

## Chapter 4

### Laghidze's and Coca-Cola: Socialist Products and Capitalist Brands



**Figure 1:** Inside Laghidze's in Tbilisi (2002)

If at some time in the past you were a devoted consumer of “Laghidze's Waters”, then, it is possible that the clear glasses, the cones filled with multicolored syrups, the tap for soda water, the heavy, cool marble countertop, the mosaic on the wall, the gentle tinkling of the spoon during the mixing of the syrup with the water, the rinsing wheel for the glasses, like a tiny fountain, all became for you indivisible characteristic features of this brand. Now, imagine, if all at once we were to change every last one of these symbols. It is possible, that a new brand would appear. But the old one would surely die. (Ak'opiani 2007: 59)

#### **Animated objects and ghostly brands**

Imagined in retrospect, these little details of the Laghidze's café, from the “traditional modernism” of the décor to the technical manner of presentation, that in the socialist

period exhibited *kulturnost*, become the charming and distinctive attributes of brand. The change in the apperception of Laghidze's café echoes the arrival of a new hegemony of consumerism, and the many changes in the postsocialist cityscape that attended it. Coming back to Tbilisi in 2001 for the first time in almost a decade, I was stunned as I wandered around a city that had changed in so many ways. The chaos and crime of the early 1990s had been replaced by a more civilized public order, and at the same time socialist economies of deficit had been replaced with real, permanent capitalist style poverty and unemployment. In 1992-3, Laghidze's had been the only place to buy the two things that I had loved the most about Georgia: cheese bread and Laghidze's soda. Now, Laghidze's socialist period monopoly over this branch of Georgian fast food production was over. Cheese bread shops were everywhere. Everywhere, too, were new, bottled soft drinks, some of which were familiar Coca-Cola products, others new to me, including some of the odd flavors typical of Laghidze's, for example Tarragon, in new forms, mostly often as a kind of flavored ice tea. But while many of these new versions of old Laghidze's flavors were made by Georgian companies, none of the new bottled beverages were Laghidze's, and none of them tasted as good.

When I returned, a friend of mine who knew me well from the early 1990s and my single minded love of Laghidze's, asked me if I wanted to go on my "Hajj" to the soft-drink Mecca, the Laghidze's store on Rustaveli Prospect. I enthusiastically agreed. The place was empty. Under socialism there was always a line and the place teemed with people. Now the marble walls and tables, which made the place cool in the heat of Tbilisi summers, took on a somber tone, reminding me of a soft drink mausoleum. I drank my tarragon flavored pop, which was as good as ever, but instead of the single

variety of fresh, piping-hot cheese bread that had been the trademark of Laghidze's in the past, now there many kinds of cheese bread, but not all of which were hot, or even warm. In general, the place was a ghost of the Laghidze's I had known. Each year I visited Laghidze's out of piety, but each year it seemed that Laghidze's store, once a joyous prophetic vision of a future world of socialist cultured trade, was now a sad spectral haunting from the socialist past.

Although I did not know this, I am not the only one silently mourning the passing of Laghidze's. Of all the unlikely fellow travelers, I find my thoughts and feelings about Laghidze's articulated most clearly by a Georgian corporate manager, a "new intellectual" typical of post-socialism, a kind of intellectual who are stereotypically associated with an absolute loathing bordering on the pathological of everything associated with the socialist past. Reading this essay with the rather non-descriptive title *Brendingi-II* (Branding –II, Ak'opiani 2007), I was surprised to find a very introspective autobiographical consideration of Laghidze's Waters as a brand running like a connecting thread through what is otherwise an unremarkable and derivative commentary on the multivalent semiotic ubiquity of the category of brand. Like the rest of the professional literature on brand, Western and Georgian alike, the discussion of brand resembles some sort of eclectic and expansive new-age spiritualist dispensation, replete with references to Carlos Castaneda, the ancient wisdom literature of the east in the form of Chinese Taoism and South Asian wisdom literature, as well as the very newest wisdom of Western brand theorists. Like much of the Western professional literature on brand, and not a little of the Maussian anthropological literature on exchange and lately, brand, it exhibits a frankly fetishistic or at least animistic theory of brands (with, it needs to be stressed, no

real commonality with the Marxian commodity fetish).<sup>i</sup> The argument is that brands create relationships with customers, partially by virtue of a universally human propensity towards fetishism or animism, through which humans (in this case customers) “are accustomed to confer animacy (*gasuliereba*) on inanimate objects and place a portion of their own being (*arseba*) in them” (Ak’opiani 2007: 57). As a result, “brands are living beings and as long as the thing animated by live by their customers live as long as the customer maintains a relationship with them” (ibid.).<sup>ii</sup>

The bulk of the essay is devoted to the thesis that brands can, in fact, be treated as being in essence prosthetic extensions of the human (as appears to be the case here) or even autonomous living beings animated by their relationships with consumers. But what is odd is that this manifesto of brand animism is first of all exemplified by not by a brand as a living object, but by brand as a ghostly haunting, using the example of Laghidze’s Waters:

Whenever I walk past “Laghidze’s Waters” on Rustaveli Prospect, I feel simultaneously a desire and a sadness, at the same time, a feeling of frightened shame takes control of me. It’s as if I walked past a friend who in their time was exceptionally talented and good-humored, who, now, dressed in rags, is begging me for alms and apparently can’t even recognize me. (Ak’opiani 2007: 58)

Laghidze’s Waters is indeed an animated object, but an object animated by sadness, shame, and nostalgia seems like a haunting ghostly presence, very different from the kinds of animation that brand theorists like to talk about. But even this degree of tenuous liveliness is better than a bottle of Coca-Cola, which for this author is a mere prosaic replacement for the poetry of Laghidze’s, a mere bottled thing which merely satisfies a need, but does not elicit a desire.

My desire is to again feel in the heat of summer that freedom [*silaghe*] and happiness conferred by those magical [*zghapruli*] waters, to again go about in those living and joyful environs of old, which as if whispers in your ear “everything is alright!” Now I drink Coca-Cola, but do I really like Coca-Cola? No! I like my mother’s cherry compote, the water of Chughureti mixed with cherry jam, and I like Laghidze’s “Chocolate Cream” (ibid.)

Why then, does she not enter Laghidze’s Waters? Why drink a dead bottle of Coca-Cola instead of the living magical fairy-tale waters of Laghidze’s? The desire is still there, but the place too is haunted with a series of repressed emotions.

What is it now that prevents me from realizing this desire? The fact that, the moment I enter “Laghidze’s Waters”, instead of feeling carefree and light-hearted, I am overpowered by sadness, dejection, fear, shame and despair.

**Sadness and dejection**—at seeing a dying friend.

**Fear** because this last safe harbor, could easily turn to dust and ashes very soon, for what are to me completely unacceptable reasons.

**Shame** because I haven’t even lifted a hand, to prevent my friend from becoming a beggar.

And **despair**—since we, who secretly love [Laghidze’s Waters], are not so few in number, but why are we so sluggish? Why don’t we take care of what we have? Why do we regard it as coldly as someone who tears up by the roots centuries old trees that he himself did not plant? Why do we not try to preserve the ambience [iersaxe] of the old city and why doesn’t it move us, when a foreign culture levels our culture traditions? Why... Why?... Why.

