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Georgia in-between: religion in public schools

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Based on ethnographic fieldwork in a Georgian village and supplemented by a range of interviews and observations from different parts of Georgia, this paper explores the creative presence of religion in public schools. In 2005 and in line with the strong secularization and modernization discourse, the Georgian parliament passed a new law on education, restricting the teaching of religion in public schools and separating religious organizations and public schools; nevertheless, mainstream Orthodox Christianity is widely practiced in schools. The paper aims to show how Georgians use religious spaces in secular institutions to practice their identity, to perform being "true Georgians." At the same time, they are adopting a strong secularization and modernization discourse. By doing so they create a new space, a third space, marked by in-betweenness. The study uses the theoretical lens of Thirdspace for analyzing the hybridity, the in-betweenness of practices and attitudes inherent for politics, religion, and everyday life of Georgians.

Keywords: religion; Thirdspace; hybridity; Georgia; Caucasus

Introduction

In 2005, the Georgian parliament passed a new Law on General Education, restricting the teaching of religion, the use of religious symbols in the school space for devotional purposes, as well as forbidding indoctrination and proselytism in public schools. The law still allows for the celebration of national holidays and historical dates, the organization of events aimed at fostering national and human values, as well as teaching the history of religions as an elective (Law of Georgia on General Education, chapter 13.2). The changes indirectly addressed the issue of the institutional independence of public schools from the growing influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church. In general, the state expected public schools to stay independent from the dominant Georgian Orthodox Church and to treat every religious denomination in the same manner. This law is in line with the strong secularization and modernization discourse of the new Georgian government after the Rose Revolution in 2003, at least initially. At the time of its introduction, the general public presence of the Georgian Orthodox Church was increasing. Its growing influence was reflected and solidified in a law regarding general education adopted in 1997 under the Shevardnadze government.[1] It enabled the Georgian Orthodox Church to be actively involved in education. Later on, the importance of the church became even more reinforced when the constitutional agreement or the so-called Concordat between the state and the church was legalized in 2002. The high presence of traditional religion in public institutions

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became a problem for human rights, as it was connected with indoctrination and proselytism.

"We would start every day with *Our Father*, the Georgian lessons were especially full of prayers," recalls one of the students from Tbilisi about her time in public school in 2003. It led to a further alienation of several ethnic and religious minorities not really integrated during Soviet times either: "In my school they started to teach us Orthodox Christianity and that's when I realized I was a Muslim. I had never thought about it," remembers Musaip, another former student from a public school in Tbilisi, now 20 years old, about his classes in 2004.

The changes of 2005 came as a blow. As one of the students remembers, the teacher for Georgian literature advised after the changes had been announced: "We cannot pray together any more but pray silently in your heart." The word the teacher used was *gulshi* (in the heart). This is one of the ways in which the relocation of religiosity took place: to the heart, to a "camouflaged" space, and to a "camouflaged" time (Certeau 1984).

In the years to follow, some creative responses to the imposed restrictions emerged while facing the ever-increasing influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church on public life. Studies show how the space is still marked by the strong religious presence of dominant Orthodox Christianity in many schools (EMC 2014). It remains a front-stage matter for school principals to display their personal religious affiliation and that of the entire school. For this purpose, many of the schools use alternative spaces such as digital representations of the schools on Facebook and the like. Many of the schools conduct religious pilgrimages, openly invite religious authorities from the Georgian Orthodox Church to participate in events, and let them perform blessing rituals for the schools after or prior to schooltime, thus maneuvering around restrictions. At the same time, topics regarding autonomous citizenship, the "changing times" and "new demands," and "being European" pervade the discourse among the youth, which in turn is the most religious and church-going group according to recent studies (Sumbadze 2012).

My paper aims to show how the younger generation of Georgians carries out being "true Georgians," at the same time adapting a modernization discourse, and how by doing so they create a new space, a third space, marked by in-betweenness (Bhabha 2012; Soja 1996). This paper looks at lived religion in a space, which has been deliberately designated as a secular space; furthermore, it looks at identity as practiced (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Looking at the school as a lived space, the paper asks how religiosity, or secularity for that matter, is practiced in the everyday life of the schools 11 years after the adoption of the law, and how contested identities are negotiated. In exploring in-betweenness, this study also aims to show how the official discourse about secularization and modernity often dwells on the same religious symbolism as the discourse of those who think to oppose this discourse. The idea of a secular state takes a specific form, not in line with the Western European tradition. This study shows once again the importance of studying religions in context, as products of particular histories and meanings (Asad 1993).

This paper uses the conceptual lens of the "Thirdspace" as theorized by Edward W. Soja to capture the complex reality as experienced during debates about traditions and modernity, religion, and secularism (Soja 1996). My appropriation of the spatial metaphor of Thirdspace utilizes this concept as an interpretive tool to analyze dynamic changes. This theoretical lens allows for movement beyond dichotomies by capturing some aspects of fluidity.

