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"Our Beer": Ethnographic Brands in Postsocialist Georgia

ABSTRACT Although Georgia is known for its wines, industrial production of beer far outstrips industrial wine production for local markets: wine consumption occurs in ritual contexts in which new wine, typically purchased from peasant producers, is preferred; bottled, aged wines are primarily for exports. Beer, therefore, is a key area in which industrial production for indigenous consumers has been elaborated. Such goods are packaged and presented as being both ecologically "pure" and following "traditional" methods, often referencing "ethnographic" materials about traditional life in brand images, even as they proclaim their reliance on Western technologies. [Keywords: semiotics, brand, production, consumption, postsocialism]

GEORGIA IS THE LAND OF WINE. In fact, many Georgians believe, and it is not an outlandish claim, that viniculture may have originated on Georgian soil. But this article is not about Georgian wines but Georgian beers. Our question is this: If Georgia is known most of all for its wines, why, under postsocialism, are Georgian beer brand names more salient in contemporary public discourse and public consumption? Why, in general, has the marketing of Georgian beers, and not wines, become the central emblem of resurgent Georgian national industries after socialism? Our second question builds on the first: How have Georgian marketers linked beer to ethnographic images of the Georgian nation inherited from presocialist and socialist ethnography, using ethnographic images of Georgian tradition to build national brands? Here Georgian beer marketers have capitalized on the fact that while most Georgians drink only wine in traditional ritual contexts, beer is the traditional ritual drink in certain remote mountain communities that are also the exemplary objects of Georgian ethnography, allowing a drink consumed in informal contexts of sociability in contemporary urban contexts to be clothed in the mantle of authentic ethnographic traditionalism exemplified by traditional technology and ritual contexts of consumption associated with mountainous regions of Georgia. Under socialism, the Georgian economy was noted neither for its branded products nor for its beer. In fact, socialist-period beer was so bad that toasts given with such beer generally meant, and indeed still mean, the opposite of what was said. Under postsocialist capitalism, by contrast, beer brands have become the most prominent

sort of indigenous product and the most well-known indigenous brands.

But Georgian brand makers produce brands that ground their products in the ethnographic halo of authentic Georgian tradition while at the same time indexing European technology. We will argue that this dual lineage in which Georgian products are presented as being part of both Georgian tradition and European modernity indexes the ambivalent way that Georgia is itself imagined as an exile or asymptote of European modernity. It also indexes the ambivalent status of branded goods in general. Under socialism, *brand* was almost by definition an attribute of goods from the "Imaginary West" (Yurchak 2006). Hence, the category of "indigenous brand" would appear to be a contradiction in terms, unless such goods can be shown to have a dual lineage that is both Georgian and Western.

THE SOCIALIST CONTEXT OF POSTSOCIALIST BRANDS

Part of understanding this story entails understanding how socialism is imagined in relationship to capitalism, especially regarding the category of brand. The Soviet Union may no longer exist in reality, but it continues to live a rich, second life as a mythological, demonic Other in the world of Western neoliberal discourse. The productivist ideology of the USSR, it is said, privileged production for production's sake—hence ignoring the consumer. And that, the argument continues, was why it died: it subscribed to an outdated ontology that privileged needs over desires, and on this basis presumed to produce for, and dictate, the needs

of its people, rather than cater to the desires of its consumers (Verdery 1996:20–29). And it failed even to do this: its products were shoddy, nonuse values parading as use values, and often there were not enough of them (see Fehervary 2005:ch. 6 on the “shortcomings of ‘shortage’”). Even when there was enough, there was not enough choice between them: there were no brands. The Soviet economy failed to produce, and part of this failure was that it failed to produce a symbolic, immaterial component (brand) to complement the material product. An entirely typical example of this mythology is the following extract from a vociferous “defense of brands,” which posits the West as a land of brand abundance in contrast to the grey and joyless wasteland of brandlessness of the erstwhile workers’ paradise. Here the essentialism favoring need over desire is complemented by one favoring the material over the immaterial, the product over the brand.

THE CASE FOR BRANDS

Although in the West we increasingly bemoan consumerism, brands are anything but superficial. They are an important indicator of economic health. At its most basic, a brand is a way for a product or service to distinguish itself from another. Like a string of would-be suitors, brands compete for our attention. To win it, they must offer a superior product, a lower price or some intangible attraction such as exclusivity, from which consumers stand to gain. The more brands there are and the more ferociously they compete for our hearts and wallets, the more benefits we will garner. Critics of brands like to claim that big brands stifle competition and reduce choice. To see how wrong that argument is we only have to look at the former Soviet Union. In communist Russia, brands did not need to exist because there was no competition. Everything was supplied by state-owned companies at set prices. Since there was no incentive for suppliers to improve quality or innovate, the result was economic stagnation and falling living standards. [Ahmad 2005:14]

In this popular definition, the term *brands* has two components: first, they are distinctive and unique associations of product to producer and, second, they are like “a string of would-be suitors,” addressing the desires of the customer. According to this story, the Soviet economy did not have brand in either sense. And we know the Socialist economy died. All we need to make an argument is to add the word *therefore*.¹

But the (Soviet) socialist legacy on this, like many other issues, is far more complex than this simple-minded story would have it. The postsocialist phenomenon of brand, which is the topic of this article, reflects this complex heritage. Socialist products in certain sectors were indeed branded. Items defined as basic, everyday needs (bread, cheese, butter, milk, etc.) may well have been brandless use values, but “common luxuries” and novelties also proliferated and were distinguished by brand names: for example, there were cigarettes like Kazbek, Kosmos, and Stiuardessa, and there were brands of chocolates, cognac, wine, and, most of all, vodka, and so on (Gronow 2003). In this way

the distribution of brand under socialism seemed to illustrate a basic ontological divide in socialist culture between orders of products: staples and luxuries, bread and roses, universal human needs (brandless) and specific human desires (branded). Importantly, the same sphere of common luxuries (Soviet or Western) like chocolates, perfumes, and alcohol that were branded in the socialist economy also played an important role as prestigious gift valuables underlying the second economy of informal *blat* (informal exchanges; for more on *blat* gifts, see Ledeneva 1998:ch. 5).

Such indigenous branded goods also formed material core of the Soviet concept of “culturedness” (*kul'turnost*). *Culturedness* stands for state-directed changes in socialist consumption, sometimes mistakenly identified in neoliberal consumerist discourse as a sort of socialist embourgeoisement, evidence that socialism is simply covertly a form of capitalism, whose motivational categories (such as consumers and desires) are taken to be natural and universal. Culturedness (and branded goods were part of the campaign for culturedness) was a state-directed campaign to reform everyday life in general, including matters of personal hygiene, public comportment, and home décor. In general, culturedness could be displayed in the consumption of everyday objects like curtains and lampshades as well as high culture like the literature of Tolstoy and Pushkin (*kul'tura*; Dunham 1976; Fitzpatrick 1992; Kelly and Volkov 1998). As Catriona Kelly and Vadim Volkov describe it,

The brilliance of the *kul'turnost* ideology lay partly in the fact that it was a fusion of two value systems previously thought incompatible, those of the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia. . . . *Kul'turnost* also achieved the hitherto impossible feat of equating consumer goods and cultural artifacts, both now respectable appurtenances of the new Soviet citizen. . . . The ideology of *kul'turnost* deconstructed the binary opposition, creating a world in which a nicely bound collection of Tolstoy's works could, with perfect dignity, stand next door to a lustreware teaset, looking down on a tea-table laid with lace doilies and a tablelamp. [Kelly and Volkov 1998:304–305]