Because of the way that Laghidze’s Waters store represents all that was best about socialism, and is associated with so many memories of times and places, Laghidze’s continued operation represents a ghostly haunting of postsocialism, bringing back repressed emotions and sadness for all that was lost with the transition, as well as the loss of one’s own biographical youth. For a younger generation, by contrast, it moves from a real place really associated with memories to being merely a metaphoric expression of the always vanishing romance of Old Tbilisi, no different from narrow streets and old balconies:

“Laghidze’s Waters” reminds me of a happy-go-lucky and joyful time. The taste of these waters, though only for a moment, makes me feel again like a little girl

and along with the bubbles bursting in my nose gives me the fragrance of my happy youth. Before my eyes I can see the old carousel in Vake Park, I feel how the wind blows on me on the tramway going up to the Funicular, I remember my older sister treating me to ice cream and coffee on the sly in a café...At the same time, this brand does not permit me to forget what the city of my birth has lost since my childhood, that which always was there, at that time...and I suddenly have a desire to somehow, in some way, protect that, which still has not vanished. But all this is only like that for me. For my niece in Moscow perhaps “Laghidze’s Waters” is one of the metaphors of Tbilisi, it is that water, which her father loved in his youth and about which she listens to him tell stories with pleasure. To drink this water she intentionally goes to Rustaveli Prospect, although who knows, do the Laghidze’s Waters of today resemble those of those times? (Ak’opiani 2007: 63)

The survival of the café into postsocialism triggers both a desire (which turns out to be a impossible desire to relive one’s own youth) and a reappearance of a repressed sense of loss (a repressed realization that socialism was, perhaps, in certain respects, a happier place). Perhaps this is why all such remnants of socialism trigger such a hostility for other intellectuals of her generation, the Rose Revolutionaries, who think that erasing such places permanently will once and for all erase this ambivalence (as I have argued elsewhere, Manning forthcoming). And this is perhaps why even those who loved Laghidze’s are silent about their love, and ashamed to continue to acknowledge it publicly. For such a customer, for whom Laghidze’s Waters as a brand lived only in the complex material assemblage of Laghidze’s café at 24 Rustaveli Prospect, but as a name printed on the label of lifeless bottles, it would only be another haunting presence that reminded one of the absence of one’s living friend, like a familiar name on a gravestone:

Perhaps I will also cry when my friend will no longer be there, when it appears only in lifeless bottles. Will its name, alone, remind me of those life-giving, fizzy waters, which I so loved and made me so happy in my youth? (ibid.)

For a Tbilisian of those times, bottled Laghidze’s would seem like a dead, or even undead thing, in a way worse than a lifeless bottle of Coca-Cola which was never alive to begin

with, falling into an “uncanny valley” where the proximal yet incomplete resemblance to the real thing makes the resemblance frightening and strange.

For such a customer, Laghidze’s Waters could only be properly appreciated at the Laghidze’s Waters store at 24 Rustaveli Prospect, the “brand” of Laghidze’s consisting of a whole assemblage of experiences that could not be replicated at any other place or any other time. But for the entire socialist period this store was only the tip of a much larger socialist concern defined not by the culturedness of the café but by the quality of their product, which in bottled form circulated in various forms throughout the USSR.

Laghidze’s was a model citizen of the socialist commodity world, where it’s only “rivals” were alcoholic beverages, wine and beer. But by 2001, Laghidze’s waters now found itself not only in competition with its historic “rivals”, wine and beer, but with new rivals as well, including Western brands and flavors of soft drink, notably Coca-Cola, as well as branded and brandless local bottled versions of the same flavor line that Laghidze’s had pioneered.

Among these new rivals for the socialist soft drink name par excellence, Laghidze’s Waters, we have already met the symbolically important one, the Western soft drink brand name par excellence, Coca-Cola. The two brands seem, in a sense, to be destined to stand as figures for the opposition between socialist and capitalist production. According to their respective mythologies, they were both invented around the same time (sometime in the mid-1880s) in places named (in English) “Georgia”. But there are more substantive similarities between them. Laghidze’s was the socialist brand that had a name recognition and dominant market share under socialism similar to the capitalist brand par excellence, Coca-Cola. The products are not merely similar, in Tbilisi they are

linked together by real associations, even kinship. When Coca-Cola arrived in Tbilisi in the early nineties, it took over one of the plants and some of the staff that had been used by the socialist firm that had also bottled Laghidze's products. While Mitrophan Laghidze's grandson, Tornike Laghidze, still runs the Laghidze plant in Tbilisi as a labor of love, his own son, Vakhtang, works in Public Relations at the Coca-Cola plant down the street.

Even so, the Laghidze's factory seems almost like the inversion of a capitalist concern, typified by the Tbilisi Coca-Cola company nearby: the building is simply a factory, the entrance unmarked, no provision for visitors, no waiting rooms with photographs and awards on the wall, the uniform here amongst the upper echelons of staff was not a business suit but a white lab coat, technicians and not businessmen, and these technicians were nearly all women. When I visited the Laghidze's Factory, I wandered past aging idle industrial vats until I found the offices, and then wandered the hallways, trying to find the person with whom I had my appointment. The person was not there, but the technical director, Nana, would come and speak with me in a moment, in the meantime I was directed to wait in an adjacent office. Here an ancient man was seated at his desk, occupying himself drawing various geometric figures with great precision. His current theme was a cone. He looked up and smiled amiably as I came in and explained myself, leaned back, smiled again. He began to talk about the problems of the company, as he said, to pass the time. I pulled out my recording equipment and he smilingly waved them away: "I will tell you a story, but just, as I say, to pass the time. We are talking here just to divert ourselves, just to pass the time." And so we passed the time. I got the impression that similarly, much of the business of Laghidze's consisted of

passing the time.

Eventually Nana arrived, a bustling, alert and authoritative woman, and we went to her office. Nana was a technical expert, a member of the erstwhile socialist technical intelligentsia, there was no marketing department at Laghidze's. In the middle of the interview we went into an adjacent room, a laboratory, to acquire some syrup samples. In the room, older women dressed in lab coats wandered listlessly in a laboratory, alembics and other chemical apparatus of mad scientist vintage clashing with the lines of houseplants, indexes of *kulturnost*, on the windowsill. Two of the lab-coated scientists were talking in a disconsolate fashion. Perhaps as part of a daily conversation about the failure of Laghidze's, perhaps an involuntary apology to the rare visitor, one of them was saying, "We don't understand business".

At face value, everything at Laghidze's illustrated the same set of themes, the oppositions between a socialist enterprise and a post-socialist, capitalist one, the Coca-Cola Company. Socialist productivism faces off with capitalist consumerism. At Coca-Cola, business expertise is front and center, at Laghidze's, technical expertise rules the roost. The two kinds of elites, capitalist business elites and socialist technoscientific elites, were also a gendered and generational opposition: at Coca-Cola younger men in suits, at Laghidze's, older women in lab coats. The metaphoric opposition between Coca-Cola and Laghidze's on the market, recurs in a different way within the sphere of production, as the opposition between socialist and capitalist enterprises.

