



Invisible Suffering

Mental illness, social annihilation, and violence in Georgia

By Martin Demant Frederiksen

This article addresses two interrelated issues. First the focus is on the reasons for the occurrence of structural and everyday violence in contemporary Georgia. Here I argue that popular explanations given for the violence experienced in the country today are devoid of an understanding of political and social forces, - political and social forces which are in fact the underlying cause of the violence. Second I seek to give an explanation of why these forms of violence are tolerated. This is followed by a discussion of the consequences of this societal neglect, and the impact that it has on pre-existing marginalized groups, in terms that I would define as complete social annihilation.

On invisible suffering

"There is no worse deprivation, no worse privation, perhaps, than that of the losers in the symbolic struggle for recognition, for access to a socially recognized social being, in a word, to humanity" (Bourdieu 2000: 240-242).

It's a sunny spring day in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. People going to and from lunch are strolling down the sidewalks of Rustaveli Avenue, the busy main thoroughfare of the city center. The newly painted facades of the official buildings along the road are remarkably scenic on this sun-drenched day. Outside the metro station, where streams of people are walking in and out, a young man lies on the sidewalk. His clothes are torn and dirty and although he lies in the warming spring sun, he is wrapped in old blankets and pieces of cloth. A two-year old child is silently crumpled up at his feet.

The young man, who could be anything from seventeen to twenty-seven, is stretching out his arms. His hands are misshaped and shaking, and he is clearly suffering from some sort of mental illness. He is calling out for bread and money, his voice trembling and desperate. The sidewalk around him is the only empty space in the vicinity. Though his cries for help are almost as loud as the sound of the bustling traffic on Rustaveli Avenue, no one pays any attention. Despite the apparent helplessness of this couple it is as though they do not exist. Further down the street several old women are silently holding out small tin cups and regularly receiving small coins. Why then this obliviousness to the patently worse suffering of the man and child?

I first visited Georgia in the summer of 2004, six months after president Eduard Shevardnadze was replaced by the current president Mikhail Saakashvili as the result of the "Rose Revolution." Shevardnadze had been forced to step down due to accusations of election

fraud. Having survived civil wars and economic stagnation since the gaining of independence from the Soviet regime in 1991, there was a feeling among the Georgians that I met that life would soon begin to get better. After a second visit in 2005 I arrived in Tbilisi in early January 2006 to conduct six months of anthropological fieldwork on government-NGO relations in the sphere of psycho-social development.¹ Unfortunately by this time the hopes and expectations seemed to have faded, things were not as "rosy" as had been expected and the current situation hardly engendered the sort of optimism that had been apparent two years previously.²

The situation of the young man and his child described above is in no way unique in the streets of Tbilisi today. Within recent years the number of people living in poverty has increased to over 54 percent.³ 17 percent are living in extreme poverty, and crime rates are high; countrywide an estimated 240.000 thousand people out of a total population of around 5.4 million are addicted to various forms of drugs, and daylight muggings in parks and streets, assaults in doorways, rape and domestic violence are everyday occurrences in contemporary Tbilisi (HRIDC 2006).

The local NGO, *Centre for Social and Psychological Aid*, through which I conducted my study, works with the people affected by these problems. These include victims of domestic violence and those suffering traumas caused by acts of war. The information I gathered for this project was in part acquired through daily personal involvement with the personnel and clients of the NGO. In other cases these people shared their stories in interviews I conducted with them as part of the information gathering process. Common to all

¹The fieldwork was done as a part of my MA at the Department of Anthropology and Ethnography, University of Aarhus. The article is based on own observations made during this fieldwork, written sources, and especially conversations, interviews and discussions with users of - and employees in various Georgian NGOs and children centers working with mental health issues, to whom I owe my deepest thanks and gratitude for their valuable help, suggestions and advice.

² See for example Human Rights Information and Documentation Center (HRIDC 2006) for a further description of the changes, or lack thereof, within social and political issues in recent years.