Just as socialist ideologies of *kul'turnost* (“directed desires” in Kelly and Volkov’s felicitous phrase) are uncannily similar to embourgeoisement of consumption, so too socialist brands are uncannily similar to capitalist brands, yet at the same time irreducibly different. There is no mystery about the source of these similarities: such common luxuries, the objects of Soviet “cultured trade,” were socialist competitors with, and imitations of, both Western goods (Hessler 2001:458–459) and luxury goods that had been consumed by the former Russian nobility (Gronow 2003:33). The differences also emerge from the same dynamic: the *kul'turnost* model for consumption (and “socialist brands”) illustrates how Western bourgeois consumption as well as presocialist aristocratic consumption serves as an external model for emulation (not imitation) to create a specifically socialist modernity to which the idea of cultured trade was connected (Hessler 2001:459). As a result, here the categories of socialist modernity are uncannily familiar,

and, yet, strange, in a manner that parallels other such categories, such as public versus private, which as Susan Gal argues are also “so different . . . yet so eerily familiar” (Gal 2002:80) because they are addressed to overcoming binary oppositions within the social imaginary inherited from Tsarism (Manning 2004a), creating a new Soviet citizen: *homo Sovieticus*.

At the same time, actual Western brands (or imitations of them) also formed a category internal to socialist consumption: alongside these socialist branded goods (images of kul'turnost) circulated “firm” (Georgian: *sapirmo*; Russian: *firmennyye*) goods, these being goods bearing labels and brands from Western or East European socialist countries. If socialist brands represented state-directed emulation of Western capitalist consumption, firm goods represented (incarnated) the almost mythical “imaginary West” itself (Fehervary 2005:ch. 6; Yurchak 2006:ch. 5). For our purposes what is relevant here is that, on the one hand, socialist brands existed and defined a sphere of state-directed desires (kul'turnost) in consumption, but, on the other hand, the category of brand itself seemed to betoken capitalist “firm” goods by a kind of stereotypic association. The result was that brandlessness versus brand, firm goods versus indigenous brands, and even the opposition between state and black-market goods all produced complex, stable hierarchies of value internal to the socialist economy (Fehervary 2005:ch. 6; Yurchak 2006:ch. 5): in effect, a hierarchy of qualitative orders of goods with entailments on their circulation, forming a sort of socialist version of “spheres of exchange” (Bohannan 1955; Lemon 1998:39–44).

The mass arrival of goods with Western brands with the so-called transition from socialism to postsocialism in the early nineties changed this stable hierarchy, producing a “crisis of values” (Humphrey 2002:43; Lemon 1998). It became possible to compare socialist brands and Western ones concretely, at least those affordable luxuries that remained within the means of increasingly impoverished consumers. At the same time, the penetration of everyday consumption by certain salient Western brands (Snickers in Russia [Humphrey 2002:48] and Magna cigarettes in Georgia) allowed these brands to serve as “metasymbols” (Miller 1998) of the more general predicament of the transition (“the snickerization of Russia” [Gorham 2000:629], “the Epoch of Magna” in Georgia [Manning 2006a]).

Therefore, the legacy of socialism with respect to brand is a mixed one. Socialist modernity here, as elsewhere, is an uncanny other of Western modernity, involving oppositions both at the level of imagined stereotype and actual practice. Therefore, in broad outlines socialism remains relevant to understand the practices of brand producers in the postsocialist world (which is the focus of this article). On the one hand, brand serves as a stereotyped diacritic to distinguish Western goods (all of which were branded) from socialist ones (only some of which were); on the other hand, there were socialist brands but they indexed a rather different sort of real and imagined relationship between the producer (the state), the product, and the consumer than under capitalism. Indeed, in a market context that was by

definition noncompetitive, the “goodwill” associated with brands in capitalist contexts can serve neither as a competitive advantage nor as a form of intangible asset, a monetary valuation of the brand name as property, two of the most important elements of brands in Western capitalism. Therefore, whatever it is that socialist brands accomplish in terms of identification of the producer cannot be explained using the same terms. Similarly, socialist brands were aimed at inculcating and directing desires as part of the creation of a “cultured” *homo Sovieticus* (Fitzpatrick 1992; Kelly and Volkov 1998); they were not aimed at recognizing some naturalized or autonomously formed consumer desire (as are “lovetmarks”; see Foster 2005).

The point is that brands are not semiotically transparent symbolic accoutrements to material goods, spontaneously springing up by an additional corollary to humankind’s alleged natural propensity to truck and barter (and consume), nor are they completely transportable, carrying the same transparent meanings wherever they go, little vanguards of capitalism that could flow into the brandless vacuum of the socialist or postsocialist space unchanged (Yurchak 2006). Brands, like the commodities they are attached to, are material semiotic forms whose circulation defines a broader social imaginary (Lee and Li Puma 2002), whether it is the market, the nation, or the empire that in part gives them meaning; in turn brands serve as metonymic symbols of these entities, as Coca-Cola serves as a handy “metasymbol” of Western capitalism, imperialism, globalization, homogenization, and so forth (Miller 1998).

The transition from socialism to capitalism, therefore, was not simply a seamless transition from brandless to branded products. There was indeed an explosion of brandness in the postsocialist economy, yet at the same time, not only did much socialist production disappear, along with it disappeared many of the socialist brands associated with them. New “firm goods” flowed in in large quantities: brand names that had served as rare icons of the “imaginary West” (Yurchak 2006) before were now encountered as everyday, usable, if not affordable, products (Humphrey 2002:ch. 3; Manning 2006a). Disappearing socialist brands in turn became objects of discourses of nostalgia: in fact, many were revived as capitalist brands. At the same time, there was also an explosion of brandlessness, as the promissory quality associated with brands—a component of what is generally called “goodwill,” the idea that a brand on a bottle indexes a specific producer and a specific style of product—was undermined on several fronts. The absence of state regulation under “wild capitalism” allowed the proliferation (real or imagined) of all manner of brandless wildlife: products with no brands; the explosion of brandless goods made in microfactories (e.g., soft drinks mixed in bathtubs with generic labels); and the outright falsification of brand names, local and international (Pelkmans 2006). Lastly there were the misgivings, suspicion, and paranoia of a population whose socialist expectations had not been domesticated to adopt the category of brand, and who in general doubted the content of any message, especially messages on bottles.

How, then, does one domesticate a population that is not only suspicious about brands but also has not yet fully accepted any premises about what *brand* means in general? In other words, how does one not only create goodwill for one's own brand but also forge a kind of "generalized goodwill" for national brands in general (as opposed to Western "firm goods")? What we wish to show here is how Georgian brand makers, particularly in the thriving Georgian beer market, partly counter these doubts and anxieties by reassuringly grounding their brands in a latently socialist productivist imaginary of traditional production. In this article, we show how figures of tradition are utilized to ground new Georgian industrial products, especially beer products, in the social imaginary of the nation. These include figures of traditional production, which suture contemporary Georgian industrial production of beer to images of traditional production methods hallowed by time, and figures of traditional consumption, which link contemporary products to specifically Georgian scenes of traditional consumption.