All this insistent metaphoric polarization that would seem to posit Coca-Cola as the international capitalism nemesis of the ailing Laghidze's concern, the final "rival" that would take Laghidze to its grave. The opposition between Laghidze's and Coca-Cola

would seem to be ripe to be rewritten as a David-Goliath metaphor to Western commentators in Russia, here, a young American in Moscow writing for the English language ex-pat rag, *the Moscow Times*:

So what local underdog beverage can topple the Coke global hegemony? My vote is in for the super lightweight contender from Tbilisi, Georgia, the green-colored drink that goes by the name "Tarhoon." And this exotic elixir has a history every bit as interesting as Coca Colas. In 1889, three years after the discovery of Coca Cola, halfway around the world in Georgia the entrepreneur Lagidze was experimenting with different water-based drinks enhanced with herbs. One of these creations employs the herb estragon, together with a few other natural ingredients and a mix of carbonation to give it a fizz. The result is a very pleasant drink that does not carry the high caffeine levels of the heavyweight champion. But just try finding a bottle of Tarhoon in your local supermarket...! If you can make it past the wall of Coke you will be lucky to find a few dusty bottles, aging like wine on some bottle shelf. But this is neither an attack on Coca Cola, nor an endorsement for Tarhoon. Rather, the example of Coke and Tarhoon provides a microcosm for the way the global economy seems to be running these days. The huge transnational corporations have the massive budgets to dump their products across the "global village" with very little consideration for the fate of the small local producers. This subject goes far beyond soda pop. It touches every aspect of our lives and actually defines our society and culture to a large degree. (Bridge 2005)

The narrative here is a familiar one from anti-brand activism and the Slow Food movement (Meneley 2004, Heath and Meneley 2007). The "local underdog" drink that can stand up to the homogenization of taste of Coca-Cola and McDonalds must therefore be qualitatively distinctive. Rather than call the drink by its proper name (Laghidze's), in an Orientalizing moment, the commentator chooses to name the brand after a specific flavor of that brand, the most decidedly unfamiliar to Western tastes, tarragon (Russian "Tarhoon", Georgian *tarkhuna*). The opposition is not now an opposition between the homogenizing Western flavor and brand, Coca-Cola, and the local tarragon-flavored brand whose contestation of globalization is figured by the way its exotic use of a savory herb for a sweet drink challenges Western canons of taste.

In fact, one wonders if the dusty bottles of “Tarhoon” above were Laghidze’s to begin with, after all, real bottles of Laghidze’s will spoil long before they can collect dust. In fact, according to Nana, the true “rivals” of Laghidze’s are not Western branded goods like Coca-Cola, but falsified brands and “brandless” products of unknown origin. A chemist by training, she proved her point right then and there by making me pour out a sample of the Nescafe rip-off drink I had brought with me (“Nice Café”). Testing it triumphantly, she demonstrated that it was a cheap rip-off, probably made out of hastily mixed flavor powders and tap water, with aspartame instead of sugar. I wasn’t entirely surprised. But I did stop drinking it.



Figure 2: Typical falsified brand “Nice Café”

What were these “brandless” goods? The only ingredients that can be purchased at the low prices of these drinks (perhaps 10-15 tetri, less than 10 cents, compared with 35 tetri as the production cost of a bottle of Laghidze’s) are the brightly colored powders sold at the an alchemist’s shop at the local bazaar where all the things, other than water, can be bought to begin a microfactory: Labels, bottles, powders imported from Russia

for flavor, and sugar substitutes like aspartame. These then are the ingredients. Nana during her interview gestured at the unspeakable and uncontrolled methods of production of these micro-factories. I myself have witnessed the process. In one village, acquaintances showed me the micro-factory from which they supplied their corner store with soft drinks. The water came from the tap, mixed with powders in the household bathtub, and bottled and labeled there. As Tornike Laghidze himself put it in an interview (Lomidze 2003)

Our factory, factually, is at a standstill. If you work once or twice in a month, can you call that work? We have laid off 90 people. The market is filled with shoddy products. How can a half litre bottle of limonat cost 10-15 tetri [about 5-10 cents]? When just washing the bottle costs us 5-6 tetri, but these tiny cottage industry producers only rinse the bottles with cold water, factually, they don't wash them. You have to pour something in the bottle. From their prices, imagine what they are pouring in the bottles. People are poor and will buy limonat for 10 tetri, limonat which, principally, is prepared from chemical compounds. Instead of sugar they use sugar substitutes. This is poison, isn't it? You shouldn't even given a child such limonat, that is better. Their limonat lasts six months (it is chemical), ours lasts a month, a month and a half, because it is prepared from natural ingredients. Making limonat [the way they do] requires technologically neither a lot of time nor resources, so whoever isn't lazy, is making limonat. We could do that too, pour chemicals in a bottle, but we don't want to, this is Laghidze.

According to Nana, the problem is the state, conspicuous in its absence, absence of regulation leading to problems like falsification of brands, and to generic brands of unknown origin and low price. She noted that under socialism, the penalties for falsification were severe: "They would shoot you". Now, of course, there are few if any controls by the state on the competition. The resulting scenario is an ironic inversion of the traditional slow food underdog story (on which see Meneley 2004), here a technoscientific industrial brand, which turns out to be the producer of a high quality natural product, is besieged by small cottage producers, who turn out to be purveyors of

cheap unsanitary artificial poisons. As a result, from the perspective of soft-drink producers, the real question is not “Laghidze’s or Coca-Cola?”, but “soft drinks or poison?” (Lomidze 2003).

### **Laghidze’s versus Coca-Cola: The Socialist Product and the Capitalist Brand**

For consumers, Laghidze’s Waters always finds its discursive nemesis in Coca-Cola. While in the world of production Laghidze’s and Coca-Cola were linked by a close kinship, in the world of consumption, Laghidze’s Waters and Coca-Cola are always posited as emblematic of opposed worlds, national versus global, socialist past versus Western future. They are paired off in a Levi-Straussian totemism based not on figuring social differences on the analogy of those in nature (Levi Strauss 1963), but a “bourgeois” totemism where humanly created second nature, differences between products and brands, serve to figure social difference (Sahlins 1976). But it is not so much that discussion of Laghidze’s leads inexorably to comparison with Coca-Cola (though this also happens), as Coca-Cola is deployed continuously as a sign of the times, a “meta-symbol” of the transition, and finds in Laghidze’s its local opponent, standing for the opposite of whatever Coca-Cola is used to symbolize:

Coca-Cola is one of three or four commodities that have obtained this status [of meta-symbol]. In much political, academic, and conversational rhetoric the term Coca-Cola comes to stand, not just for a particular soft-drink, but also for the problematic nature of commodities in general.... It may stand for commodities or capitalism, but equally Imperialism or Americanization.... So Coca-Cola is not merely material culture, it is a symbol that stands for a debate about material culture. (Miller 1998: 170)

Whether one likes Coca-Cola, and thereby adopts a “Westernizing” political position, or one suspects that it contains some sort of “black poison”, thereby adopting a kind of anti-

Western nationalist position, Laghidze's Waters is always brought in as the indigenous "national" soft drink in opposition to Coca-Cola. As a result of this, bottles of Laghidze's Waters, which are almost invisible as actual products in actual stores, are highly visible objects of a lively meta-symbolic commerce.

An example of this pervasive opposition, a cartoon from *Niangi* from the late 1990s summed up the transition to capitalism by showing an animate bottle of Laghidze's sitting on the pavement on a street corner, begging, and a passing animate bottle of Coca-Cola flipping it some small change.



**Figure 3:** Cartoon from humor magazine *Niangi* [Crocodile] (1998) V. Kucia

In the cartoon, the bottles of Laghidze's Waters and Coca-Cola are figures, conveniently opposed Socialist and Western brands from the same domain of use-value, personified to oppose the products of the socialist period ("our" Laghidze's Waters) over and against the products coming in from the Capitalist West ("their" Coca-Cola). Obviously, the cartoon-writer is not merely commenting on the fate of companies like Laghidze's, but also the fate of socialist production in general in the post-socialist, capitalist period. Socialist companies and "brands" that were once strong are now reduced to begging in the street, and that new companies like Coca-cola are those that are doing well now. Transferred to whole populations, Laghidze's stands for the general dire economic situation of people of the socialist generation as a whole, or even Georgia's transition from socialism to post-socialism as a whole. I note in passing, because I don't know what to make of it, is that Laghidze's Waters is fully personified, it has a human face, but the animate bottle of Coca-Cola is faceless. I also note that here, as above in Ak'opiani's discussion, Laghidze's is not only fully personified, but again is personified as a beggar.