³ These numbers come from UNDP. The national poverty line is defined as 80\$ a month, extreme poverty around 30\$. The calculation of the poverty line has been critiqued by the IMF. Average income amounts to 17\$ monthly for the poorest segments of the Georgian population and 292\$ among the richest (www.undp.org, www.imf.org).



whom I spoke with was that violence, in a variety of forms, was a regular feature of their daily lives.

In this article I seek to determine a link between these forms of violence on the one hand, and the apparent obliviousness to this violence on the other. In addition, in the course of my field work it became apparent to me that within Georgian society there is a relative lack of awareness of and an unwillingness to come to terms with, the related notions of homelessness and mental illness. Being a victim of this obliviousness is what I term “invisible suffering”, that is, the total annihilation of vulnerable social groups. Before exploring this issue further, the article will focus on how some of the violence and extreme poverty in contemporary Georgia has come to exist, and how various descriptions of violence in the country unwittingly contribute to the marginalization of psychosocial welfare as a factor in the development of Georgia as a nation. In later sections it will be explained how this is linked to the creation of invisible suffering.

Conflict, clans and the pornography of violence

The transition period following the break-up of the Soviet Union was witness to outbreaks of violence and civil war in several of the new nations that emerged. In Georgia regional conflicts broke out in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia shortly after independence. This in turn led to massive numbers of internally displaced persons. Later civil war broke out in the capital, and as in many other newly independent states there were major economic breakdowns in the industrial sector, and an almost total demise of public institutions and of the delivery systems for social services. Outbreaks of violence became everyday occurrences (Dudwick 2002: 213).

Though there are similarities between the former Soviet republics Georgia seems to have been one of the countries in which violence has been most pronounced. Violence in developing post-war countries has often mistakenly been seen as something rudimentary and instinctive, which at times has led to an “exotification” of developing countries. Developing countries are then seen as places where tribalism, primitivism and otherness are an inherent part of the everyday environment.⁴ Vivid, sensational stories and horrifying pictures of violent events are often the only views presented by the mass media of currently war torn areas like the Balkans, East Africa and the Caucasus. When our understanding of places and events is artificially limited in this way we are left with what Phillipe Bourgois has termed the pornography of violence (Bourgois 2001: 33). In the case of Georgia descriptions of “clan culture”, avenging groups, personal networks and mountain warriors has been part of this pornographic image, creating a stereotyped picture of the current experience and violence. The

combination of a turbulent history, the powerful geographical settings, and the vast variety of ethnic groups makes a good background for telling dramatic stories about violence, and the non-scientific literature using the region as its setting is vast.⁵ On the other hand academic descriptions and analyses of the actual violence in Georgia have been few and far between and thus if we are not careful we fall into the trap of accepting this other body of literary and journalistic images as being the complete picture of the problems faced in Georgia today. From being stories of one-time events they turn into a general picture of the entire country – a picture that fails to address the actual cause of the violence and social instability. This failure is due to the fact that the news media on the one hand and popular assumptions on the other simply do not address the root political and social cause of this violence. But not only are these images inadequate as frames of explanation, they are also devoid of any sense that sustainable solutions are possible. For the *exotic* or *pornographic* view of the region reduces the current violence to an inherent cultural component of Georgian society, rather than seeing it as a temporary, solvable social condition. This pornographic version of events deems that people *in and of themselves* are violent, and that this violence stems from their national character and their “clan culture”, instead of looking at the conditions in which patterns of violent behavior may have emerged.

This doesn’t negate the fact that clans do exist regionally in the country and that personal networks have significant importance to many people. They surely do, but can one with certainty postulate a direct link between the ongoing existence of these social networks through centuries and the social breakdown in Tbilisi and other places over the last fifteen years? In an analysis of both the turbulent history and current developments in Georgia Irakli Chkonia terms the Georgian experience as being one of “cultural warfare” at which he claims Georgians to be “experts”, having maintained the same national identity for centuries (Chkonia 2006: 354). In Chkonia’s view Georgians have historically managed to survive as a people by retreating into personal networks and “thus major economic transactions, power relations, core structures of their social organization, system of solidarities and community life, ethical and value systems, and even effective norms of justice all operate informally” (Chkonia 2006: 355).