Thirdspace as a "lived space" (Lefebvre 1991) is a wide and open concept, which can encompass "otherness" as in "heterotopia" (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986, 22–27), resistance, and hybridity (Bhabha 1990, 2012). It can describe a space which is constantly

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changing, acquiring meanings, and is creatively open to redefinition and expansion in new directions (Soja 1996). It can be a place for contested meanings. In Soja's concept, the Thirdspace stands in relation to and is different from the Firstspace and Secondspace. Firstspace is the material form, the mapping of space, and the location of things in space. Secondspace is a conceived space, our thoughts about space, and the concepts about how something should be done or function. The Thirdspace goes beyond this conceived idea and the official function of space. It is the lived experience in which the Firstspace and Secondspace come together, but it is more than just the sum of the two.

The Thirdspace allows us to see beyond binaries. It brings into focus the other, as something dynamic, hybrid, open, and creative. I use Thirdspace to talk about the creative use of space: how public schools in Georgia conceived as secular spaces are creatively used for religious purposes and more. Furthermore, I employ Thirdspace as a lens to look at the in-betweenness of such binaries as in secular versus religious, modern versus traditional in contemporary Georgia.

Spatiality and lived religion: a short overview

Anthropologists have mainly been interested in space as a site for power struggles and contestation, as Feld and Basso reflect:

> anthropologists have come to worry less about place in broad philosophical or humanistic terms than about places as sites of power struggles or about displacement as histories of annexation and resistance, thus ethnographic stories about place are increasingly about contestation. (Feld and Basso 1996, 4)[2]

Ethnographies show how the use of spaces and the formation and transformation of landscapes are practiced as a form of domination and representation (Ong 2011). Everyday life in the post-Socialist space is pervaded by discussions regarding the ownership of public spaces and the social and political dimensions of spatial changes (Grant 2014; Humphrey 2005; Manning 2009; Van Assche and Salukvadze 2012; Van Assche, Verschraegen, and Salukvadze 2010). Georgia is no exception to this. Governments in post-Soviet Georgia have been carrying out attempts to imprint the landscape and equip it with a message. One such attempt has been the motion to pass a law forbidding Soviet symbols in public spaces in order to shed off the Soviet past and modernize the country. New symbols emerge in place of the old symbols. They are replaced with new saints and "sacralities."

The recent history of Georgia is full of examples of how the state and the church compete for spaces by "hyperbuilding" – to use a term by Aihwa Ong (also applied by Bruce Grant for Baku, see Grant 2014, 504; Ong 2011, 209). Large futuristic buildings stand surrounded by numerous newly erected, often oversized churches and electrified crosses. Their form and architecture touch upon the debates about identity: the state has been building to create a new Georgia with architecture far removed from the existing style of old Tbilisi. The Georgian Orthodox Church builds in the traditional way, replicating existing forms.

The state and the influential Georgian Orthodox Church attempt to define the landscape. In her paper, Serrano (2010) aptly shows how the church broadens its claims to landscape and heritage. As Serrano highlights, for the places to be Georgian, they have to be Orthodox: "Building new churches is part of this strategy, since the motivation is not only to open new places of worship, but also to create a landscape reflecting the congruence of religion and national identity" (2010, 38). Along with new churches and crosses at almost every corner, villages and administrative units receive new names often perceived as the old and true ones and sometimes having religious Orthodox Christian connotations. In recent

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years, double signs have emerged at the entrances of several major regional centers: when entering a regional center, there are two signs a small distance apart. One shows the name of the place in administrative terms and the other shows which diocese of the Georgian Orthodox Church one is entering.

Schools are another realm where the state and the church compete with each other. In what follows, I explore how the hybrid mixtures in this contestation emerge. I focus on a village as a case study, adding examples from different parts of Georgia, as well as online sources, discussions, and public statements. This paper is structured in the following way: There is first a short description of the focus and methodology of my study, followed by an analysis of the school space from the perspectives of Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace. In order to do this, I first analyze the spatial dimension of the school; second, I proceed to describe its conceived meaning and symbolic centrality. Third, I analyze the lived space in the school as a Thirdspace experienced by teachers and students. The paper looks at what exactly is practiced in schools and what often multiple purposes the icon corners serve. Following this, I touch upon the hybridity and fluidity in domination as practiced in religious and secular domains, and how reconciled identities emerge.

Lived religion in a lived space

Contrary to the assumptions of earlier modernization and secularization theories, we see a general trend that the role of religion did not diminish. Scholars speak about "desecularization" (Berger 1999), of the revival of religion (Tomka 2011), of "belonging without believing" or "believing without belonging" (Davie 1990), and of "vicarious religion" (Davie 2006). The research of religion has become much more complex and interdisciplinary (Corrigan 2009, 159). It uses concepts developed in different disciplines to understand the varieties of religiosity felt in everyday life.