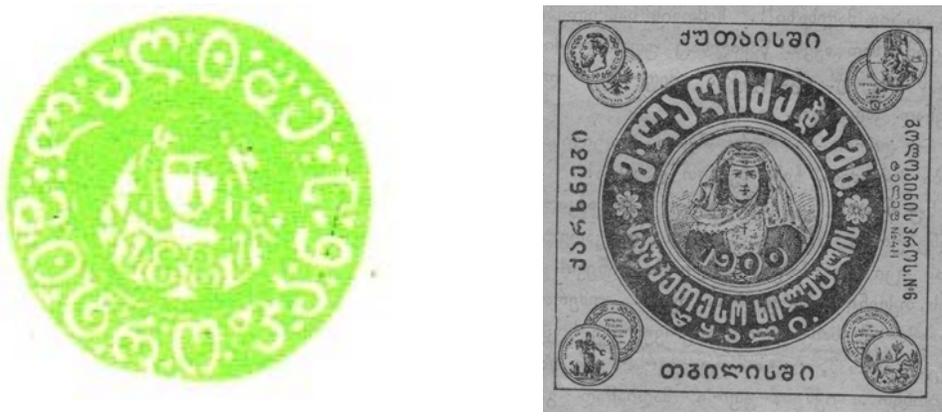
The reading seems simple enough, but in order to make this reading work, the cartoonist has to find a way to treat a vanishing commodity, Laghidze's Waters, as being a product that is packaged and branded using the same kinds of (presumably universal) semiotic technologies of distinction as the easily recognizable and readily available bottle of Coca-Cola, including a distinctive color, name, logo and even shape of the bottle. First, while Coca-Cola is strongly associated with a specific form of glass bottle (which is still used in Tbilisi) that as a distinctive "trade dress" is part of the semiotic technology of

brand, Laghidze's Waters not only lacks a distinctive type of bottle, but is seldom found in bottled form at all. Recall that our nostalgic Georgian consumer above treats seeing her old friend Laghidze's in a bottle as being akin to seeing a dead friend in a coffin, the name on the label like an epitaph: "Perhaps I will also cry when my friend will no longer be there, when it appears only in lifeless bottles. Will its name, alone, remind me of those life-giving, fizzy waters, which I so loved and made me so happy in my youth?"

The name "Laghidze's Waters" literally *in vitro* on a label on a bottle is lifeless compared to the lively technical process of mixing and pouring it *in vivo*, and the name printed on the label (without any distinctive stylization of script, again unlike Coca-Cola) is all that there is to distinguish this product as a brand. Actually that is not *quite* true. Just above the name on the label in the cartoon is a tiny circle, apparently a logo. Laghidze's labels throughout their history do have a recognizable logo (image of Georgian woman in traditional dress, see above chapter 3 figure 1). Under socialism, the Laghidze's logo usually appeared, if at all, as a tiny mark at the upper edge of the label, much as it does here. Quite unlike a capitalist label, the bulk of the space of the label announces in word and image the nature of the use-value that was to be consumed, but not the producer of that use-value. In fact, the two major soft-drink factories, Laghidze's and Tbilxiltsqali (acronym for Tbilisi Fruit Waters, later to become the Coca-Cola plant) not only shared many of the same personnel, but also labels that were identical but for these tiny markings.<sup>iii</sup>



**Figure 4:** Typical Socialist soft drink labels: (Left) Georgian SSR State Agriculture Industry in the name of Laghidze’s, “Tarragon Syrup”, (Right) Georgian SSR State Agriculture Industry TbilKhilTsqali “Lemon Syrup”. The “trademark” logo is the almost illegible circle at the top.



**Figure 5** Details: Laghidze’s Logo (indicating origins of 1887, presumably the change was to allow a jubilee year to be celebrated in 1987), Pre-revolutionary (1914) Laghidze’s logo from newspaper advertisement (indicating 1900 as the [correct] date for the founding of Laghidze’s).

The fact that Laghidze's Waters is found in the cartoon in a personified bottle is motivated by the iconographic imperative to position Laghidze's Waters as a socialist brand, as Coca-Cola's domestic rival, as its totemic other. But the iconographic comparison of the two instead reveals instead how very *unlike* one another they are. Compared to the dense semiotic adumbration of brand in the Coca-Cola bottle, Laghidze's hardly seems like a "brand" at all.

While in one way, both Laghidze's and Coca-Cola are brand (*pirmis*) goods. The term translated as "brand" (Georgian *pirmis*, *sapirmo*, Russian *firmennyi*) carried under socialism, and for many, still carries, a strong connotation of "Western", to the point that it was not so important whether brand was a known Western brand as that it was "Western" in the first place: "Something was *firmennyi* because it was manufactured elsewhere and therefore established an authentic link with the Imaginary West" (Yurchak 2006: 196). As a result, while companies like Laghidze's Waters were technically socialist examples of branded goods (Laghidze's was a *sapirmo maghazia*), nevertheless there was also a sense in which "brand" (*sapirmo*, *pirmis*) meant "Western". As we have argued elsewhere (Manning and Uplisashvili 2007), one of the problems that Georgian "brands" have in the first place is to overcome the idea that *pirmis* (branded) means "foreign". Hence, on one level, Laghidze's pairs off against Coke as a socialist or domestic brand to a capitalist or international one, on another level, the opposition is between goods with a "brand" (*pirmis*, which in Georgian typically also means "foreign", Coca-Cola) versus goods with a "name" (Laghidze's).

This is why the Laghidze's company does not conceptualize itself as a "brand" (an appellation arbitrarily conferred on a kind of object), but a "name" (an essential attribute

of the producer of the object). Perhaps, too, this is why the Laghidze's bottle is fully personified, while the Coca-Cola bottle is faceless. Take the names of the two brands, Laghidze is the name of a person, and if the bottle itself is named, it will be named after the fruit essence it contains ("Tarkhuna", "Limoni"). Are either of these, separately or taken together, to be treated as a brand in the same sense as Coca-Cola obviously is? To function as a trademark, or as a brand, a product name must not be descriptive of the product, but distinctive of the brand.<sup>iv</sup> The traditional Western legal doctrine of distinctiveness relates to a specific dimension of the linguistic aspect of brand, namely, that "original, arbitrary, or fanciful words" are more singular and distinctive than terms descriptive or referential or in common usage (this particular model is ultimately canonized in the Abercrombie decision of 1976). Thus, very roughly, trademarks are protected to the extent that they *lack* a descriptive or referential relationship to properties or qualities of the product. A similar opposition is found in protection of distinctive trade dress (for example, the Coca-Cola bottle), replacing a doctrine of referential/descriptive with utilitarian/function, just as a whimsical arbitrary or fanciful made-up name is more distinctive because less descriptive, so those aspects of the trade dress that cannot be rationalized in terms of utility are instead assigned to the domain of semiosis, a domain of non-utility. What is linguistically descriptive or functional belongs to the product, the brand is made up of fancy and whimsy.