The notion of cultural warfare suggests that what is happening in Georgia today is but one event on a string of continuous occurrences, – occurrences driven by a sort of cultural content which has existed for centuries. In my opinion the assumptions driving this notion are false. What we see in Georgia today is distinctly new. It is true that for Georgians social networks of families

⁴ An example of this being Harrison and Huntington’s explanations of how “Culture Matters” (2001).

⁵ The bibliography in Anderson’s *Bread and Ashes* (2004) gives a good overview of the non-scientific literature on Georgia.



and friends have great importance. But as we shall see the events of the past fifteen years are not a retreat into traditional informality as Chkonia would have it but rather a disruption of social traditions and networks. One cannot explain away recent developments and burgeoning violence in contemporary Georgia simply by referring to the strength of traditional clans and social networks. Quite the opposite is in fact the case.

In order to analytically approach the existence and consequences of violence in present day Tbilisi, this article will define and make use of the notion that there are three different forms of violence at play: direct political, structural, and everyday violence. Direct political violence refers to targeted physical violence, as it is expressed through military oppression and different forms of torture and armed resistance (Bourgeois 2001: 32). Structural violence is defined as chronic, historically entrenched political-economic oppression and social inequality (Farmer 2005: 30). Lastly, everyday violence, a concept developed by Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1993), refers to daily practices and expressions of violence on a micro-interactive level where it is interpersonal, domestic and delinquent. In the following a link between these three different forms of violence will be made. In doing so I will illustrate how political oppression and instability - leading to distortions of social relationships created by poverty - has fostered a situation of structural violence. A situation that has further eroded the daily life of Georgians, - leading to the point where physical violence and psychological abuse are ordinary occurrences in the country at present.

Consequences of, and reactions to, conflict and poverty are of course multifaceted. This article will touch upon only one. That is the social and psychological consequences of extreme poverty and the above forms of violence.

In a country of continuous transition

From its beginning the Soviet regime held a firm grip on its republics. To the end of its existence any popular uprising against it was immediately suppressed. Military force was used wherever and whenever assumed necessary, and this stringent form of political violence was tightly organised by the KGB and other state sponsored organizations. In Georgia several demonstrations were thus suppressed by force during the country's time as a Soviet republic. One of the last of these took place on April 9th 1989, where a large demonstration for self-determination was broken up resulting in the death of some twenty students in central Tbilisi (Jeffries 2003: 117). Two years later on this day Georgia declared its independence.

When the centralised economy of the Soviet system collapsed people both inside and outside the new countries optimistically believed that a transition to market economy would be right around the corner, and further that peace and cooperation would be keywords in the times to come. However, the drastic collapse in

production, ethnic uprisings, regional conflicts, and political turmoil led to a rapid increase in poverty and unemployment. The new regimes were unable to respond to this in a timely manner and the millenarian atmosphere was soon replaced by general feelings of despair and disillusion (Marc 2002: 2).

During the Soviet period Georgia was a prosperous republic. The lush areas of the Black Sea Coast and the Kakheti region provided agricultural riches and the country was a well known center of cultural events. So when post-independence poverty struck large groups within the population it struck people who beforehand largely had been employed, housed and socially well integrated into society. For many if not most of these people this transition was not only unpleasant, but a complete shock (Dudwick 2002: 213). At first people expected the new government to restore their job opportunities and provide general social assistance. Today those hopes are gone. Already by the late nineties what had seemed a temporary economic downturn has instead become a seemingly permanent state of poverty for most Georgians. Experiences of war, poverty and insecurity have become the norm, and today the population has been characterized as being generally traumatized (Khonelidze & Geleshvili 2005: 28).