Religion in Georgia is a widely researched topic (for recent debates and an up-to-date review, see Agadjanian, Jödicke, and van der Zweerde 2014). Most of the studies deal with ethnicity and religion, how being an Orthodox Christian equates with being a Georgian, and how fluid the relations are between the state and the Georgian Orthodox Church (Andronikashvili and Maisuradze 2010; Charles 2010; Grdzelidze 2010; Janelidze 2014; Serrano 2010; Zedania et al. 2012; Zviadadze 2014, 2015). The majority of researchers look at religiosity in the dominant discourse, that of the state or of the religious institutions. To primarily look at religiosity outside its space, as a part of daily life, as it is lived and experienced, is a rather new tendency and an understudied area in the case of Georgia, where surveys show very high religiosity, especially in everyday life.[3]

As research in the last decades has shown, religious life was not contained solely in churches (or in any established institutions), nor did it hide in the private sphere or turn into the "believing without belonging" (Davie 1990). We know that religious life extends outside religious institutions and is lived in unexpected spaces (Ammerman 2007a, 2007b; Berger 1999; Luckmann 1967). It has a profound impact on private and public life. As Casanova (1994, 5) argues: "Religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well theories of modernization had reserved for them." An approach of lived religion has been adopted to capture the diverse forms of religiosity in everyday life in recent years. It looks at religiosity as it is experienced outside the institutions. This paper looks at spaces of religiosity in the schools. Looking from the official perspective, public school should be an unlikely place for religiosity. Nevertheless, as Ammerman (2007b, 9) puts it: "Everyday religion, then, may happen in unpredictable places."

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This paper is part of an ongoing three-year project aiming to explore everyday religiosity among Georgian youth. The larger study is designed as a multi-sited ethnography. The project aims to explore how religiosity in everyday life looks, how it is practiced, and what the meanings of different parts of the patchwork of religiosity are. A part of the project focuses on spaces where religion is lived out. The ethnographic fieldwork exploring spaces of religiosity in and outside religious institutions was carried out in 2015 and 2016. This particular paper centers on ethnography in Imereti, rural West Georgia, in 2014–2016. I have placed my observations from a village in Imereti alongside a series of interviews with current and former students of public schools, teachers, and decision-makers from different parts of Georgia below in order to explore the hybrid character of changes, formation, and transformation.[4] The students and former school attendants I talked to were male and female, age group 15–22 years. The teachers I interviewed were mainly women of varying age groups, ranging from 25 to 55 years. The directors of the schools and former decisions-makers were male and female, older than 30 years.

Religion in public schools as Thirdspace

The Imeretian village "R" is a small place with a population of approximately 500 people; many of them look for seasonal employment abroad while moving between Georgia, Greece, Italy, and Russia. The otherwise poor village has two functions, earning it acclaim from the adjacent villages. One of the functions is secular and the other one is religious. "R" has a public school for general education along with a kindergarten. Children from the neighboring village come here to get an education. It also serves as an employment destination for teachers and administration coming from adjoining communities. Furthermore, the village stands out from neighboring villages as having a medieval church, the oldest one in the area. It is a beloved destination for Sunday services for Christians from other villages, where there are either no or only newly built churches, usually perceived as less sacred in Georgia (Manning 2008). The school stands in the center of the village, with the church at the beginning of the settlement. The landscape of this village offers two axes, *mundi* and *ruris* (to paraphrase Eliade [1961]), as geographical and symbolic centers.

The above-mentioned two markers have remained important throughout the twentieth century and well into twenty-first century. The church is located at the entrance to the village. Though the church was initially closed during the Soviet period and reopened in the 1960s only to be closed again in the 1970s, the building has been there to be cared for and to be proud of as a testament to being Georgian, to the "oldness" of the settlement, and to the sacred. The church cemetery remained functional throughout the Soviet years. The church reopened at the end of the 1990s and has had several priests since then. Now a priest comes several times a week from Kutaisi (the second largest city in Georgia). He is one of the most respected persons in the village. He is often invited to *supras* (traditional Georgian parties) and usually takes the role of the much-respected *tamada* (toastmaster). The church services are very popular. New meanings and new practices emerge in this church, especially those relating to gender, which are perceived as old and proper. The space underwent some modifications to accommodate changed practices; the male and female members of the congregation are segregated during the services. When entering the church they stand in two strictly separated groups with females to the right of the priest and males to the left. The "female part" of the building also houses a small counter where a lady sells candles. Women are assigned with cleaning and selling the candles, while male members act as helpers during the service. The priest has chosen thirteen male members of the congregation for the function of assisting him during the services. Dressed

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up in Orthodox Church garments, they enjoy popularity and are proud representatives of their families. Male members of the church receive communion first and are treated with much more respect than the women congregants. "Men come first. It has always been so" – explains a young mother to her five-year-old daughter and pulls her back.[5]

The village people have renovated the church in recent years, merging the old with the new. Old plaques with medieval inscriptions on graves were replaced. The church got new frescoes, new icons. Some Soviet-era gravestones in the cemetery were painted with new burial crosses.

The school building stands in the center of the village. It is seen as the achievement of the village during the Soviet period. This village only had a "traveling" school without its own building well into the 1930s, mainly using houses belonging to the old aristocracy for several weeks at a stretch. A rather large building in the center of the village was built through the efforts of the local intelligentsia in 1968–1970, replacing a small wooden school building.