Despite superficial similarities, these discourses of traditionalization of production and consumption remain very different from the way the opposition between tradition and modernity is elided into an opposition between artisanal *techne* and industrial technoscience, and the discourses of relative distinction related to these, in Western countries (see Meneley 2004, this issue). In Georgia, where much agricultural production is indeed still (or is once again) done by peasants, there is no discourse that privileges artisanal production over industrial production. Rather, contemporary industrial methods of production are seen as providing highly desirable links between the product and European modernity, while traditional images of production link the product back to Georgian national soil and tradition. In effect, postsocialist Georgian brands attempt to represent their products as having the desirable properties of Western "firm" goods as well as being autonomously produced by and for an autarchic national economy (like socialist brands). Instead of producing a stylistic distinction within production that opposes consumer products as being "artisanal" versus "industrial" and linking these to discourses of distinction (aesthetic, moral, class, or what have you), as in Europe and North America, Georgian manufacturers seem to prefer a dual lineage, which seeks to link tradition to modernity in each and every product. Because it is not craft production per se that is important, any aspect of the commodity's trajectory, from production to consumption, can be emphasized as being "traditional."

The imaginary that allows such a linkage is a nationalist imaginary of the nation as a longitudinal unity since time immemorial but one that is also moving forward in time into (European) modernity. Within this imaginary, the divided temporal moments of tradition (the past in the present) and modernity (the future in the present) are linked together. At the same time, the divided spatial moments of production and consumption are also linked together within the same imaginary of the nation. In this linking, there is a latent socialist notion that the nation should be autarchic (national production for national consumption)

and an imaginary in which (socialist or capitalist) modernity is understood as a primarily technical set of innovations (see also Chatterjee 1992 for a parallel articulation), which allows the Georgian traditional cultural life of the nation to continue in essentially unchanging form: socialist, capitalist, or European in (technical) form, national (traditional) in content.

BRAND SEMIOTICS

Brands are potentially Janus faced, now indexing a figure of the producer, now a figure of the consumer. They are Janus faced in another way as well, in that they are somewhere between the material world of commodities and an immaterial world of signs, representing an incursion of the material category of "wealth" into the "immaterial" world of signs ("immaterial wealth" such as "goodwill"; Manning 2006b). In both of these ways, they can be compared to linguistic signs (Moore 2003): the discrete moments of production, distribution, and consumption can be modeled in terms of the participants of a speech event—speaker, utterance, and addressee—and like language, the phenomenon of brand oscillates between the immaterial type (Saussurean *langue*) and individual material token (Saussurean *parole*). Robert Moore characterizes brand as

centered semiotically upon a composite object, or, more accurately, an unstable conjunction of a product (prototypically at least a material, tangible object) and a mark, logo or brand name. . . . "Brandedness" as a semiotic process immanent in the contemporary commodity experience unfolds in relationships between two parties—producers and consumers. These relationships can be modeled as events of communication in several respects. "Brand" summons people to participate in the market, it interpellates people to act as consumers, in particular ways. In the same moment, brand is now the dominant means by which the producers—corporate entities, usually—extend themselves (in the ordinary as well as philosophic sense) into the world inhabited by their erstwhile (or sought after) consumers, indeed, into the world of contingency (success or failure) itself. [Moore 2003:335]

If the pragmatic function of the utterance that foregrounds the speaker's involvement in it is usually called "expressive," we might call the function of a mark on a product that foregrounds the involvement of the producer a "productivist" function of brand (on productivism as a social ontology more generally, see Manning 2004b, 2006b). The phenomenon of brand in the West is most often rationalized, of course, as a unique identifier of the source of the product, a market equivalent of a signature or a fingerprint. It links products to the distant producer, serving at minimum as a simple conventional diacritic that differentiates the products of different producers, and perhaps even indicates the real presence of the actual producer. As Rosemary Coombe (1996) points out, these two very different ways of linking product to source are often conflated in discourses of branding²:

A mark must attract the consumer to a particular source that, in mass markets, is often unknown and distant. A

logo registers fidelity in at least two senses. It operates as a signature of authenticity, indicating that the good that bears it is true to its origins—that is, that the good is a true or accurate copy. It is exactly the same as another good bearing the same mark, and different from other goods carrying other marks. . . . The mark also. . . registers a real contact, a making, a moment of imprinting by one for whom it acts as a kind of fingerprint—branding. [Coombe 1996:205]

In indexing the producer, however, both of these moments do not figure equally in all types of products in Western discourses of branding; rather, they seem to be constitutive of the stylistic opposition of different kinds of value within the world of goods between “industrial” and “craft” production (Meneley 2004, this issue). The conventional sign of the producer—the logo, mark, or brand name—is like a conventional linguistic sign: a type-level entity that is reproduced identically through individual copies or instances, what we call “tokens,” in exactly the same way that an industrial good is definable as a type of product, an individual token of which is indistinguishable from any other. This sort of interchangeability operates both at the level of brand and of branded product, and it results in a kind of goodwill: that one product bearing the same mark will be as good as or identical to any other bearing the same mark. Such goodwill and absolute interchangeability is the hallmark of industrial production. Let us call this “type-level” branding. The second sense of mark, the “real contact,” is a unique imprint of an individual craftsman. It is more typically associated with the individuated products of craftsmanship, of nonindustrial production, in which the individual variations and noninterchangeability of products all index the (highly prized) variability of craft production, which seems to offer direct contact with the real producer, who is made present in flaws and minute variations of the product. Here, individual products are connected to their real, individual producers (or at least so represented). We can call this “token-level” branding. In the West this generates a completely different kind of goodwill: the goodwill associated with elite, rather than mass, consumer items:

Consumers are urged to buy products which have the identities of producers evident in them, in contrast to industrially produced goods, which, as Marx noted, rendered the labour of the worker, and the connection between the consumers and producers, invisible. It is ironic, and perhaps a testimony to the remarkable malleability of capitalism that this un-erasure of the labour of the producer is a key element in making extra virgin olive oil a valued commodity for those who bemoan the anonymity and mystified origins of industrial food. [Meneley 2004:173]

The productivist concept of brand here is a stand in for the producer, indexing (in different ways) a specific known source for a product. As Coombe points out, that aspect of brand is linked to the related economic concept of “goodwill”:

the mark that accompanies all of one’s goods and makes them recognizable attracts the “loyalty” of consumers, and this loyalty and good feeling is a valuable asset—

goodwill. The positive value of one’s trade is congealed in the exchange value of the sign. The trademark marks the point of origin of the good—and serves as a surrogate identity for the manufacturer—in a national market in which the distances between points of mass production and points of consumption might be vast. [Coombe 1996:210]

But the problems associated with creating goodwill (or trust, more generally) between producers and consumers where production does not immediately attend consumption is not merely a problem created by “vast distances.” Rather, it is a more general problem, a problem of fears of “conspiracy” and claims for “transparency,” that confronts not only economic processes, in which consumption is separated spatially and temporally from production, but also, indeed, any form of mediated discourse, be it economic, political, or interpersonal (West and Sanders 2003). For Georgians, in particular, fears that any and all branded products they consume may be inauthentic, poisoned, or falsified have been rife since the late 1990s, and there are obvious parallelisms in the suspicions with which Georgians approach other forms of linguistically mediated public discourse (Pelkmans 2006; Manning 2007).³

These suspicions, in the case of branded products, are particularly compounded by the fact that brands really are not immaterial wealth at all; in fact, they are all too material—that is, like all signs, they take the form of material objects (empty bottles and labels that can be forged or purchased). We tend to think of brand as belonging rather more to the order of the immaterial (often conflated with “immaterial wealth,” like goodwill, for example). However, one problem Georgian producers have is that brands exist, are realized, through real material objects (the containers that contain objects are as real as the objects that are contained, so, too, the brand is impressed on labels, and so on): that is, brands, token instances of brand, are as concretely material as the token instances of commodities they attend. This makes them subject to all the contingencies that any other material object is subject to. And this is a problem, because the materiality of brand—labeled bottles, for example—is easily separated from the objects in question, either by reusing the bottles with the same labels attached or by forging them. Georgians producers and consumers alike confront an economic situation in which the claim that the material semiotic form of brand uniquely indexes the producer is continuously called into question. And as with political discourse, so with economic: in such an environment of rampant falsification (or rampant “occult cosmologies” of falsification of production [West and Sanders 2003]), goodwill is something that all products lack to some extent. Goodwill is not a problem for an individual brand, or even local goods versus “firm” goods in some cases, it is a problem for branded goods in general (see Pelkmans 2006:188–194).