In response to the aftermath of war, the main response of the international community and national government agencies has been an attempt to ensure the physical survival of those who have endured. While this is certainly the first priority, it has sadly forced the role of psychosocial welfare on to the sideline. What is perhaps missing from the strategies used in countries like Georgia is a working program to eliminate the feeling of social deprivation, shame and exclusion that is widely experienced today. The non-existence of a state welfare system to provide psychological support and social aid has led to a situation where the standard of living has decreased and the quality of life has been diminished. Job possibilities have nearly disappeared and no new training programs have been successfully implemented. This in turn has led to a decrease in productivity. On the other hand mental illness and suicide are on the rise as a consequence of seemingly hopeless situations. Third sector NGOs like the one for which I worked have become the only source of help for people finding themselves in these situations, and times are rough for these organizations as well. As an ongoing participant in the daily processes of such an organization, I took part in projects that provided support for at-risk and homeless children and youth. I experienced first hand the growing struggle of fundraising, and of being in a situation where attention from local policymakers, journalists and academics seems at times non-existent. This relative lack of an official system of social services in the country has left many personal wounds unhealed for more than a decade. That violence at times has come to be seen by some as an inherent component of Georgian ethnic



culture, rather than a set social problems triggered by political and economic dysfunction resulting from the aftermath of the break up of the Soviet Union, makes it even more of a challenge for these NGOs to explain the logical processes behind the necessity of their work. So far imprisonment, institutionalization and various other correctional and police work based strategies have been the only official response to these issues (Khonelidze & Geleishvili 2005).

The creation of invisibility

The political transformation that followed the “Rose Revolution” in 2003 promised hope for improvements in the quality of life for Georgians, yet the new government has not yet fully risen on the challenge. At the time of my fieldwork unresolved regional conflicts, recurring electricity cuts, fuel shortages, lack of water and sanitation, unemployment and poverty were the cause of ongoing and severe stress for many. Several of my local friends were unemployed or struggling to get by in different jobs, getting into bar brawls or traffic accidents because of heavy drinking, and wishing they could leave Georgia. In 1996 a qualitative field study was carried out in nine regions of Georgia as part of a study on income distribution and poverty. Today, ten years after the field research was done, not much has changed for those suffering the worst deprivation. The following excerpt from this study provides a telling example of some of the social problems that have followed in the wake of the scarcity that has struck this country:

Recently Nodar’s mother died. Just after he had arranged for her funeral, his neighbor’s mother also died. The neighbor arranged for her own mother’s funeral to take place the same day but begged Nodar to organize his family’s funeral procession and burial earlier. The reason for her request was that because she could not pay the amount required for a coffin (the equivalent of \$200), she had simply rented one for the showing of the body. Her mother was later buried wrapped only in cellophane, and the neighbor was ashamed that the neighbors coming to the funeral of Nodar’s mother would observe the contrast. (Dudwick 2002: 218).

Families in Georgia today find themselves in a bizarre and tragic double bind. For when one family member becomes ill, relatives can neither afford medical treatment, nor the funeral expenses if medical treatment was not provided. As the above excerpt demonstrates, being unable to arrange social occasions following a death in a family is an area of great concern, since rituals of hospitality and display are a central component of Georgian culture, and have been for centuries. Thus when Georgians are unable to participate in mutual acts of hospitality, humiliation follows, and individuals are seen to lose both self-respect and social standing in the surrounding community. The fear of being seen as a beggar looking for a free meal means that many Georgians will stop accepting social invitations from friends and relatives, knowing that they would not be able to invite them in return (Dudwick 2002: 218).

Together with the material deprivations suffered during the prolonged transition away from Soviet social structures these breakdowns in social relationships lead to an increase in cases of depression, heavy smoking and drinking, suicide attempts and other stress-related conditions. And since the number of people living in poverty has increased, the number of people suffering from social and psychological problems has done the same. This has created a situation where the Georgian population can be seen to be suffering from ongoing structural violence. This type of violence then translates into personal distress and mental illnesses.⁶ These reactions are a physical embodiment of the violence, emotional abuse and widespread neglect that has been endured. In a Guatemalan context Linda Green has described how chaos becomes diffused throughout the body when living in a state of anxiousness and fear. Low-intensity panic remains in the shadow of waking consciousness and often shows itself in dreams and chronic illnesses easily leading to severe mental problems (Green 1998: 60). In the case of Georgia experiences of conflict, direct political violence and fear have been followed by experiences of poverty and social deprivation. As can be seen from the above example of the funeral; increased levels of poverty have undermined many people’s ability to maintain and participate in local social and cultural traditions of hospitality and display thus breaking down existing informal networks, which in some cases have fostered increased numbers of mental illness.