The school with its central location has been a multivalent place ever since its construction. It is one of the main employers of white-collar workers. The teachers as well as the local doctor are probably the most respected people in the village, the guardians of morality. The school building was the main center of the village during the Soviet period and has been hosting those visiting the village since that time. The local administrative office has never played this representative role. Two adjoining villages shared this administration, the so-called *soflis sabcho* (village council) during the Soviet era. It was housed together with the post office, a medical office, and a library in a building between the two villages, belonging to neither of them exclusively. It has never acquired any symbolic meaning, being partly demolished in the 1990s. The building is almost empty now; only a small grocery shop is there. The cloister was moved to a new location; the library ceased to exist. The new local administration office was moved to a new, nondescript location.

The school stands there as a representative of the state. It is newly renovated, has a large front yard, and is equipped with a new library. The state defines the financial and educational aspects of the public school. It has tried to define the school's space as well, since 2005. When the law was passed in 2005, icons were largely removed from the educational space by schools. The state tried to occupy the empty space and replace the religious symbols with symbols of the new state. It was also connected to attempts by the new government to strengthen the idea of Georgia as a multiethnic country, to expand the notion of citizenship, and to make it more inclusionary (George 2009; Wheatley 2009).

The Rose Revolution had the ambition of starting a new state with new symbolism. A new anthem, a new flag, and a new coat of arms were introduced. Paradoxically, the new flag and the coat of arms were centered on Christian symbols. The new symbols had to become a part of everyday life, so the minister of education issued a decree ordering the public schools to start the day with the new anthem. The best student from the past week had the honor (and the duty) to raise the new flag. The government tried to introduce a kind of civic religion in public schools. It very much resembled the American model (Bellah 1967). A promotional video combines the new symbols with Christian Orthodox identity markers in a remarkable way: the new anthem is performed in front of the Trinity Cathedral, erected as the new glory of the Georgian Orthodox Church.[6]

The school's response to the changes and what is practiced in the lived space of the school were the questions I wanted to explore when visiting the school in the village. Natela, the teacher of Georgian literature, is my guide to the school. The first thing I see when entering the school is a large banner citing the words of a famous writer who visited the village more than half a century ago. As the words suggest, he was delighted

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Figure 1. The school entrance, icon corner/shrine. Imereti, summer 2015.

with its people and nature. Right at the threshold there is a self-made "shrine" with Orthodox Christian icons and candles (Figure 1). Students entering the school must pass the icon corner (as such shrines are usually called) to proceed to the classrooms. "In the morning, when we enter, we cross ourselves and go to classes," Nina, a female student, tells me.

This ritual, practiced on the school's "front stage," is a meaningful part of the everyday life of the school. It is not isolated, nor is the centrality of the place by chance. For many teachers, it defines the mission of the schools. As a slogan on many school buildings proclaims, the mission of the schools is to teach the three pillars of patriotism: "Language, Fatherland, and Faith." This slogan hangs right above the shrine in the Imeretian school. The threshold ritual of crossing oneself has a clear meaning for Natela: "We, as Georgians, just do it. We have always done it this way," she tells me when commenting on the shrine at the entrance. Natela is in her early 50s and became a teacher during the Soviet period. Though icon corners are a rather new development, it feels like a very old tradition. It helps her perform her identity and perform her duty as a guardian of Georgianness. The threshold ritual of crossing oneself is an event by which the Georgian identity of the students and the teachers is practiced. Following Brubaker and Cooper, here the Georgian identity occurs in practice " … as a category of everyday social experience … . Deployed by ordinary actors" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 4).

The entrance acts as some kind of a ritual threshold.[7] It is liminal and hybrid (Turner, Harris, and Park 1983). The school acts as a quasi-religious building, using religion to its own ends. It shapes the space accordingly. The school needs legitimation to increase its own symbolic meaning, to create a threshold evoking a response in students that they are entering something special. The school itself "steals" the space from the church by making its own space "sacred" for its own purposes. It gets the legitimation to act as a metaphorical "temple." Schools and universities in Georgia are often referred to as "sacred," as "temples of knowledge," or "holy temples" alluding to their very high importance in the metaphorical sense. In a certain way, the two places in the village compete with each

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other. The school imitates the church and the church imitates the school. Priests in Georgia often act as teachers, also in a literal sense, as the name for a priest chosen as an advisor is *modzghvari* (teacher in old Georgian). People are poaching: taking what they need from the church and from the school.

Religiosity is very much present in the classrooms, especially in the rooms for literature, history, and art (Figure 2). The composition of other icon corners and the display of religious symbols in classrooms have a clear ethnic connotation. In Georgia, schools often



Figure 2. History classroom, the school. Imereti, summer 2015.

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combine patriotic discourse with religious and didactical functions when choosing the pictures for the classroom display. These are usually beatified historical figures and writers.

The adoration of historical figures, writers, and scientists in general has a long history in different cultures, Ancient Greece being one of the most prominent examples. Georgia is no exception to this. The Soviet era with its proclaimed atheism gave rise to the cults of writers, historians, and scientists. They are revered: their words are repeated on a daily basis in memorization as homework; the students are awarded when they manage to stay very close to the original formulations perceived as true. Despite the fact that the new national curriculum tries to encourage analytical skills in students, critical attitudes are not expected and in many cases not tolerated.