Through brands, however, products are also attached to figures of consumption: idealized consumers. In the West, attending a general shift from a social ontology of productivism to one of consumerism, there has been a general

move from brand as a figure of production to a figure of consumption (Mazzarella 2003): a semiotic transition from trademarks of production to so-called lovemarks of consumer loyalty (Foster 2005). This perspective on brand seeks to see the "value" of brands as being a joint product of the labor of both producers and consumers. Branded objects attract to themselves not only properties of the subjects ("person-alities") that produce them but also, by association, the subjects that consume them. Robert Foster describes this as the

reattachment of the alienated product to another personality, that is, to the consumer. It is this reattachment that is achieved through branding. I hasten to add that branding involves more than the labour of special workers who design logos and devise advertising campaigns. . . . Branding also involves the work of consumers, whose meaningful use of the purchased products invests these products with the consumer's identity. . . . Put differently, the persons of consumers enhance the value of brands. [Foster 2005:11]

Foster hastens to add that the resulting value (another kind of "goodwill") becomes not the property of these consumers but, rather, is another form of labor that is appropriated by the brand owners (goodwill, let us remember, is a form of property, immaterial wealth). Such a subject-object nexus that now links types of objects to consumers by association and produces loyalties thereby foregrounds consumer involvement in the brand and are what have been called "lovemarks." However, as Foster reminds us, this Maussian moment of consumer appropriation overcoming alienation ("lovemarks") is just as instantly confronted by a Marxian one in the very real, consequential way that these lovemarks are themselves alienated to become immaterial property ("goodwill") of the brand owners (more generally, see Mazzarella 2003:192–195).

The concept of the "lovemark" seems to be embedded in a very different milieu than that faced by Georgian producers and consumers. In some ways, Georgian concepts of brand remain strongly rooted in a generally productivist model of the economy, particularly because there is no sense that a "generalized goodwill" exists in the economy: because of brandlessness, falsification of brands, and unreliability of producers, all branded products are to some extent suspect. Moreover, Georgians do not seem to evaluate the distinction between industrial and nonindustrial production in the same way that North Americans and Western Europeans do; there is no arts and crafts movement legacy that causes Georgians to prize the defects and minute variations that separate craft from industrial production and that make the former more valuable, as in the West. Georgians prize local production of fruits and vegetables, it is true, and the accusation that a food product is from a foreign country implies that it may be dangerous, but the main concern is that the product is Georgian.⁴

In Georgia, the phenomenon of brand is closely allied to the traditional socialist emphasis on production, a nostalgic image of traditional production within the contemporary world of consumption. But it should be added

that unlike Western manufacturers, there is no real sense that Georgians advocate a return to traditional production methods (beyond making vague references to "nuances" of traditional technology): this is not the mark of the birth of a Georgian arts and crafts movement. Nor does the traditional branding here have anything in common with European attempts to appropriate or authenticize traditional artisanal practices or other attributes of localities as legally protected forms of intellectual property (see, e.g., Coombe et al. 2005; Meneley 2004). Georgian beer producers we interviewed, in fact, all strongly avowed that attempts to privatize aspects of national tradition amounted to incomprehensible nonsense: the traditional order by definition belongs to everyone. Rather, we would argue that the referencing of Georgian traditions of production (without ever, it should be stressed, appropriating them in production or as property) reassuringly grounds modern Georgian industrial production within a genealogy of the nation, a unity in which production and consumption are reunited within the nation (autarchy), just as tradition and modernity are reunited.

Contemporary Georgian trademarks and brands do not so much reconnect distant producers and consumers, rather they substitute "figures" (in Goffman's sense [1974:523–537]) or "surrogate identities" (Coombe 1996:210)—what William Mazzarella (2003:187–192) calls "prosthetic personalities"—for absent producers (and consumers). The figures used as brands, then, do not index and try to link up the distant producers and consumers of products, making them present on something like a model of the speech situation; rather, they index a larger totality, an autarchic model of the nation in which the different moments of production and consumption can both be contained. In Georgia, these figures of production and consumption that mediate within the imaginary of the market are drawn from figures mediating within the imaginary of the nation; the social field of alterity constructed by folkloric and ethnographic discourses to organize persons within a nation is adopted and transferred to organize products into brands for a national market.

Something similar to this process of grounding brands in broader social imaginaries has been attested elsewhere. As Coombe, for example, has noted, these figures that mediate within the imaginary of the market are also mediating figures within other imaginaries, drawing on a "symbolic field of social alterity" (Coombe 1996:212) of the nation, the frontier, or empire to structure the field of the market (see also Richards 1990:ch. 3; McClintock 1995:ch. 5). As Coombe argues with respect to 19th-century U.S. brands and trademarks,

dominant U.S. culture was preoccupied with the nature of civilization and its alters, and with the prerequisites of nationhood and its connection to frontiers. . . . Images and descriptions of African-Americans, Indian peoples, and Hispanic and Meztizo subjects . . . were mass-produced and projected on a national scale through the medium of trademarks. [Coombe 1996:210]

U.S. consumers were "constituted in relation to the embodied otherness" of the savage alterity of the U.S. frontier

(Coombe 1996:209). In the Georgian case, this is not radical otherness (“civilization and its others”) but an otherness that verges on asymptotic identity: an ethnographically stereotyped version of national self as traditional other, the mountain dwellers of Pshavi and Khevsureti (Manning in press). The Georgian appropriation of “autoalterity” here is quite similar to a process Mazzarella has called “Auto-Orientalism,” which he defines as “the use of globally recognized signifiers of Indian ‘tradition’ to facilitate the aspirational consumption, by Indians, of a culturally marked self” (Mazzarella 2003:138). This general process, in which “publicly recognized signs of social difference create a pool of cultural resources within which manufacturers fished for their own distinction” (Coombe 1996:211), in the case of Georgia takes two forms: on the one hand, there is an occidentalizing process by which Georgian goods are associated with European technology while still remaining grounded in Georgian traditions (“dual lineages”); on the other hand, there is an indigenizing process by which the traditional lineage of Georgian products is specifically grounded in ethnographic images of Georgianness (“ethnographic branding”).

DUAL LINEAGES OF GEORGIAN BEER: GEORGIAN TRADITIONS AND EUROPEAN TECHNOLOGY

After the fall of socialism, industrial production of nearly all food commodities in the Republic of Georgia virtually disappeared. Now, unemployed urban and rural Georgians have retreated to “peasant” subsistence strategies and petty commodity production and transaction. Many foodstuffs consumed in Georgia are now produced “traditionally”: that is, on private peasant plots. The withdrawal of the Socialist state from production has left “the nation” as the only alternative model in which the disassociated moments of production and consumption can be reunited within a comprehensive social imaginary. In this context, new Georgian industrial firms seek to ground their own lines of consumer products—primarily beers and soft drinks—in “the nation,” not only catering to Georgian consumer tastes (e.g., the ever-popular tarragon-flavored soft drinks) but also making reference in marketing to the use of “traditional methods” in production, “ecologically pure” ingredients grown on national soil by peasants, and Georgian ownership. In fact, the sale-ability of “ecological purity,” not lost on Georgians by any means, seems to have been one of those rare unexpected windfalls deriving from their poverty. Very recently Georgian agricultural produce has become popular in Turkey: because Georgians cannot afford labor-saving chemicals such as pesticides, by definition their agricultural products are “ecologically pure.”