People suffering from these conditions often find themselves isolated – at home or in institutions, – stigmatized, and then forgotten by society at large (see Dudwick 2002: 254). In this sense they are socially annihilated – their place in the social realm has simply ceased to exist. As became obvious when I was talking to employees and users of the NGO for which I worked, the creation of this invisibility not only reinforces the state these people are in, but the despair, helplessness and exclusion they experience also leads to an increase among them in crime, prostitution, domestic violence and various forms of drug abuse. The effects of this are devastating both at the individual and at the larger social level. Thus one can see how political and structural violence also plays a part in the creation of everyday violence in Georgia today.

This leads back to the opening description of the situation of the young man and the child in the street. Since situations of structural and everyday violence are quite common in Tbilisi and Georgia today, why is it that people in general are so oblivious to the people suffering under these situations? Why are such conditions seemingly accepted by the population at large?

⁶ I am drawing here conceptually on Farmers work on Haiti (Farmer 2005: 30).



Fighting for food or future

As mentioned previously the sphere of psychosocial development has been given very low priority in the public sphere in Georgia, and since people suffering under structural violence are at the bottom of the social hierarchy, their suffering is rarely an issue for public debate. Added to this is the fact that mental illness and poverty still are widely surrounded by stigma in the perception of the general population (Khonelidze & Geleishvili 2005). This stigma is in part traceable to Soviet times, since during this period individual suffering from mental illnesses was officially ignored. Soviet ideology claimed the population to be in perfect shape, both physically and mentally, and those experiencing mental problems, be they social or medical, were thus confined to institutions and hidden from society. But the stigma this group is experiencing today can not solely be seen as result of this legacy. There is no longer the same degree of taboo surrounding the subject, as conditions have become more widespread. Yet the mentally ill are still conceived of as inhabiting another world. Susan Optow has argued that our normal perceptual/cognitive processes separate people into in-groups and out-groups and that this division can have severe consequences for our understanding of social injustice. Those who fall outside our in-group are morally excluded, and become either invisible, or in some way socially excluded so that we do not have to acknowledge the injustice they suffer. So that if, on the one hand an injustice were to befall someone we care about it would induce immediate confrontation, yet on the other, the same injustice suffered by a stranger or someone who is seen as invisible or irrelevant is easily ignored (Optow 2000). It is this form of social annihilation that many groups in Georgia face today. Yet exactly what forces lie behind the creation of these in – and out-groups? How are they defined in the first place?

In Georgia the political and economic instability of the last fifteen years has made it very easy for formerly middle class people to fall into a condition of dire poverty. As Alexandre Marc has noted about the former Soviet republics “the rich and the poor increasingly inhabit separate worlds, with the poor fighting for survival and the rich fighting to protect their wealth” (Marc 2002: 23). But wealth in itself is not all that needs to be protected. The *prospect* of being able to gain or keep wealth also needs safeguarding, a prospect which becomes harder and harder to come by. In his time living among the lower social classes in Paris and London in the 1930’s George Orwell experienced that “when you are approaching poverty, you make one discovery which outweighs some of the others. You discover boredom and mean complications and the beginnings of hunger, but you also discover the great redeeming feature of poverty: the fact that it annihilates the future” (Orwell 2001 [1933]: 16). Quite simply put: if you have no food at present, thoughts about the future become irrelevant. In this situation all

that matters is the avoidance of starvation. As one of my informants, a social worker in a local NGO put it in an interview

(...) the people in Georgia are so busy with their every day problems that they don’t think enough, really, about the real problems, they think about nowadays problems, every day problems – don’t look in the future.... because they think that their future is very dark. (Nona, interviewed February 2006).