The Georgian Orthodox Church beatified many of the revered writers and scholars after the 1990s. Now they are revered writers, scientists, and, at the same time, saints. This duality often helps schools to overcome restrictions and display the pictures (which can also act as icons) in classrooms. Spaces can dominate. The authority of the displays disciplines and imposes meanings. One student from an east Georgian village remembers how the display of a "writer-turned-saint" hindered the middle-school children from getting crazy and running around during recess. One time, when students had accidently dropped a picture of Ilia Chavchavadze, a very secular writer and public figure from the nineteenth century, who ironically was beatified in the 1990s, Giorgi exclaimed, "You can't do it, he is a saint!" Recalling this case, Giorgi adds, laughing: "I just wanted to be a better Georgian." (Interview with Giorgi, 10 March, Tbilisi).

A school had great significance in the Soviet state as the place for molding citizens, with its emphasis on the "upbringing" of students (Jones 1994, 4–6). This aforementioned tendency continues. A teacher explains in a very Althusserian way (Althusser 1970): "We are here not only to teach specific subjects, but to raise proper Georgians." She is a teacher from a public school in Tbilisi and objects to attempts by the school principal to remove Orthodox icons from her classroom. As the deputy director of the school told me in an interview:

> Our director goes to the classroom almost every week and takes down the icons. We have a multi-ethnic school in Isani (a neighborhood in Tbilisi) and our director is very sensitive to those issues. This teacher brings new icons the next day. "It is my mission," she responds smiling. (Interview with Mari, Tbilisi, spring 2016)

Other schools and teachers choose to hide the displayed religiosity. Sometimes the time is covert. Since the law forbids devotional practices during teaching, an alternative time such as recess and alternative spaces, such as corridors in the school building (outside the classrooms), are used for prayers. The shrines, icons, and religious paraphernalia in this and many other schools I visited fulfill multiple functions for the people involved. The threshold shrine alludes to the metaphorical "sacrality" of the school and its special meaning in the community. This gives more authority to what they teach. It also fulfills their proclaimed mission to raise "true Georgians." As elsewhere in Georgia, the school in the Imeretian village also uses other places in its space to invoke "the chosen past" for performing identity: the classrooms are decorated with pictures of old churches, with dioramas of the churches as student projects. It is a space within a space, which has the meaning of time or better the timelessness of being Georgian as perceived by the teachers and students. It surely has a nostalgic quality as well.

The in-betweenness of symbols

Sometimes the display itself is in-between. The multivalence of symbols allows for this kind of poaching, when everybody gets their share. Sometimes the law and the lawless

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share the same symbols (Herzfeld 2014, 109) by relying on cultural intimacy. Such is the case with Saint George and the new meanings attributed to him. When recalling his school, a Muslim student tells about his school in Tbilisi: "We had no religious symbols or icons at our school whatsoever" (Interview, winter 2016). The school has a huge painting of St. George in its main room. How come St. George can be ignored as something belonging to the Christian Church as in the example above? I encountered the display of St. George standing for secular, state, or religious meanings in many schools during my ethnography. The following short overview should give an insight as to how the multivalence of symbols can be employed for different purposes.

After the Rose Revolution, the figure of Saint George, a very popular saint in most regions of Georgia, became the central figure in state symbolism: he is the main figure of the new coat of arms. His statue was erected as the central monument on Freedom Square in Tbilisi, claiming the place where Lenin once stood in Soviet Georgia. The state declared two days celebrating St. George in a year as a holiday. The state played with the multivalence of symbols as well and hoped to combine the Christian symbol with the beginnings of the new state, which should be more inclusionary.

St. George is quite unique to Georgia as different groups and minorities identify him as their own. He is celebrated in many cults, Christian or non-Christian, in mountain cults, as well as in shared festivities among Christians and Muslims in Georgia. Moreover, what St. George represented for the new government was beyond his Christian "affiliation" the symbolic political importance of both holidays related to St. George: 23 November is "Giorgoba" (St. George's Day) and the Rose Revolution happened on that very day in 2003. The second "Giorgoba" was lesser known by then, celebrated on 6 May. But again, it was on 6 May 2004 when one of the biggest success stories of the United National Movement was achieved, freeing Adjara from the corrupt local government and making it governable again.

The golden statue of St. George on Freedom Square was erected amid protests by different groups of society: by the guardians of the "true face" of the city, on one hand, and by religious groups trying to preserve the "true meaning of the saint," on the other hand. The statue is also open to uses and interpretations: it is a Christian saint, but also revered by Georgian Muslims. Many of them take part in celebrations for St. George at common sacred sites. It is Christian, yet it is often perceived as pagan. It is religious and secular at the same time. Every year it is used for secular purposes, upsetting many believing Christians and pleasing others: a Christmas tree is made around it and the statue itself serves as the top of the Christmas tree instead of a Christmas star. Christian believers cross themselves when driving around it or utter their uneasiness for (mis)using it as a decoration.

