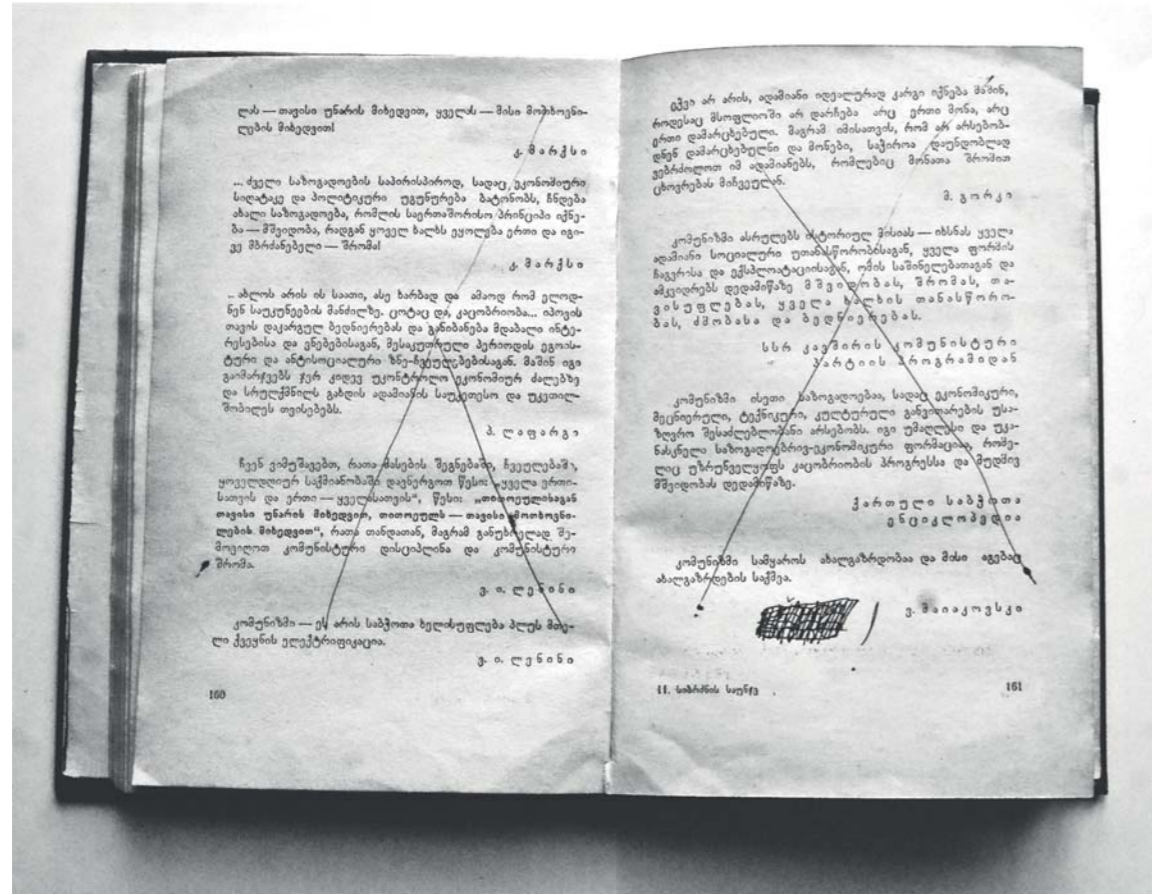




## RETHINKING THE PAST

The hegemonic ideologies dominating people's minds by the implied means of power have been replacing each other in Georgia and the transition period from one ideological edifice to another has been occurring since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The change, however, has not been brought on by rethinking or understanding; rather, imprudent eradication of the past has taken place. The communist past has become a dragon that Saint George (read current ideologies) is trying to desperately slay. It is "indispensable" for the dragon to die in order to establish new Georgia's victory over the past. We all have our little dragons to fight: one way to do this is through negotiation and understanding that every event and act carries with it a corresponding lesson, and that our task is to reveal that meaning. Nevertheless, alternative approaches propose not thinking about past experiences, which can serve the present and instead suggest burying the past under its weight. The mainstream discourse still struggles to slay the dragon called "communism" by demolishing its symbols. Similarly, in my childhood, I tried to eliminate the past through vandalism, but now I want to look back and understand the implications, which may help me rethink the past and face it.