But Mitrophan Laghidze himself conceptualized his soft drinks not as a distinctive brand, but as a distinctive product. In fact, he spends a good deal of time in his book on non-alcoholic drink production seeking a scientific precision in objective denotational reference to aspects of the product (down to chemical diagrams of the exact chemicals

involved in the ingredients), seeking to find an objective scientific way to distinguish his branch of industrial production from neighboring ones, in particular seeking to define the domain more clearly than the extremely imprecise term *limonati*, or rather “fruity, gassy, cold drinks” (Laghidze 1953: 10). Of such fruit drinks, there are two types, natural drinks that are based on natural fruit juices from which they should take their names and those prepared artificially from synthetic “fruit” essences (Laghidze 1953: 11). But both of these are separated from an even more artificial group, Western drinks made with artificial flavorings and with correspondingly made up names: “so-called ‘fantasy drinks’ which have made up names” (Laghidze 1953: 9). The problem with this group is not that they are necessarily artificial in their contents, rather the problem is that given their made up names, one can never really know anything at all about their contents, which could be literally anything:

To a separate group of non-alcoholic drinks belongs the so-called drinks with made-up names, which in some countries they call ‘fizzy *limonat*’ [*shushkhuna limonati*]. Very often between the name and the content of these drinks there is no natural connection whatsoever. The names and numbers of drinks with made up names are legion and their potential combinations [between names and contents] practically unlimited. In their group belong fairly widespread drinks: ‘Cream Soda’, ‘Theatrical’ [*teatraluri*], ‘Spring’, ‘Crème de Vanilla’, ‘Coca-Cola’ and many others drinks which frequently have strange names. In the mixtures of drinks of made up names it is possible that mixtures of natural fruit essences and fruit juices will be used, or endless combinations of synthetic aromatic-flavor substances. (Laghidze 1953: 11)

This opposition between the transparency of socialist naming and the artificiality of capitalist naming underlines the productivist “monism” of the socialist product and the capricious dualism of brand and product under capitalism. For Laghidze, it is clear, products that had the same ingredients and properties defined in technoscientific terms should not be distinguished at all by their descriptors.

One might well imagine that this somewhat stodgy technoscientific addiction to referential truth and transparency was being challenged by the younger, late socialist generations by their transgressive consumption of Western brand names which, the story is oft told, show that consumer desire is a transhistorical form of agency and subjectivity. But it could equally be argued that the ways that capitalist branded goods were consumed as being “symbols disconnected from their literal meanings” (Yurchak 2006: 197), as being dematerialized brands, actually is much of a piece with Laghidze’s theory that brands are just “made up names” obscuring the nature of the product. The divorce between the product and the brand is related to the otherworldliness of branded goods as portents of the “the Imaginary West” (Yurchak 2006: chapter 5), and this otherworldliness is further underlined by their separation from the mundane banality of use-values, which begins in the West with their made up names, and ends when they finally float free from the product that they were arbitrarily attached to in the first place, detached and displayed as an empty container or label in late socialist consumption:

Young people in all corners of the country used empty Western liquor bottles, beer cans, and cigarette boxes to create a kind of ‘still life’ installation on the bookshelves and cupboards in their rooms. Most of these packages and bottles were empty—they could not be purchased in regular Soviet stores and often circulated as pure packaging free of original products. However, this empty status did not matter because their original meaning as consumable commodities (the actual liquor, beer, or cigarettes) was largely irrelevant. They were not commodities but shells of commodities whose role was to link the here and now to an ‘elsewhere’. The materiality of these objects, and the fact that they were unmistakably ‘Western’ in origin, endowed them with great power for doing this work of linking. (Yurchak 2006: 194-5)

Naturally, given their distinctive stylized shape, Coca-Cola bottles were prime examples of this sort of deployment of brand. A Georgian commentator, a Parliamentarian, after stipulating his patriotism in the sphere of drink by preferring

Laghidze's Waters to Coke and Pepsi, nevertheless recalls how he prized a Coca-Cola bottle under socialism, and how, therefore, he will not "cast the first stone at Coca-Cola" in the present:

Once, among us, there was such a tendency noted, when Coca-Cola was considered an 'agent of American imperialism'. I remember how, in 1965, having returned from a trip to America, I discovered I had apparently brought back a small, pretty Coca-Cola bottle in my handbag. In a local [Georgian socialist] context, it really appeared as though it were strange and inviting in some unknown way. I set it on a bookshelf at home as a souvenir and there it stayed for a goodly amount of time. A coworker at a organization of that [Soviet] period, a friend of the family who I had invited to my house, observed the bottle with doubt, took me aside and advised me 'You don't want that, throw it away!' (Pridon Khalvashi 'K'ok'a-K'olas vin chokolavs?' *Kartvelos Resp'ublik'a* no. 5 december 23 1997)

From the normative socialist perspective which naturalized the category of universal human "needs" (use-value), embodied in the product, Western brands appear to substitute an unnatural order of empty signifiers (made-up brand names or literally empty cans and bottles) for the natural qualisigns of the product (use-values, duly described on the socialist label or inside the actual container). As Fehervary (2009) notes, socialist ideology articulated by Laghidze is one of referential "transparency", seeking a kind of technoscientific and naturalizing fit between name and product, which is opposed to the capricious conventionalism of Western brand names, where the arbitrarily chosen name obscures the nature of the product. Western legal theory, of course, might well agree, that the essence of a brand name is that it is specifically *not* descriptive of the product, hence the legal protections offered to names that are, indeed, as non-descriptive and whimsical, even fantastic, as possible.

Once this separation is made for products, in the fashionable appropriation of empty signifiers of brand amongst late socialist youth, there is no reason why it cannot be extended to persons as well (Figure 6):

**Figure 6**



-- I am getting married!  
-- What brand (*pirmis*) is she? (Niangi 1978 13)

Deployed as empty signifiers, Western brands functioned less differentiating properties of ordinary consumer goods as they functioned as meta-symbols in everyday life. To the extent that meta-symbols are uses of brands not to differentiate products but to stand for the horizons of circulation of those same products, Coca-Cola standing not for a specific kind of soft drink, but for Imperialism, Americanization, Capitalism, then it

might well be argued that under socialism virtually all “branded” goods tended to be valued precisely because of their otherworldly “meta-symbolic” function to index “The Imaginary West”. The same could be said for socialist branded goods, which often contrasted with ordinary socialist products as meta-symbolic portents or figurations of the coming bright future of Communism. In part, this also meant that even Western brands did not function as brands, inasmuch as their valuation in monetary terms on the black market depended entirely on their generic status as “Western” (as opposed to socialist) and not on the specific recognizability of the individual Western brand, which had a negligible effect on price (Yurchak 2006: 196).

For the term “brand” and branded goods under postsocialism, this had certain consequences for the apperception of brands in general. One is that the term “brand” (*pirmis*) still tends to be treated as being a category that applies specifically to Western products. Hence, on the one hand, Laghidze’s and Coca-Cola are socialist and capitalist brands, but on the other hand, Laghidze’s is a “name” and Coca-Cola is a “brand”. Another is that while in Western brand literature there is an increasing stress on how the opposition between a brand and a product form an inseparable internal relationship, where brand and product increasingly are inseparable aspects or moments of an integral unity, the semiotic apparatus of brand was treated by late socialist youth as an externally and extrinsically connected, *entirely* separable part, which, (following the same critical line of Laghidze above, after all) did not index any specific product but provided contact with the imaginary place of origin, either an empty can or bottle or “a physical marker worn on clothes and personal possessions and known in youth slang as *leibl*, from English ‘label’ for a tag or brand name....[O]ne student argued that what made clothes

*firmennyi* (of a 'brand' make, slang for 'trendy' or Western) was the presence of a *leibl*" (Yurchak 2006: 195-6). The very fact that a *leibl* can be transferred from one product and used to adorn, for example, clothing, underlines once again the way that these youth essentially agreed with Socialist critiques of brand like that formulated by Laghidze: while brands unavoidably index the imaginary West (function as "meta-symbols"), there was no specific relationship between a Western brand and a product, a brand is easily separated from a product, and once separated, no longer "points" to that product in its absence. Another is that given the immense value attached to Western-ness under socialism, there was already a thriving market in actual falsified Western goods, leading to the development of a suspicious consumer who viewed each branded good with the suspicion that branded goods, if anything, were more likely to be falsified than not (Yurchak 2006: 196).