Saint George is one of the examples where the state and the Georgian Orthodox Church compete. Other displays favored by the schools include Georgian kings, especially King David the Builder, famous for his inclusionary politics among other things. Georgian public schools make use of the same source for symbolism as the state. Students assemble their identities by appropriation. When asked about who they are or what it means to be Georgian, not surprisingly, students as well as teachers will start explaining their Georgian identity from a historical perspective: how they came to be as they are now. The display of Orthodox Christian symbols in public schools alludes to one of the central roles of religion in public spaces: the church is increasingly there in the public space as a "safeguard for collective memory, even for those who are not great believers and who rarely go to church" (Pace 2006, 45).[8] What the students and the teachers declare while performing religiosity is foremost their Georgianness. The discourse around Georgianness is built along the axis of nostalgia. Herzfeld would call it structural nostalgia (Herzfeld 2014). It is also most noticeably constructed along the fear of losing this identity.

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Modernity as the other

While performing and asserting identity, there is a need to define oneself against someone who is or identifies as "other." It can be a power coming from outside or it can be an internal other. As Nodia puts it:

> While trying to establish the nation-state, as well as after this goal has been achieved, nations are usually forced to deal with those who reside in the national home but do not easily fit in because they do not share the relevant identity markers. (2009, 88)

This can be a group of any kind or it can be a project. In the case of Georgia, the perceived threat of "losing one's roots" has been associated with the modernization project. The state, along with intellectuals supporting the ruling party, behaved initially as true Weberians: they saw the modernization of Georgia as going hand in hand with the secularization of the country. With the proclaimed modernization project of the government in 2003–2012, attempts were made to reform the educational system, including general education. The new law, as well as the introduction of the framework for the new national curriculum, was part of an attempt to modernize the country. It should also end proselytism and help build a new type of multiethnic and multireligious national state. But the discourse of the state, the symbols it employs, and relations with the dominant church have been all but consequent.

The discourse of the state has been framing the change as modern and European (Janelidze 2014; Serrano 2010). The secularizing law of 2005 was perceived as a turning point and became part of the discourse regarding modernization.[9] At the same time, it also triggered fears of losing "Georgianness." School reform has been perceived and is still debated as bringing "secular indoctrination," "the abolishment of history," "the rooting out of Georgianness," and the loss of the very "essence of self."[10] The fear of losing identity while facing increasing globalization is nothing unusual.[11]

Since ethnic identity was so closely connected to religious identity, every attempt to remove religion from the classroom was perceived as an attack on identity as well. In many cultures, religion stands as a proxy for ethnic identity. As Pace remarks, for many European countries religion seems "to function as a guardian of the collective identity and memory … they can reconstruct a romantic sense of being a society, a collective identity rooted in the Christian pattern of values … " (2006, 37). Orthodox Christianity has become a true marker of identity in recent decades in Georgia. Over the years, a lifestyle including the physical practices associated with it has emerged. Certain aspects of this Georgianness are newly defined, though perceived as very old and correct or "true" as Georgians would define it. While switching between the past, present, and future, people reorient toward the past in certain circumstances, which seems the most relevant (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 964). In their 1998 paper, Emirbayer and Mische explore the ability of social actors to be "embedded within many such temporalities at once, they can be said to be oriented toward the past, the future, and the present at any given moment" (1998, 964). In this process, we can also speak of the "chosen glory," or "the chosen trauma" (Volkan 1988).

"Georgianness" includes a certain way of life, which is labeled as more morally superior. The church is there against the perceived thread of amorality, which belongs to the constructed "other." As in many other countries, the Orthodox Church tries to act as a guardian of moral purity, as a "specialist in public ethics" (Pace 2006, 45). The fear that modernity would "infiltrate" and make everybody "faceless citizens of the world" is present there.[12] The protest against being mixed up in a melting pot of world citizens causes heated debates even after 11 years and has strong religious connotations. The

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term used most often in this discourse of fear is "gadagvareba," which literally means *the loss of one's own family name* but also *degradation* and *debilitation*. This word links the loss of old ways with negative developments. There is a fear of indoctrination coming from "modernity," from "Europeanization," and from "globalization" that threatens to change them. Such a reaction to globalization is rather a global phenomenon and not surprising.[13]

The introduction of the changes beginning in 2005 has been marked by negotiations. As one of the decision-makers in the education reform of the United National Movement told me, every change, every step to diminish the role of the church in schools had its price, often monetary. The changes were negotiated between the parliament, the government, and the church at the top level. It took a hybrid form in everyday life. Debates in the media show how similar the discussions were in the following years.[14]

This constant negotiation of meanings, political nodes, the play between old and new, between the modern and the traditional, bargaining, and hybridity mark the practices and the places. (The domain of religion is no less marked by tactical compromises. Everything is fluid: the changing landscapes with competing religious and secular buildings, the schools with official and unofficial forms and meanings.[15]

Reconciled identities

Several reports about the presence of religion in public schools stress how much proselytism and indoctrination are still part of the everyday life in public and private schools in Georgia, surely a very concerning trend. My experiences from the fieldwork in Georgia show that the identities carried out are much more complex. The Imeretian school adheres to the Georgian Orthodox Church, but it is not the only affiliation nor does it completely obey. This hybridity is apparent spatially as well. Within the vicinity of the shrine, there is a declaration of human rights and a bill explaining the rights and freedoms. The school opens its doors to different international organizations. A larger developmental organization systematically conducts training and workshops on gender roles, tolerance, and diversity. Furthermore, the migration of mostly female family members to European countries such as Greece and Italy shapes the attitudes of students. "I made two icon corners for them, but in their minds they are gone," the history teacher tells me.