This is one of the major differences between people living with poverty and those living in relative comfort. For the role of the future is significant in the way we understand the world around us. A main part of daily praxis is strategic behavior in support of future goals (Vigh 2006: 30, 174). So that those who don’t suffer from social annihilation live their daily lives while looking towards a social horizon of future possibilities and expectations, possibilities and expectations which barring unforeseen circumstances very well may come to fruition. As the above interview excerpt suggests the future seems an absolute unknown for many Georgians, and in a country where economic prospects seem dire for many and where loss of stability and predictability have become inherent, having the *possibility* of a future thus becomes a very precious thing indeed, a thing that needs to be guarded. One possible answer to the question of why some groups in Georgia, in this case people suffering from mental illnesses are invisible to the remaining members of society is that they are standing in the way of the imagined future.

People living in poverty, people living with mental illnesses, homeless children, and other weak and unprotected groups serve as a constant visual reminder of the precarious situation in the country today. Such people serve as a reminder to the rest of society that an organized process of improved social development is not a guaranteed prospect in Georgia today. Therefore, the image of these people when they are perceived by the luckier members of society creates a visual block which interferes with the ability to imagine a brighter future. The only way to resolve the contradiction they present is thus to render them non-existent, or turn them into an out-group. In the terms of Mary Douglas their presence represents a “pollution” of a possible future, and thus a danger that it can not come into being (Douglas 1966: 44, 203). Thus for the marginalized it is not only their own futures that are annihilated by poverty, socially they themselves are as well, for otherwise they represent a threat to the psychological well-being also of those better off than themselves. The paradox of this process is that unprotected groups are likely to have their suffering increased drastically by this situation, for experiences of stress and social exclusion will surely continue to intensify at the same pace at which the rest of society ignores them.

Listening to the life stories of the homeless youth and children with whom I worked provided me with an



awareness of the social consequences of this marginalization. Typically the fathers in these families lose their jobs and are thus unable to support their families. They are then also cast out of the traditional social network which demands of fathers that they be breadwinners. As a result these fathers typically turn to the bottle and end up in severe alcoholism, often leading to domestic violence. As other possibilities disappear some mothers turn to prostitution as a means to survive economically, removing the family even further from their former social life. Many of the children I talked to had been forced by their parents to beg in the streets or commit petty crime in order to support their families. Many of them ran away as a result of this. Others had simply been left behind or “given” to neighbours. Many of the children I worked with or interviewed had thus suffered tremendously in the family situation. Yet surprisingly many had a strong wish to return to their families given the opportunity of an improved situation. The anger they expressed was usually not directed at parents, but at society at large.

It is thus not simply a question of some people selfishly thinking about their own prospects and ignoring those who don't have any. It is in fact a binary process where the individual and society both participate in the shutting down of traditional social networks for people at risk. As was seen in the example of the funeral the poor actively withdraw from their formal social networks, since they are unable to contribute their share to the group. The above example of homeless children also demonstrates that young people will simply refuse to participate in a society which they blame for their current situation. While being put in the shadow of society by society, they are also themselves choosing a non-participatory strategy.

Behind the facades

Before exploring this further, the facades of Rustaveli Avenue deserve a special note. In the summer of 2005, immediately preceding the official visit of US president George W. Bush, the facades of the old, classical Georgian buildings on Rustaveli and other streets in central Tbilisi were painted, and the roads quickly paved. During a stay in the country at this time I discussed this phenomenon with several local friends. Many people found it ironic that the only things that were painted were those which would be visible from a passing car. The sides and backs of the buildings were left completely untouched. “You can't find a painter in town who has free times these days” one of my friends jokingly explained and added “but well, at least *they* have work”. Yet in spite of the cynicism expressed over the painting of the facades people were generally pleased by the visit of the American president, and saw it as a great step towards increased international relations with the West – a step towards the future. The fact that brightly colored houses are not traditionally a component of Georgian architecture, and that a lot of money was spent on this superficial makeover of

central Tbilisi thus seemed relatively unimportant. Now, in the same way that people were aware of the irony of painting only the facades of the buildings and leaving the problems behind them untouched, they are of course also aware of the fact that there are many unresolved problems in the country. For if they did not know these attempts to protect their own interests would be useless. Yet many people are living in situations so extreme that their survival rests solely on the goodwill of others. And many people do donate small amounts to those who are begging at various places in the city. Just not to all.