Such a separability and opacity of brand might help give rise to an intense awareness of how easily falsified the semiotic attributes of brand are in general, leading to a sense of distrust of the promises made by brand. This is linked, too, to a general way in which Laghidze's conceptualization of the relationship of the name to the product is one of naturalness and descriptive transparency (see also Fehervary 2009), compared to the artificiality and opacity of "made up" brand names. Georgians to a large extent still purchase many of their goods in the bazaar, so there is a model of consumption in which the transparent world of natural use-values faces off with an inscrutable world plagued with falsification.

Fears of falsification not only undermine the linkage of the product or producer and the brand, but falsification, too, represents a kind of occult dimension to the transparency

world of production. In this sense, fears of falsification represent a more general paranoid and nihilistic logic of reception that attributes an occult dimension to every manifest activity, in economics and politics alike (see Manning 2007). This even applies to what might elsewhere be called “natural disasters”: Earthquakes in Tbilisi in 2002 were widely attributed to Russian (or Abkhazian) earthquake machines (Manning 2007: 208n18). Accordingly fears of falsification of production apply not only to the obviously extrinsic relation of container to contents, brand to product, but even agricultural products in the bazaar are often felt to be falsified with chemicals (Pelkmans 2006: 191).

Falsification not only represents a rupture of the authentic link between the brand and the Imaginary West, it is often taken to be the sign of either a nefarious hidden agency (the Mafia) or the fact that the goods came from the East, specifically Turkey. When Pelkmans’ expensive Italian shoes are ruined after only a month, his Georgian friend, rather than admit that Europe can produce shoddy goods, deduces that the shoes were not made in Italy at all, but manufactured in Turkey by the Turkish “Mafia” (Pelkmans 2006: 171). By locating falsification in Georgia’s nearest outpost of “Asia”, Turkey, Georgians can preserve a pristine image of the products of the Imaginary West, which is seen as the telos of “the transition”, representing an abundant future when Georgia will “return to Europe” (ibid. 173, chapter 7). Just as Europe or “The West” is associated with modernization, prosperity, civilization, and Turkey (or Asia) is associated with the opposites, so too Europe is associated with authentic production and high quality goods and Turkey is associated with falsification and shoddy goods:

The attachment of the label ‘Turkish’ to all commodities that were considered worthless, and the preservation of the label ‘European’ for those products that were highly valued, strengthened peoples’ conceptual map of both the past and the future. This time dimension was in itself revealing. Whereas Russian products

symbolized the past, Turkish goods referred to the disliked present, while Western products continued to express hopeful images of the future. (Pelkmans 2006: 1888)

Factually, while consumers locate production and falsification within an Orientalist imaginative Geography as West and East, factually, the synthetic soft drink flavors used to falsify soft drinks all come from Russia (Lomidze 2003). Who else, after all, would make an imitation Tarragon flavor, but someone who had drunk this flavor under socialism? But as Nana reminded me, fears of falsification index the absence of the state either as unitary producer and guarantor of production under socialism, or regulator under capitalism. Conceptualizations of brand which locate the value of brands in the relation of “goodwill” they create with the customer forget that without a third party, the state, this relationship becomes a precarious bootstrapping relationship.<sup>v</sup> Western brands are imagined against the ever present, but invisible, normalized condition of the state, lending them a “generalized goodwill” which forms a not unimportant part of Western brand loyalty and equity. The failure of Laghidze’s Waters under postsocialism begins with the failed Georgian state, particularly as Laghidze’s export schemes in late socialism were annihilated by the years of civil war and chaos. But if Laghdize’s failure and falsification under post-socialism ultimately becomes a critique of the capitalist state, under socialism the exceptional status of Laghidze’s waters becomes a resource to critique ordinary socialist production too, in effect a critique of socialism and capitalism alike from the standpoint of production itself.

### **Production: the “secret” of Laghidze**

However much Laghidze may have been a quintessential member of the Stalin period technical intelligentsia, by late socialism Laghidze became an almost magical fairy tale figure, a “sorcerer”. His waters were no longer the prosaic product of an objective industrial labor process that could be described explicitly in gruesome technoscientific detail over 300 pages (as he does in his 1953 work), but a mysterious “secret”. A good example of this folklorization of production in the figure of Laghidze is found in the work of the Abkhazian novelist Fazil Iskander, whose Sandro of Chegem novels seem to marry disparate elements of folklore and socialist reality, the every day and the state, in such curious ways that he has merited the title of a “socialist magical realist” author. In one of these novels, the hero, Uncle Sandro, an extra-ordinary ordinary Abkhazian, has yet another one of his run ins with the highest echelons of power under Stalin, this time in a tale about socialist soft drinks, the tale of a certain “Logidze” and his famous soft drinks and Stalin’s security henchman, the notorious Lavrenti Beria (also, like Stalin, a Georgian), the head of the NKVD (the predecessors of the KGB). The tale is narrated by Uncle Sandro’s nephew, the narrator of all the novels. The immediate context is the hapless attempt of Abesalomon Nartovich, a local bureaucrat, in the present day (the novels are set in the “stagnation” period of late socialism), to impress a visiting cosmonaut by offering him his own undrinkable experimental soft drinks. The political background that sets the scene for the encounter, is Logidze’s refusal to share the secret of his production process with the Socialist authorities, leading to his exile from Tbilisi (in fact, the historical Laghidze did go to Sukhumi at the invitation of Abkhazian communist party leader Nestor Lakoba (who later became enemies with Lavrenti Beria) in 1930):

“Now I should like to offer you,” Abesalomon Nartovich [A local Abkhazian Socialist Bureaucrat] said ceremonially, “a soft drink made from my own recipe... Nadya, bring the glasses.”

....

“The famous Logidze carried the secret of his soft drinks to the grave,” Abesalomon Nartovich said, “to the extent of my modest abilities, I am trying to create a drink of equivalent worth.”

Interesting, I thought; does anyone in the country tend to his own affairs? Nevertheless, the mighty breadth of Abesalomon Nartovich’s character left room for hope that he was not a complete stranger to the affairs of his own institute.

At this point Uncle Sandro took the floor and told a short story about his own encounter with the famous Logidze.

It seems that Logidze made the best soft drinks in the world. His lemon fizz was so fine that the Shah of Persia couldn’t live a day without it. Cases of Logidze Lemon Fizz were dispatched to Baku, went from there by sea to Persia, and then by Caravan all the way to Teheran.

But in the early thirties Logidze’s relations with Beria deteriorated badly. Beria apparently tried to find the secret of the soft drinks from him, but Logidze would not reveal it. Despite Beria’s intrigues, the old man bravely preserved his secret. And Beria couldn’t do anything to him because he didn’t know how Stalin felt about it. He merely exiled him from Tbilisi. Logidze moved to Mukhus [the mythical universe name for Sukhum, the capital of the Abkhazian ASSR, part of the Georgian SSR]. Here he worked in a soft drink factory, still making his excellent beverages, but he did not reveal their secret to anyone.

Now in Abkhazia, he firmly enters the narrative universe of the Abkhazian writer’s novels. Nestor Lakoba decides to see if he cannot get the secret, naturally employing Uncle Sandro, the trickster hero of most of these stories, for this end. On Lakoba’s instructions, Uncle Sandro gets the keys to the old man’s apartment, puts on a mask and gets a pistol, and goes to the old man’s apartment and wakes him up. Uncle Sandro is flustered by the fact that the old man Logidze, having been harassed by the notorious Beria over the years, is unimpressed with the pistol-bearing intruder.

“More of Beria’s little tricks?” he [the old man] asked, settling back in the bed.