Although Georgia is known for its wines, industrial production of beer and soft drinks for a local market far outstrips wine production: wine consumption occurs in ritual contexts in which new wine, typically purchased from peasant producers, is preferred; bottled, aged wines are primarily for exports. Beer and soft drinks, therefore, are a key area in which industrial production for indigenous consumers has

been elaborated. Such goods are packaged and presented as both being ecologically pure and following traditional methods, often referencing ethnographic materials about traditional life in brand images even as they proclaim their reliance on Western technologies.

The greatest single exception to the generally dire situation of Georgian industry is the beer industry. In recent years Georgian beer producers have aggressively carved out a dominant market share for products produced in Georgia. The frequently quoted statistic is that something like 94 percent of beer products consumed in Georgia were manufactured in Georgia in 2004, effectively driving out much of the foreign competition in just a few short years (Lomidze 2003). The most successful of these new companies is the Kazbegi Company, which is equally well-known for its soft drink and iced tea products as it is for beer. Kazbegi is the first company in Georgia to have developed a successful and recognizable logo, a picture of one of the national icons of Georgia, Mt. Kazbek (Georgian: Kazbegi, Qazbegi), from which the company takes its name, that in turn adorns all of its products in different lines.⁵ Moreover, Gogi Topadze, founder of the Kazbegi company, is frequently credited with this somewhat miraculous transformation of this sector of the Georgian economy in the late 1990s into one that is now virtually completely dominated by Georgian products. In fact, many have seen the Kazbegi Company in particular, and the beer market in general, as a model for other industries, especially the wine industry, because Georgia is particularly well-known for wines and not beer, and, yet, the indigenous beer market is prospering and the wine market is not. As an example of this, one interviewer in the Georgian press, interviewing a wine producer about the difficulties experienced in the wine industry from taxes and falsification, abruptly changed the course of the interview and began to berate the wine producer to follow Topadze’s example. The increasingly frustrated wine producer offered various cogent reasons why the Topadze model could not so easily be transferred, to no avail:

Interviewer: I don’t know Gogi Topadze personally, but I respect him a great deal. Do you know why? He saturated the market with national (erovnuli) production. People are no longer attracted to foreign beers, with pleasure they drink “Kazbegi,” “Argo.” Why can’t our wines do that?

Interviewee: Wine has different problems. Gogi Topadze’s products are of high quality. But still he won against imported products by price. Our products are also of high quality. But as a result of taxation our price becomes unable to compete. I don’t have the means to sell my wine for less than 2.5 Lari [a little more than a dollar].

Interviewer: That is, you wine-makers should have stood firm like Gogi Topadze and not paid artificially raised excise taxes . . .

- Interviewee:** It's not just a matter of being firm. Vodka, beer, whisky all compete with wine . . .
- Interviewer:** Understandable, but what about the fact that "Kazbegi" and "Argo" were able to compete with wine and vodka, aside from that, were able to compete with many foreign beers?
- Interviewee:** As a result of low prices! Then, because falsified production does not represent a hindrance for them. Get rid of falsifiers and we will be able to restore the name and dignity that Georgian wines once had! [Aslanishvili 1999:5]

Topadze's example has had many imitators. Following the lead of what Topadze himself calls the "Topadze ideology," many Georgian companies have emphasized a dual lineage for their products, emphasizing both the European technological modernity of their products and the way their products embody in one way or another Georgian tradition. Billboards throughout Georgia for a range of consumer products often have the same rhetorical juxtaposition of "European Technology" and "Georgian tradition." Of course, Georgian tradition and European technology are synthesized more at the level of marketing than at the level of production.

What then, is the "Topadze ideology"? Topadze, an easygoing, charismatic man, is quite up front about the linkage of politics and economics in his corporate ideology. After all, he is a (not particularly successful) political figure in Georgia, the head of a political party with the suggestive name "Industry Will Save Georgia." The billboard of this party, found outside the Kazbegi headquarters, resembles a socialist-era propaganda poster, showing in order all the separated moments of industrial production from the rows of tea bushes to the ships that carry the products overseas (see Figure 1). Part of the Topadze ideology is attempting to create an autarchic link of national production to national consumption. This happens at the level of mar-



FIGURE 1. Billboard outside the Kazbegi office: "Let's save industry and industry will save us!" (Photo courtesy of the authors)

keting (from the use of a logo on all products that links the company to an important national landmark to the specific brands, which often index specific areas within the nation); in production itself (through the exclusive reliance on Georgian capital, labor, and raw materials); and, finally, with consumption (Kazbegi is noted for having attempted to make not only beers for Georgian consumption but also soft drinks, cigarettes, and many other common consumer goods).

Not all of Kazbegi's attempted "national" brands were equally successful. The beer brand Gagra, named after a once-famous tourist resort in Abkhazia lost during the war with that region (1992–93), was patently a failure because it conjured up a part of the national imaginary that everyone wanted to forget, a kind of negative nostalgia. Another interesting example arose during our interview when Topadze produced a carton of a brand of cigarettes the Kazbegi corporation had been unable to market. We opened them and sampled them, as we had his beers and soft drinks: they were no better or worse than any other Georgian cigarettes. In fact, the packages sported an appealing and clever design. Named "Nostalgia" (see Figure 2), these cigarettes visually reproduced the package illustration of a well-known Soviet-era cigarette brand, Kazbek, showing a mountaineer rider riding with the mountain (Russian: Kazbek; Georgian: Kazbegi, also spelled Qazbegi) in the background (see Figure 3).

The brand was unsuccessful, Topadze explained, for the purely prosaic reasons that most Georgian brands fail: competition from lower-priced contraband. The brand, however, encapsulates the covert dimension of the Topadze ideology, inasmuch as it indexes different dimensions of nostalgia, overtly linking traditional imagery of the mountains (the Kazbek brand showing a rider in traditional dress with the traditional symbol of Georgia and mountain traditions, Mount Kazbek) with a covert nostalgia for the socialist past and familiar socialist products from that period. For Topadze, both of these dimensions are linked and extend to a wide variety of products, not just beer, although for those who have borrowed the "Topadze ideology," the primary focus is beer products.

Kazbegi's promotional literature reproduces images from traditional mountain techniques of beer production drawn from ethnographic works as part of a historical narrative that also connects Kazbegi with German beer manufacturing in Georgia (the Kazbegi plant is on the site of the 19th-century German beer plant, the Wenzel Brewery). The traditions of the mountain-dwelling beer brewers are shown in illustrations drawn from classic Georgian ethnographies of their technical apparatus (a massive copper vat with the legend *ludis saxarshi kvabi*, "beer-brewing vat," is depicted) as well as the ritual apparatus to which beer production is linked in mountain communities (a Georgian mountain shrine priest carrying a sacred flag [*drosha*]; in addition various sacred shrine buildings, including the beer-brewing building, are depicted). The images are drawn from a classic ethnography by Vera Bardavelidze (1941), which was



(a)



(b)

FIGURE 2. Kazbegi's failed brand "Nostalgia": Georgian and English versions. (Courtesy of Kazbegi 1881 JSC)