### იდეოლოგიური მუშაობის ნათელი პროგრამა

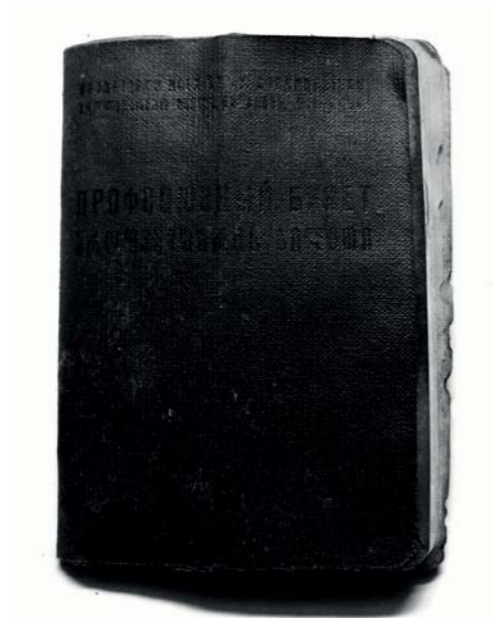
ცენტრალური კომიტეტის დადგენილება „თანამედროვე პირობებში პარტიული პროპაგანდის ამოცანების შესახებ“ პარტიული ორგანიზაციების იდეოლოგიური მუშაობის ფართო და ნათელი პროგრამაა. იგი განსაზღვრავს პარტიული პროპაგანდის შინაარსს, ფორმებსა და მეთოდებს ჩვენი ქვეყნის მშენებლობის პერიოდში. ხელმძღვანელობდა რა პარტიის XXI ყრილობის ისტორიული გადაწყვეტილებებით, ქალაქ ქუთაისის პარტიულმა ორგანიზაციამ მნიშვნელოვანი ღონისძიებანი განახორციელა ახალი ამოცანების შესაბამისად პარტიული პროპაგანდის გარდაქმნისათვის. ამ ღონისძიებათა

შედეგად, უჩვეულოდ ამაღლდა მშრომელთა პოლიტიკური აქტივობა, მნიშვნელოვნად გაძლიერდა კომუნისტებისა და უპარტიო აქტივისტთა ინტერესი მშობლიური კომუნისტური პარტიის გამირული ისტორიის შესწავლისადმი. ასევე ქუთაისის პარტიული ორგანიზაციები მნიშვნელოვან ღონისძიებებს ახორციელებენ პარტიული პროპაგანდის ფარგლების გაფართოებისათვის, მისი მასობრიობისათვის. ახლა პროპაგანდა მოიცავს არა მარტო პარტიის წევრებსა და კანდიდატებს, არამედ აგრეთვე სულ უპრო მეტ უპარტიო მუშასა და ინტელიგენტს.



Some symbols might disappear, while some appear, and some re-appear as they disappear or appear – nothing new

“For the ad hoc montages of objects and other scraps found in ruins are not deliberately organized assemblies devised to strike chords and meanings through associations, but are fortuitous combinations which interrupt normative meanings.”<sup>1</sup>



I like going to abandoned places, because the ruins, the leftovers there give some kind of freedom for interpretation; maybe because I am just curious about what's happening there; or because it feels like archaeology of the near past, or perhaps of the present. These artefacts are not of high value or no “value” at all, but to me they are artefacts of the history I grew through and we live in - where a lot of Soviet period places changed, and “new” ones emerged and “old” ones were emphasized. I am constantly trying to figure out how the three should interplay for us to be able to situate ourselves in the environment that we live in.

<sup>1</sup> Edensor, T., 2005. Waste Matter – the Debris of Industrial Ruins and the Disordering of the Material World. *Journal of Material Culture*, 10, pp.311-332, p.323.