We were sitting in a classroom one day with five students in their mid-teens, talking about their lives in the village. The girls, 15–16 years of age, talk about their lives and their future plans. Natela is there with us. One student shares her thoughts: "We have some people who are not baptized. There are no Muslims in the school otherwise. But even if there were, we know we have to treat all of them equally. People can be different." She reflects on her thoughts as something acquired, something new that she had learned. "There is a family, who are Jehovah's witnesses. It does not matter. They are the same," says another. When I talk to them about gender roles as practiced in the church, they object: "It is all hypocrisy. It can't be true. My grandmother is the boss at home, not my grandfather. We had some training here and we know better." And then they go on telling about one of the international organizations primarily working on agricultural projects in the region, which organizes different activities for schools as a side project as well. When they recall some of the projects and trainings, topics about tolerance and gender roles come to the foreground.

"They are totally different. My generation thought, we as Georgians should be Orthodox," says Natela listening to the students. "My own girls are the same, modern," she says about her daughters. One of them emigrated to Germany, the other married in Greece. The

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girls switch between their identities: they talk about their plans to become very successful and independent women: "I will marry late, studies come first," says one, who wants to study finance. Then she switches to delightful memories, when they had organized a pilgrimage to see the grave of a holy monk 300 km away together with the local church.

I asked the students if they often go to church. "Sadly not," one of them answers. "I have so much to do for the school lessons," she says apologetically. She is not wearing any religious symbols either. The religiosity as practiced in the school, mainly limited to performing the ethnic identity, is enough for her and many others. The school remains a center for her goals: to study and become a great lawyer. This is a space where her religiosity, her identity, and not least her gendered identity are performed in a way that goes beyond the dichotomies of the religious or secular. Students and teachers think it is important to perform their identity (religious and ethnic). At the same time, different aspects of Western culture are appreciated or even seen as one's own. What we see now in Georgia can maybe be interpreted as a process of hybridization, as a creative response to the modernization process, and as attempts to resist absorption and losing identity. When talking to the students, I see how they negotiate and reconcile different identities. What emerges in this reconciliation process is a Thirdspace for their identities. It seems like they are picking different parts, which at first glance do not fit together, and are assembling them in a manner that makes sense to them. The space (in this case of schools) is constructed and constructing and open to many meanings and interpretations.[16]

Conclusion

This study was an attempt to look at lived religion in a lived space. For this purpose, I took the space of a public school as a space of representation, hybridity, and reconciliation. It is a contested space, designed by the state as a secular one, but still housing everyday religiosity in many places. Despite the fact that the law regarding general education, adopted in 2005, forbids the display of any religious symbols for devotional purposes, proper shrines have remained in many public schools over the years.

This paper focused mainly on one of the schools in the Imeretian village using ethnographic observations and interviews. The lived space of the school is marked not only by its location, centrality, function, expectations, and regulations, but also by the resistance and hybridity when opening up for creative use and interpretations.

There is no clear answer as to what extent the law has been implemented and how it has changed experiences. As some of the interviews show, the law of general education had a positive impact for a peaceful coexistence in some multiethnic regions. "Our village has so many Azeris. We all live here and go to each other's celebrations. Prior to 2005 there were religious pictures in my classroom at school, mainly cutouts from newspapers. Afterwards there were none," says a 20-year-old university student from a village in east Georgia. Other regions continue to remain more problematic. The teachers think it is their function to proselytize: "We all pray: Christians, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses. It all ends up great. They will all become Christians," says one of the teachers. The state is sometimes also confused. In a report from a multiethnic south Georgian town, the municipality proudly announces how they bought presents for every school graduate through the city budget. Christian students received icons as presents. "The two Muslim students were presented with paintings," per the press release.[17] In Adjara, a region with a mostly Muslim Georgian population, proselytism is still maybe the most profound. "If I see a Christian student with an icon, I don't do anything, but I will not allow someone to bring a Bible or a Quran here,"[18] says a school

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director. The fieldwork as well as the discourse of politicians shows the impossibility of seeing the reality through binary glasses.

In this paper, I used the theoretical lens of Thirdspace as developed by Edward Soja, first, to look into the space itself as a bearer of hybridity; second, I used Thirdspace as an interpretive tool to look at the in-betweenness of the secular and religious in politics and discourse after 2005. The Thirdspace stands in relation to the Firstspace and Secondspace. From the perspective of the Firstspace, the school is there on the map, in the center of the village. The school also stands there as an achievement of the village and houses hopes and expectations. It is conceived (from the Secondspace perspective) as the place where children get their education. Not least it is there, as something belonging to and representing the state (the state regulates its functioning, takes care of it, renovates, etc.). The shrine at the entrance gives this space another meaning than conceived by the state.