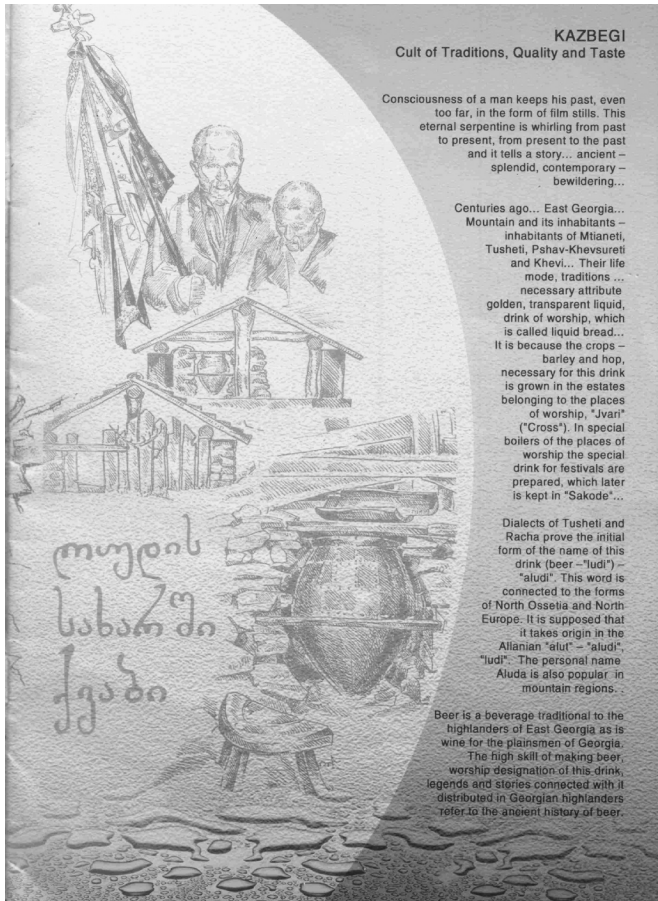
recently rereleased. Opposite them are color photographs of the contemporary functionally equivalent structures in the modern Kazbegi factory (see Figure 4). This dual lin-



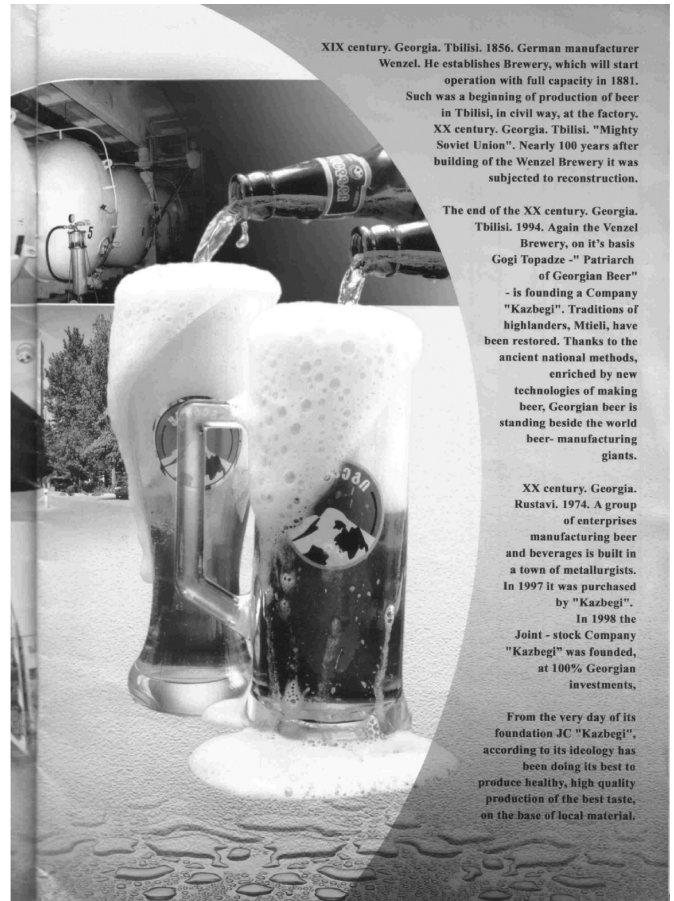
FIGURE 3. Socialist era cigarette "Kazbek" package design. (Photo courtesy of the authors)

age of traditions and technology allows Kazbegi to claim that they have "restored the traditions of the mountain-dwellers, thanks to ancient national methods of beer production enriched by new technology" (Kazbegi n.d.).

The French company Castel, too, proclaims the traditionality of its beer production. For example, in its radio ads for its "Khevsur beer" brand Aluda, it describes "masculine traditions brought down from the mountains." The rest of its ads emphasize that Aluda is "our beer . . . prepared with traditional Khevsur methods," although Aluda is produced in what may be the most modern European factory in Georgia by a European company. When asked how this particular beer, which tasted like any other lager, could be called "Khevsur beer," the Aluda representative smiled. It was, in fact, a stupid question. Of course no one would actually attempt to produce authentic mountain-style beer because actual mountain beer is dark, thick, sweet, and prone to giving powerful headaches, like an evil version of Guinness; a Georgian friend likened it memorably to sweetened motor oil. (We note, however, that the 2007 Aluda summer ad campaign [field notes, 2007] have become more specific,



(a)



(b)

FIGURE 4. Dual lineages: traditional Georgian beer production (left) and contemporary European technology (right). (Courtesy of Kazbegi 1881 JSC)

claiming that the “traditional Khevsur brewing methods” used to produce Aluda boil down to the use of “copper vats” along with, of course, “tasty Georgian water.” The copper vats shown in the ad, of course, are not Khevsur copper vats but simply the standard industrial copper vats used in breweries all across Europe.) What, then, is the point of appealing to these mountain traditions of brewing if no one actually intends to use them?

ETHNOGRAPHIC BRANDS

Kazbegi is not the only beer company in Georgia to market its products using traditional imagery from the Georgian mountains. Two other Georgian companies, Lomisi and Tbilludi, as well as the local branch of the French industrial giant Castel, have borrowed this aspect of the “Topadze ideology” to market their products. To ground this new range of beer products in the “nation,” Georgian marketers for these companies have created an explosion of brands that harkens to Georgia’s imagined traditional exemplars: various groups of ethnic Georgians who inhabit the mountains of Georgia adjacent to Chechnya. These mountain groups—such as the Khevsurs, the Pshavs, and the Tush—have, since the 19th century, been sacralized by generations of Geor-

gian ethnographers as being the true bearers of the authentic Georgian way of life (Manning 2004a, in press). Since the late 19th century, the mountains of Georgia, regions like Pshavi and Khevsureti, have been understood to represent the unchanging masculine traditional life of Georgia, the Georgian past in the present, just as the plains of Georgia, regions like Kartli where the capital city, Tbilisi, is located, represent the present and future life of the country:

Here [in the inaccessible mountains of Pshav-Khevsureti], in this homeland the Pshav-Khevsur have preserved unchanged until today their ancient, ancestral customs, life, past traditions. In this respect the Pshav-Khevsur is more Georgian [*kartveli*] (if it can be said so), than the Kartlian [*kartleli*, resident of Kartli, the central Georgian province] himself. The Kartlian lives more in the present, in the future. If he had not turned his back on the past, still, he avoids facing it. [Khizanashvili 1940:1]

In an ethnographic vision of the nation, these fierce and free, hospitable and brave mountaineers, spouting poetry and avenging blood for blood, embody all that is best about Georgians in general (Manning 2004a, in press). Georgian advertisers turned to this ready-made iconography of the nation to articulate their claims to a national



FIGURE 5. Ethnographic map of Georgian beer brands. (Courtesy of author)

market, turning idealized figures of ethnographic and folkloric others into images that could be used to organize an array of industrial products for a national market. In an interview as early as 1996, Topadze connected his choice of the name *Kazbegi* and familiar national symbol of Mount Kazbegi as the logo of his products to indigenous ethnographic traditions of beer brewing preserved by mountain dwellers:

You will remember, that the population of our mountainous regions, the Mokhevians [residents of the area around Mount Kazbegi] and Khevsurs since time immemorial pursued the brewing of beer with folk technology. In our own production are inserted nuances of precisely this technology and for that reason too these names were chosen. [Tbilisi 1996:2–3]

Whatever these “nuances” of folk technology might have been, by 2005 the tendency to use different ethnographic groups from a small region of the Caucasus mountains bordering Chechnya and to categorize and differentiate what were essentially all the same Lagers (ethnographic branding) had reached a high point with no end in sight. In effect, the beer brands of Georgia today look just

a little bit like the ethnographic groupings of the Georgian ethnographic museum in bottled form (see Figure 5).