Walking to and from the NGO in which my fieldwork was carried out, I frequently noticed the young man and his child outside the metro station. The empty space always surrounded them – unless they were asleep. For when sleeping they actually earned a little bit of money, though this was given uneasily. Most people would drop the coin almost as if by accident and a friend of mine even observed a woman pitching a coin from quite some distance in order to avoid having to come to close. This is contrasted with the apparent ease with which passersby donate change to the silent older women standing nearby. Silent women, looking at the ground can earn small donations. They have learned the trick of making themselves non-existent. They have made their peace with the shadow of society, and are mute in the presence of those with a future to look to. For it is in the shadow they can obtain the most. This form of begging both allows them to gain a little money, and those giving it not to take any special notice of their actual situation. The young man and his child had quite literally stepped out of the shadow and into the light. Their suffering on direct display, they thus became both a visual and audible example of a situation most would rather forget and hope to get beyond. The beautifully painted buildings of Rustaveli Avenue lose a little of their beauty in the presence of this unsolvable suffering. They lose a little of the hope for a better future that they are supposed to generate for those lucky enough to be able to hope to participate in it. Therefore the young man is doomed to invisibility in the eyes of passersby. Not only is he denied money, he is also denied of his mere presence, and is thus socially annihilated. By making his pleas louder, he only becomes more silent, more invisible.

Equal access to the future

The violent outbursts emanating from those segments of the population that have been driven into drug abuse, crime and deprivation have become a very real part of the everyday lives of many Georgians. But violence and violent behavior in Georgia are not simply some form of local, cultural phenomenon, as a romanticist and culturally-biased view of the Caucasus as a region of mountain warriors, clans, eternal networks and vengeance might suggest. As I have shown in this article the violence is created by larger political and social conditions, components of which can be seen as structural violence, as explained in the



body of this paper, thus leading at least partly to the creation of the everyday violence in individual lived experience. A violence that has normalized petty brutalities at the community level, exemplified via the social annihilation of already marginal groups, such as people suffering from mental illnesses. Feeling invisible, or being made to feel invisible, can in some sense be said to be a state of mind rising from being denied the right to participate in the ordinary routines of daily social life. It is a question of being, presence and experience.

The point of this article however, is not the feeling of invisibility in itself, but rather the act of making some groups and people invisible, and how social forces in the public realm push, or force a retraction of, certain groups out of the spotlight and into the shadows of society, thus removing them completely from the domain of public discourse. The consequences of this are among other things the outbreak of violence on the part of these socially annihilated. This is a condition that is in severe need of attention if the crime and the social problems in contemporary Georgia are to be resolved. A deeper understanding of the reasons for structural violence in Georgia needs to be achieved if the existence of everyday violence and social annihilation of marginal groups is to be prevented. Everyday violence as such can not be stopped via control, imprisonment and juridical reform since it is not a matter of correcting behavior but of correcting living standards. Addressing this problem will necessarily involve a larger public focus on psychosocial development and aid as well as on creating a higher level of awareness, rather than on more legislation enacted for the purpose of controlling petty crime and violence. Finally biased, culturalist explanations for social problems in Georgia can be sensibly ignored, as part of a general strategy of helping people in this part of the world come to terms with the possibility of a future.

An inclusionary form of thinking needs to be fostered both within the population and among policy-makers; - a form of thinking which will make it clear that if the future of one group is to be secured it is dependent on providing equal access to that future to other more marginalized groups in society. To make the invisible sectors of the population visible might be a haunting experience, but it could also be the only road to take if Georgia as a country is to realize the hopes of the times to come.

Martin Demant Frederiksen is an MA student at the Department of Anthropology and Ethnography, University of Aarhus.

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