By designing the shrine and displaying the icons, the school adheres to the Georgian Orthodox Church, while disobeying state regulations: the law regarding general education introduced in 2005. Religion still continues to be a part of the curriculum for educational purposes, especially in history and literature when a corresponding era or piece of literature is being discussed. History teachers along with teachers of Georgian literature became kind of like guardians of religious and national identity. Nevertheless, the school shapes its space and religiosity to meet its own ends, thus not completely obeying the dominant church. The display of religiosity helps them establish their role as guardians of collective memory and national identity. It is the "other" they resist, often theorized as "modernity" and secularization, amid fears of losing their identity. On the other hand, students embrace changes. Different actors as well as labor migration play their roles in shaping the hybrid identities of the students.

The paper tried to look beyond the dichotomies of the dominant and dominated, and to show the fluidity between those categories. According to Homi Bhabha, the existing differences (between cultures, between groups in the same culture) as well as the process of translation create a hybridspace, which in itself, as a Thirdspace, is interesting and "enables other positions to emerge" (Bhabha 1990, 211). But the changes are constant, the identities liquid to put it with Zigmunt Bauman, and the power relation fluid with no final answers regarding the strong and the weak.

Thirdspace as a perspective allows us to see beyond binaries. When we talk about resistance, the roles seem to be strictly assigned: someone is weak and tries to resist the other, who is strong. As we have seen, none of the dominant powers is free from being dominated. The spaces are used creatively to accommodate different meanings, to reconcile the old with the new.

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Notes

1. See http://mes.gov.ge/old/upload/editor/file/Brdzanebebi/2010/Tebervali/kanoni%20ganatlebis%20shesaxeb.pdf.
2. For quite a long time, spatiality in the study of religion was important mainly for housing the sacred space (alongside with earlier authors such as Mircea Eliade and others), as something geographical that invokes and shapes religiosity. Later with the spatial turn, the interest has been directed toward space as constructed and constructing, and toward interdisciplinary understandings of space (Corrigan 2009). Anthropologists examine social relationships that produce certain

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experiences and perceptions of places, and how their meanings are created (Serje 2009). For a great overview, see Hervieu-Léger (2002).

3. From Caucasus Research Resource Centers, "Caucasus Barometer" (time-data set Georgia). http://www.crrccenters.org/caucasusbarometer/. Accessed March 21, 2016.
4. The names have been changed, with the exact location remaining undisclosed, as the practice of displaying icons for devotion is against the law.
5. It stands in contrast to the so-called domestic religiosity (term coined by Dragadze 1993), where women still perform the most important roles.
6. From https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBHDQPIjDyc&feature=youtu.be. The religiosity in schools gives insight as to how the religion is lived out as an ethnic category; for studies about different countries, see works such as Orsi (2010) and the volume on everyday religion (Ammerman 2007a).
7. The importance of threshold rituals is widely studied (Turner [1969] 1995; Van Gennep [1909] 2011).
8. The topic of how specifically Orthodox Christianity stands as a proxy for ethnicity is widely researched and will not be further elaborated upon here (Nodia 2009; Zedania 2011). For the display of religiosity in Armenian schools, see the article by Mkrtchyan (2014). I am grateful to my anonymous reviewer for pointing out another study, by Kapferer (1988), exploring how "nationalism makes political religious."
9. In the analysis published by *Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center* (EMC 2014), the authors state that

> an important change in governmental policy is connected to a new law which was adopted in 2005 and manifested the willingness of the government to implement an effective policy regarding the protection of religious neutrality and the principles of secularism. This turning point in educational policy groups problems and challenges in "before 2005" and "after 2005."

10. For a further discussion of this topic, see Batiashvili (2012).
11. As Blum (2007, 15) observes, the trends of homogenization are met by the counter-trends of rejection.
12. Recently, the introduction of a new subject in social studies at the school level, teaching several issues related to gender, equality, LGBT rights, etc., was met with huge resistance from conservative politicians, the Orthodox Parent Union, and the church. The Orthodox Parent Union claimed that the idea behind those subjects in school is to detach children from their identity and is against the nation and against family, and makes them "faceless citizens" of the world. The church issued a statement expressing concerns that the new subject would psychologically damage children. For the debates, see local media online (in Georgian): http://netgazeti.ge/life/96882/.
13. For Russia, see a recent dissertation by Naletova (2007, 146–147).
14. For debates in 2007, see the following link (in Georgian): http://en.alplus.am/5615.html.
15. The fluidity of these relations has been aptly studied in recent publications (Agadjanian, Jödicke, and van der Zweerde 2014; Janelidze 2014; Serrano 2010; Zviadadze 2015). The term itself is borrowed from Bauman (2005, 2013).
16. The space itself changes attitudes; it can discipline and it can enhance meanings. It is open to multiple interpretations. The display changes the meaning of the space as well. It is also open and reversible. When referring to his home, Giorgi tells me how his mother covers the icons in the dining room when guests and a big party are expected. She feels bad that the icons should face the party and spares them from the loud Georgian celebrations with excessive drinking.
17. Samkhretis Karibje, 25 May 2015. Accessed 5 May 2016. http://sknews.ge/index.php?newsid=5600.
18. From Netgazeti, 16 May 2015. Accessed 20 March 2016. http://netgazeti.ge/life/31755/.

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