“No,” Uncle Sandro said, “but you have to reveal--”

“The secret of Logidze water?” the old man asked scornfully. Taking a cigarette from the chair that stood at the head of the bed, he struck a match and lit up. “Remember this: there isn’t any Logidze secret.”

This takes Uncle Sandro by surprise, and the result is a kind of Socratic dialog by which the wise old man Logidze explains that the process is not a product of knowledge, a secret, something that can be learned, written down, stolen, but a product of love and labor, things that cannot be taken or faked or abstracted away from the labor process or from real people. The standard of comparison of an equivalent labor process which combines love and talent are differences in making the West Georgian and Abkhazian domestic staple, cornmeal mush. In other words, not an industrial labor process, nor even artisanal, but more equivalent to female domestic reproduction than male industrial production, more like private production (the home, the second economy) than public production (state, socialist production). In other words, a critique of bureaucratization and planning (knowledge, secrets) from the point of production itself and the factors of production that are embedded in it, properties of persons (love, talent), a critique of planning from the perspective of use values.

“What do you mean, there isn’t?” Uncle Sandro asked in surprise.

“There just isn’t,” the old man said, inhaling. He waved at Uncle Sandro’s pistol. “Put it away, or it’ll go off by accident... No, there isn’t any Logidze secret; there’s love for the work and knowledge of the work.”

“How do you mean?” Uncle Sandro asked, putting the pistol in his pocket.

“Do you know how your cornmeal mush is made?” the old man asked.

“I do,” Uncle Sandro replied.

“And there’s no secret to it?” the old man asked.

“There’s no secret,” Uncle Sandro replied.

“Then why are there some housewives who make cornmeal mush that’s a real treat, while others aren’t very good at it?” the old man asked.

“Some are better at it, and some aren’t,” Uncle Sandro replied, trying not to let himself get confused.

“But don’t those who are worse at it know everything that those who are better at it know?” the old man went on. “Or do they have some sort of secret?”

“No,” Uncle Sandro said. “How could there be a secret, everyone knows how to make cornmeal mush.”

“Then why,” the old man asked, “are some first rate at making it, others a little worse, and still others thoroughly bad?”

“I don’t know,” Uncle Sandro admitted at last.

“Because there’s talent and love in the world,” the old man said, “which your bosses won’t ever understand. A woman in whom talent and love are combined makes cornmeal mush better than the others. Love teaches her to choose fresh meal at the bazaar, to sift it well, and talent helps her correctly to grasp the relation of the fire to what is being cooked on the fire.”

“Then what should we do?” Uncle Sandro said.

“Just respect talent,” the old man replied, “and when I’m gone there’ll be people who make soft drinks no worse than I do.”

But since Uncle Sandro needs something from the old man, politics being what they are, the old man writes something down on a sheet of paper that Sandro can take back to his bosses. It turns out, of course, on analysis, just to be a basic recipe for soft drinks, what everyone already knows, no great secret, and at this point the bosses give up on trying to prise the secret from the old man. Naturally, the truth of the proposition that there’s no secret, just natural talent and love, is proven immediately by the fact that Abesalomon Nartovich, after all, himself a bureaucrat with no talent or love for the production process, has concocted something that illustrates the point amply:

While Uncle Sandro was telling all this, the secretary brought in a tray of glasses. Abesalomon Nartovich opened the refrigerator and took out a carafe of poisonously yellow liquid.

“Old man Logidze tricked you, all the same, Sandro,” Abesalomon Nartovich said in a voice filled with self-confidence, as he poured the glasses. “He carried the secret of his soft drinks to the grave... But I shall achieve a drink that will be no worse. Try this one, for now.”

We reached the glasses with a certain lack of confidence. I put my lips to the icy liquid and began to sip it slowly. It was on the bitter side, and my mouth puckered. The others, I noticed, also took cautious sips from their glasses. Only the cosmonaut, with his native decisiveness, tossed off the whole glass at once. Then he wiped his lips and said, “It tastes of pine needles.”

His exactitude was disarming. (Iskander 1984:280-283).

Iskander presents Laghidze's as a figure opposed to socialist production, once again a figure of production, but a figure of production as an intimate sphere, private sphere, labor of love, opposed to the bureaucrat Nartovich, who believes there is a "technical" solution to the problem, but his loveless researches produce only poisonously yellow liquids that taste like pine needles. Once again, the salient value of "private" is not to be identified with western private property, rather, Laghidze's production techniques have no secret, because the secret is the same as the secret of a woman who makes good corn mush for her family. The private "secret" of Laghidze's is not that it had been private in something like the sense of capitalist private property, but the private in the sense of the intimate sphere of women's labor, the labor of love (for the fetishization of this sphere in antipolitics see Gal 2002, Gal and Kligman 2000). The love that Laghidze poured into his labor (shared also by all discourses about the man and his family) is what makes the soft drink good. This also means that the secret of Laghidze's cannot be appropriated and made public, because love is an inalienable possession: labor and production is made into a transcendent act of love that can never be appropriated by the socialist state, socialist labor will never equal the labor of love of the informal second economy of love. There is no technical secret to be appropriated, because the secret is love. It follows that no one will imitate Laghidze's by a sheer technical means, by stealing his "secret".

The productivist fairy tale of "Laghidze's secret" comes from a riddling poem written by the famous socialist period poet Evgenii Evtushenko, which begins:

Unguessable is the wise one, you cannot wake  
The drowsy secret of the master—this is the law  
Laghidze always took his secret of his waters with him

As Tabidze the sorcery of his poems (cited in Sigua 1980: 4)

The riddle of his secret, which he always took with him wherever he went, is revealed at the end of the poem to be a part of his body, “the tip of his tongue”, that is, his sense of taste. What is interesting is the linkage of Laghidze to the poet Galaktion Tabidze, a fellow Kutaisian, canonized as a genius of modernist poetry (on the canonization of Tabidze as a socialist genius, see Shatirishvili 2004). Laghidze becomes a genius of industrial production, alongside the genius poet Tabidze. This linkage continues the socialist linkage of art and production, writing and engineering as equivalent creative acts, beginning with the constructivism of the 1920s (McCauley 1998). However, with the Stalinist recuperation of the romantic cult of genius in the 1930s, and the linkage between artistic and technical creativity, the traditional and technical intelligentsia, suggested by Stalin’s memorable quote (in 1934) “writers are engineers of souls”, this connection was transferred from the gritty realism of the world of everyday life [*byt*] to the fairy tale world of socialist realism. The creativity of the genius engineer/writer is almost supernatural, a kind of “sorcery”, a charismatic, almost esoteric “secret”, offering a position of critique of ordinary production of both capitalism and socialism.

But the poem also offers itself as a (unguessable) riddle. Offering alternate guesses to the riddle of the “secret” of Laghidze, beginning with Uncle Sandro above, formed a fertile ground articulating socialism and reformist positions with respect to socialist production in the late 80s. What these all share is that the “secret” involves a charismatic involvement with production that linked the almost fabulous persona of the sorcerer (*jadokari*) Mitrophone Laghidze and his lineage with the charisma of the drink. This “secret” is very different from the one that Uncle Sandro was sent to look for, it is

not something one can write down or steal. The secret of Laghidze's is not an alienable property, a property of the product, but an inalienable property of the producer, as much as his tongue or his name itself. In this sense, it is like the name "Laghidze" itself which is not an alienable, arbitrarily made up and affixed to a product (like a Western brand), it is an inalienable, personal name belonging to a producer, embodied in the very person and name of the master, the sorcerer (*jadokari*) Mitropane Laghidze, and his lineal descendents, such as Ramaz and Torniqe Laghidze, who ran the establishment after him (unlike, again a trade secret or secret recipe of the kind Uncle Sandro was sent to find).