Just as the plains dwellers of Georgia traditionally drink wine, for these mountain dwellers the traditional ritual drink is beer. This particular ethnographic fact allows beer to be seen as a traditional Georgian beverage alongside wine and, more generally, allows modern industrial beers to be associated with the timeless ethnographic traditions, rituals, and general masculinity of the Georgian highlanders. The labels of the Castel Company’s Khevsur Beer Aluda (see Figure 6) and the Kazbegi beer Pshavi (see Figure 7) both reproduce familiar ethnographic images of the typical Khevsur or typical Pshavian man in traditional dress against a suggestive traditional landscape.⁶

Similarly, the rhetoric of commercials for these brands indexes Georgian traditions of production and consumption in slightly different ways, but all of them link their frankly quite novel European products to specific traditional contexts of production or consumption. A particularly good example is a commercial for Kazbegi’s Pshavi, which displays the entire traditional contexts of production and consumption of beer in an idyllic scene of traditional



FIGURE 6. Aluda: a Khevsur beer. (Courtesy of Castel Sakartvelo)

mountain life in the mountains of Pshavi. The commercial opens with springtime flirtation between a Pshavian lad and lass otherwise engaged in traditional occupations, the Pshavians being as noted for traditions of romance as they are for poetry (Manning in press). The commercial then moves on to an image of an older man (indexing respect for the elders and tradition) and then to a man engaged in brewing beer using traditional methods (see Figure 8a). The technical process of traditional beer production is followed in particular detail, with traditional implements, and the commercial notes in particular that the craftsman making the beer pictured is “certified.” Then the ad moves seamlessly from scenes of traditional beer production to traditional beer consumption (see Figure 8b), at last juxtaposing the traditional Pshavian beer poured from a traditional serving pitcher to the modern bottled beer brand “Pshavi” (see Figure 8c). The Pshavians are noted for being poets and their poetic cycles



FIGURE 7. Pshavi: a wheat beer. (Courtesy of Kazbegi 1881 JSC)

are a central focus of Georgian folkloric research; thus, the ad’s text is in fact set as a traditional Pshavian poem:

Roca k’i gazapxuldeba, gamoighvidzebs kveqana,
When spring comes, the world awakens,
silaghe simxiarule, daseirnoben qvelgana.
Freedom, happiness, walk about everywhere.
[See Figure 8a]

Shasvi pshavuri—et’qvian, xorblis ludia sviani,
Drink Pshavian, they say, it is a wheat beer with hops,
gvitxari rame ghvtis madlsa, erti kartuli gziani.
Tell us something, by the grace of God, having a Georgian way. [See Figure 8b]

ludi pshavi—kartuli mtis istoria.
Pshavi Beer—the history of the Georgian mountains.
[See Figure 8c]

This commercial by Kazbegi is perhaps the most complete grounding of a beer in idyllic scenes of traditional beer production and consumption, appropriate for the Kazbegi product, which is most directly linked to this project of ethnographic branding. Other companies have used simpler gambits to link together some aspect of their product and this mountain tradition, sometimes emphasizing traditional production, sometimes emphasizing traditional scenes of consumption.⁷ In the case of this commercial, a whole traditional trajectory from production to consumption is highlighted.

CONCLUSION: BRAND, CIRCULATORY OBJECTS AND SOCIAL IMAGINARIES

Georgian brand makers invoke ethnographic figures of Georgian mountaineers as a basis for their brands in part simply because it is there, in the Georgian mountains, that indigenous traditions of beer production are found. But emphasizing ethnographic traditions of production is not intended to argue that the contemporary product is concretely produced by such methods (beyond small “nuances” or copper vats); this is not an attempt to pass off an industrial product as a product of craftsmanship (as in the cases discussed by Meneley 2004). Rather than opposing tradition to modernity as craft production to industrial production (as in the Western “Slow Food” movement discussed by Meneley 2004), Georgian producers seek to create a “dual lineage” for their products, which supposedly represent both an indigenous tradition and European modernity.

This “dual lineage” is something that Georgians like to imagine themselves as having with respect to Europe in general. Georgia, a country on the uncomfortable shifting border of an imagined geographic opposition between Europe and Asia, does not like to emphasize the alterity of Europe to Georgianness as modernity to tradition, for that would consign them to be forever in the “backwards” status of being traditional, non-European, and nonmodern (for a more general discussion of Georgia’s recent history, see Manning 2007; Pelkmans 2006). Such an untroubled nostalgia for tradition is, perhaps, diagnostic of those who feel that their claim to modernity is unchallengeable.



(a)



(b)



(c)

FIGURE 8. Screen stills of a Pshavi beer commercial: a. traditional Pshavian context; b. traditions of Pshavian beer production and consumption; c. linking the traditional Pshavian beer to the modern brand “Pshavi.” (All images courtesy of Kazbegi 1881 JSC)

Unlike other colonial situations, such as the situation described by Partha Chatterjee (1992), Georgians do not oppose European technical modernity to indigenous Georgian tradition: they treat them as being variations of the same thing. Georgians like to say that they were European and modern before Europe was and that they experienced a hu-

manistic renaissance before Dante; however, they also sense that their country is not yet, in fact, European and modern (Manning 2007).

The same ambivalence attends the marketing of indigenous production, hence Georgian producers suture together these uneasy discourses of opposition and assimilation in

a dual lineage and ambivalently ground their products both in European technical modernity and Georgian tradition. The problem that such a strategy addresses is how to incorporate Georgian goods into the evaluative hierarchy that confers prestige uniquely on foreign "firm goods" (goods emanating from the "Imaginary West"; see Yurchak 2006:ch. 5).