I went to one late period Soviet buildings, currently being demolished. There was not much left, some of the floors and ceilings were already gone. Between the ruins I found a Trade Union membership card, belonging to one of the former employees. The place in which it should have had the picture of the owner, is blank. It still tells me much about this person, or their professional life. Texts, stamps, aesthetics...



Like this artefact, things we own, encounter or obtain in daily life, they speak, sometimes too much. While some symbols might disappear, while some appear, and some re-appear, as they disappear or appear, artefacts from the past and the present still speak too much.





The article 7 moment 6 in the Freedom Charter set on the 31st of May 2011 recommends the elimination of all Soviet and fascist ideology symbols, statues, bas-reliefs, inscriptions and names.

Further amendments were made to the law on the 30th of December 2013, which include punishment for failure to remove these symbols, first with a warning and second time with a fine of 1.000 lari. A special commission is set up in the Ministry of Interior Affairs, whose task is to follow to the enforcement of the law.

I wanted to know more about the application of the law in practice, and telephoned the central operator of the Georgian Parliament.

I was told to telephone the Government instead. I did not find a telephone number to the Government of Georgia, so I called the Ministry of Interior Affairs. The operator told me that she cannot connect me with anyone over telephone, but I should write my questions regarding the Freedom Charter in email, and she assured to me that they will be answered.

from: minnalh@gmail.com  
to: miapr@mia.gov.ge  
date: 13 February 2014 13:52  
subject: Questions about the Freedom Charter

To Whom it May Concern,

I am visual artist from Helsinki, visiting Tbilisi and interested in the politics regarding symbols.

I have read the Freedom Charter set by the President of Georgia on the 31st of May 2011. Also I have read all information I have found available in English language on various Internet news portals about the amendment to the administrative violations code and the Freedom Charter regarding the actual enforcement of the law, which was approved in the Georgian Parliament on 25th of December 2013.

The information I have got hold of is fragmented and scarce. Thus I have some further questions I hope to receive an answer to regarding the ban of communist symbols as set in the Freedom Charter:

1. What is to be done with the removed symbols?
2. Does the ban apply only to public buildings, or also to buildings in ownership of private companies, or also to buildings of private people?
3. Does the ban apply only to facade of buildings or also to the interior?
4. Is the fine (1.000 lari) to be paid for each symbol or once per building?
5. Which communist symbols are banned (to my observations it seems that the hammer & sickle is banned but the star is not)?

I would very much appreciate if I received an answer to these questions promptly. Also if there is someone specialized in this matter, whom I could consult, I would be really happy to get a chance to speak with that person.

After not receiving a reply to my email in a week, I tried to telephone the Ministry again several times and sent them another email. Finally I received an answer saying I should consult the Georgian Parliament with my questions.





### Symbolic hunt for symbols

*Is it possible to clean Georgia from reminders of past communism? The most visible symbols, the Soviet star on top of the Academy of Science, or the reliefs of Lenin and Stalin on the side of the Ortachala Hydroelectric Power Plant are already removed as result of the law banning Soviet (and fascist) symbols. But there remain many communist symbols intact, even in the heart of Tbilisi; the Soviet stars on the bridge next to the Ortachala Power Plant, hammer & sickle -symbols on the Galaktion Bridge and in the pillars of the old Houses of Parliament on Rustaveli Avenue, or as the shape of the entire building complex of the Georgian Technical University.*

*There are also many more symbols which are much more modest, you can find them almost anywhere you look. Small stamps in the ironware produced in the USSR. Are these also ideological manipulations that should be got rid of?*

*It seems that the demonization of the communist symbols is necessary. The hammer and sickle is illustrative symbol of the unity of the peasant and proletarian workers. It is indisputable fact that the value of the worker is reversed from the times of the Soviet Union, when Georgia is today known as "one of the easiest places in the world to do business" (The World Bank, 2013) and "one of the worst cases in Europe as far as the rights of workers is concerned" (International Trade Union Confederation, 2012). The ideas the old symbols were meant to carry, pose a threat to the realities of today.*





FORMER CREMATORY BUILDING.  
TBILISI, GEORGIA.

PLEASE WAIT...

PLEASE WAIT...

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არქიტექტურის  
ინსტიტუტი

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