Alexei Yurchak has persuasively shown how under late Soviet socialism, Western "firm" goods, often stripped down merely to the *leibl* (label) without the associated use value, served primarily as physical, indexical incarnations of the "imaginary West" and resources for constructing imaginary worlds, rather than guarantors of the value of the associated product (often no longer present in any case), a token-mediated semiotics of presentification opposed to the type-level semiotics of authentication and goodwill (Yurchak 2006:195–197).⁸ Under such circumstances, there is a poetization of the semiotic apparatus of brand, wherein (the fantasy of all brand theorists) the material signifier of brand (*leibl*) becomes detachable from its putative object, self-referential and self-valuable. The function of brand here is displaced from a productivist or consumerist semiotic orientation that locates goods in relation to producers or consumers to one that indexes the imaginative geography within which the goods circulate, often with what Mazzarella calls an "aspirational" aspect, indexing a kind of unrealized desire or yearning for the elsewhere from which the branded good comes (2003:102). Under such circumstances, the brand can become the tail that wags the commodity dog. Mazzarella has argued that Western brands in India have a similar aspirational, Occidental content, incarnating categories of imaginative geographies such as "the imaginary West": so similar, in fact, that the following could just as well be a description of the semiotics of firmen-nye goods under socialism and postsocialism (cf. Fehervary 2005:ch. 6; Yurchak 2006:ch. 5):

Major Western brands became important markers of social distinction for a small elite. . . . Much of the mystique associated with these goods depended on their capacity to serve as physical embodiments of a source of value that was understood to reside *elsewhere*. This elsewhere might in shorthand be called "the West," but in fact it was conceived as at once concrete and abstract, as a real place and as a mythical location. The de facto magic of the goods was that they provided concrete, *present* evidence of this absent source, as conjured in advertising. Auratic in Walter Benjamin's sense, at hand, tactile, yet transcendently irradiated, these brands reverberated with what one might call a kind of "close distance." [Mazzarella 2003:256]

The evaluative hierarchy of concrete goods followed the outlines of the socialist period imaginative geography into the postsocialist period. Prior to the elaboration of postsocialist Georgian production, Mathijs Pelkmans has shown how foreign "firm" (*sapirmo*) goods and their typifying material qualities were articulated into complex hierarchies of value that in a sense reflect an orientalist imaginary of alterity (which privileges European foreign goods

over Asian ones) but also a socialist one (which privileges quality [essence] over packaging [appearance]). Thus, European goods (expensive, good quality, beautiful) outrank Russian goods (cheap, good quality, but ugly), and these in turn outrank goods from Turkey (cheap, relatively good looking, but poor quality; Pelkmans 2006:184–188). What we have tried to show is that the strategy of "dual lineage" seeks to overcome the inherited opposition between Western "firm" goods and local goods. All sorts of food products (beer, soft drinks, even bread) are advertised as incorporating European technology with Georgian traditions; even European-style beers marketed by Georgian companies (with German or Czech brand names) insist that they are marriages of German or Czech technology and Georgian traditions.⁹ Georgian brands then depict Georgia as an affinal, rather than consanguineal, kin of Europe.

Because the primary concern of Georgian marketers is not "traditional craft production," their invocation of ethnographic figures of the imaginary of the nation within the imaginary of the market to create brands for products is based on a desire to ground the production and consumption of their product within tradition in general. In general, then, the phenomenon of brand is something that does more than merely link producers or consumers to products, exchanges, and associations of properties of subjects and objects. Brands also index a relationship between an individual circulating object and a whole social imaginary of circulation, whether that imaginary is one of European modernity or Georgian national tradition. Brands become like mythic genealogies rather than trademarks ensuring goodwill; labels become miniature ritual incarnations, affixed by glue, of whole cosmologies of circulation.

While recent anthropological treatments of brand (e.g., Foster 2005; Mazzarella 2003) have taken inspiration from Maussian exchange theory, we believe that brand might also be approached from a perspective more indebted to Arnold Van Gennep: in effect a relinking of Marxian approaches to economic production and circulation to Van Gennep's concern for the linking of spatial classification with spatial transition or qualitative transformations of persons and goods in circulation or ritual, the way "boundaries are transcended through exchanges of persons and goods that both define and blur those boundaries" (Beidelman 1997:26). Although social anthropological approaches to ritual were bedeviled by a sharply drawn but ill-defined "you know it when you see it" sort of opposition between "technical" and "ritual" ("symbolic") transformation of objects (see, e.g., Galaty 1983:366–368; Pfaffenberger 1992), it remains that this older literature represents some of anthropology's most sustained consideration of materiality and meaning, the intersection of causation and signification (Keane 1997:18–20, see also ch. 3). The "technical" production of goods is at the same time a "symbolic" or "ritual" reclassification. Both involve transformations of the potentially meaningful qualities of objects (Peircean "qualisigns"; Keane 2003; Munn 1986): sociotechnical (indexical, causal) transformation of object qualities ("quali-") and their symbolic reassignment as signs ("-sign"; see Galaty 1983:367; Keane 1997:18–20,

see also ch. 3). This process of semio-technical transformation of qualisigns, involving transformative moments of both causation (quali-) and signification (-sign), does not end with the production process but continues through exchange (Keane 1997:ch. 3; Munn 1977, 1986).

Production, exchange, and consumption involve interlinkages of circulation and qualitative transformation of objects in which sociotechnical transformations of object qualities and their semiotic transformation into meaningful qualisigns in production or subsequent circulation are all asymptotic moments of one single process of transformation (Munn 1977). Just as acts of production of individual commodities are akin to ritual transformations that involve both asymptotically symbolic and technical dimensions, transformations, and associations of the qualitative properties of subjects (persons) and objects, so too their circulation involves further transformation, recategorization, and both material and metaphoric "rites of passage" so that goods presuppose and create the social categories of space and time ("space-time") in which they move (Lee and Li Puma 2002; Munn 1977, 1986).

The material and semiotic properties of the circulatory object itself that mediate these space-times becomes particularly analytically important here, in that a given circulatory object can be treated as a "condensed space-time, and may be analyzed to give a fuller account of the wider intersubjective space-time in which it operates" (Munn 1986:10). Brand is just such a semiotic property of a circulatory object that allows it to act as a "condensed space-time," with respect to both economic and political imaginaries. Semiotic phenomena like brand involve a semiotic apparatus that stands in a metasemiotic relation to the process of circulation, and this semiotic apparatus can be reflexively attached to the circulating object (a label) and also exists independently of it (a TV advertisement). The semiotic apparatus of brand does not merely serve to locate objects as vendible goods with respect to purely economic imaginaries like the market, it also serves to locate them in terms of other cosmological systems, including the imaginative geographies of Orientalism, Occidentalism, and nationalism.

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NOTES

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1. There are many similar, essentially neoliberal, academic arguments that locate the historical reasons for the demise of socialism in its paternalistic productivist neglect of the desires of the con-

sumer. Such literature on "consumption" often presents the consumer as a universal agent standing outside history; *homo faber* is replaced by *homo emptor*. For different examples (from otherwise seemingly very different disciplinary and political orientations), see Miller 1995:16 and Aslund 2002. For a critical approach to universalizing consumerist social ontologies in other contexts, see Mazzarella 2003 and Fehervary 2005.

2. These two methods of linking product to source are conventional representation versus what we might indexical "presentification" (Vernant 1991) and type mediation ("true and accurate copies") versus token mediation ("moments" of "real contact").

3. This is what Georgians call *palsipik'acia*: falsification, the antonym of *production*, standing as "lies" to "truth" in linguistic communication just as *goodwill* in a sense stands to *trust*. Ex-President Eduard Shevardnadze often quipped that in Georgia "there is more falsification than production" (field notes, 2001–02).

4. As noted, Georgians cannot afford chemicals in agricultural production, so their products are ecologically pure by default.

5. See, for example, Figure 7, top and center. On the significance of Mt. Kazbegi, see Manning 2004.

6. The Castel Company's Khevsur Beer Aluda is named after a Khevsur hero named Aluda Ketelaury from a famous poem by Pshavian poet Vazha Pshavela. In addition, the name *Aluda* also recalls the Georgian and dialect words for beer (*ludi, aludi*).

7. Space does not permit us to discuss these companies here. This topic will be addressed in a chapter of a book in progress on Georgian drinking culture.

8. According to some, it was precisely the possession of a leibl that made a thing a "firm" good (*firmenny*). Hence, it is not surprising that the "use value" of a firmenny good would be, in essence, the label.

9. Some bread companies in Georgia now insist that their traditional breads are cooked on Italian stone ovens.

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