Each gloss on the unguessable riddle of the secret of Laghidze offers a supplementary answer, and each supplementary answer is a critique of everyday production from the perspective of production-as-art. One writer for the paper *K'omunist'i*, while conceding that part of the secret of Laghidze's resided specifically on Mitropane's tongue, Mitropane's "amazing gustatory art", added that Laghidze's secret also resides in both the "good conscience" of the producer as well as his "maintenance of optimal technological regimes" (Aslanishvili 1989: 4). Indeed, one only need leaf through the 300 plus pages of chemical diagrams and technological schematics of Laghidze's book on soft drinks (1953), which amounts to a technoscientific encyclopedia of every aspect of every known method of soft drink production (his own choice of methods, mysteriously, are not indicated), to convince oneself that Laghidze himself was no fetishizer of low-tech small batch artisanal production. Part of his innovation was simply in attempting to make high quality, but inexpensive soft drinks, on a mass scale, using the best technology available (he often traveled to Europe) along with local natural ingredients (which, among other things, were cheaper). Still, always the

“sorcerer”, he learned these European technologies and improved upon them, primarily by using adapting these technologies to making soft drinks not from expensive synthetic ingredients (as in Russia and the West) but to the difficult task of making them from natural, local fruits of which Georgia is an abundant producer:

Mitrophané directed his main attention in that direction that he might use the plentiful high quality fruit abundantly existing among us in the mass production of non-alcoholic beverages. This however, aside from economics, was connected to other difficulties as well – it demanded the refining and improving of existing rules of the preparation of fruit juices and syrups. (Aslanishvili 1989: 4)

Our contemporary ideology of food production strongly opposes technology to nature, the cooked to the raw, as what Laudan calls “culinary modernism” and “culinary luddism” (Laudan 2001, see also Meneley 2004, Wilk 2006, Heath and Meneley 2007). For Laghidze, however, there seems to have been no contradiction between simultaneously endorsing a strongly technoscientific and strongly naturalistic attitude towards food production. In fact, if anything Laghidze himself seems to have seen his own technoscientific intervention in production as nothing more than allowing the flavors of nature to speak for themselves. When he was asked by the famous linguist Akaki Shanidze asked Laghidze how he managed to make such delicious drinks, his answer: “I don’t add anything to these fragrant fruits, which our variegated nature has given us in such abundance” (Sigua 1980: 14).

Not only did Laghidze specifically adapt his technology to produce soft drinks that preserved the flavors of the fruit, he also personally chose specific fruits from specific producers from specific areas (sometimes in Georgia, sometimes elsewhere in the Caucasus). Here too, his personal, charismatic involvement with production comes to the fore, specifically his sense of taste and knowledge of local ingredients:

Taking into account the specific qualities of local raw materials, he chose raw materials with exacting care according to locality [mikroraion]. For example, he prepared raspberry syrup with berries found only in Bakuriani, which were very aromatic and flavorful, although it would have been cheaper to use produce brought in from the North Caucasus. .... He really was a sorcerer [*jadokari*]. According to miniscule nuances he would select ingredients of such a kind that the product gained especially attractive and flavorful aromatic qualities. In the same way, he made such compositions, which more than once were awarded the highest prize at impartial and international exhibitions. (Aslanishvili 1989: 4)

Laghidze's methods involved both a cult of technological industrial modernity (culture) as well as a personalistic, charismatic involvement in production in the selection of raw materials (nature). While our own ideology of production strongly opposes nature in the form of raw materials to technoscientific interventions of industry (see Laudan 2001, Meneley 2004, Wilk 2006), for Laghidze they represent, taken together, a single natural sphere of production opposed to the artificiality of Western capitalist forms of production (whose artificiality and obscurantism is typified by the use of made up names for products that themselves bear no relation to nature). This is a typically socialist species of a wider characteristically modern ideology of productivism, "the belief that human society and nature are linked by the primacy and identity of all productive activity, whether of laborers, of machines, or of natural forces" (Rabinbach 1990: 3). Such a productivist ideology, socialist or otherwise, does not set nature and industry in opposition to each other, but sets both in opposition to the manifest artificiality of the market (Postone 1996: 65, Manning 2001, etc.). Hence, Laghidze seems to see his technology not in opposition to nature, but as an extension of it, as being simply a means of conveying the natural flavors of the carefully chosen fruit to the consumer. In the same way, as we saw above, he does not want to hide the natural ingredients which are

the *essence* of his product under a prosthetic artificial identity of a “made up” brand name.

Indeed, Laghidze embodied his secret of production in his person and in his name. It is therefore no surprise that Laghidze’s soft drinks remained a dynasty even under socialism, for the secret of Laghidze’s seemed to be embodied in the family name, and the technical management (not ownership) of the factory always remained within the kinship group. Tornike Laghidze, explaining why he would not adulterate his soft drinks, needs no greater argument than “This is Laghidze”!

So far this article in “Komunisti” (Aslanishvili 1989) has followed a rather official line, praising Laghidze not only for giving his “secret” to the people, but for all his other social work in other fields, political, cultural, in an utterly typical socialist fashion. But if Laghidze represents a model form of socialist production, it not only follows that such a model not only forms an external ground for productivist critique of capitalist forms of production (in which the natural world of production is fettered by the extrinsic artificial constraints of the market), but also for an internal ground of critique of ordinary socialist production. The author, at the end of the piece, reflects on the words of the director at that time, Ramaz Laghidze, which opposed turning Laghidze into something like a “made up name” for a drink (a brand name typifying capitalist style soft drinks like Pepsi then entering socialist circulation by special agreement), but endorsed restoring the charisma of the “Mitrophanic tradition”:

... On my way back, as I went into the “Laghidze’s” on Rustaveli and according to habit I drank a ‘Lemon’, I was reminded of the words spoken by a dissatisfied Mr. Ramaz [Laghidze]: “In recent times there is felt a tendency for an excess of drinks with made up names, we need to resurrect,” he said, “the Mitrophanic tradition of preparing natural fruit syrups, which essentially conditioned the

unique properties of these drinks, their medicinal, dietary and gustatory functions.” (Aslanishvili 1989: 4)

And here is where the author makes a rather odd suggestion for a newspaper bearing the name *Komunisti*, in effect, advocating the return of Laghidze’s Waters as private property to the Laghidze family!

And here an idea dawned on me: now, when activity by individual labor, cooperative movements, is being so encouraged, wouldn’t it be best if the Lagidzes were to once again take into their own hands the making of “Laghidze’s”? (Aslanishvili 1989: 4)

In retrospect, now the whole article seems more like praise for a capitalist entrepreneur than a hero of socialism. How could this happen in the newspaper *Kommunisti*?

The answer is now “how” but “when”? The article in question came out in what turned out to be the final two years of socialism in Georgia. The ambivalence of the discourse, that on the one hand praises Laghidze for giving his “secret” as a free gift to the people, and then immediately advocates returning the secret to the Laghidze family, is more or less typical of the reforming tendencies of the period. What the author is *not* suggesting is privatizing the company, transferring the Laghidze firm to the family of the same name as a form of alienable property. Rather the author is suggesting that control of production be returned to the originators of that form of production, the Laghidze family, in whose family name is embodied this charismatic involvement with production. (mention labor) Nor is there any sense that Laghidze will be confused with a Western brand name, either of a firm or a product, the article expresses a desire to return to the tradition of producing real use values, drinks that differ from each other and other drinks essentially in terms of their actual unique “medicinal, dietary and gustatory properties”

and not drinks that differ accidentally on the basis of their “made up names”. The arbitrary conventionalism of Western “made up” brand names expresses the way these drinks are triumphs of form over essence, while the personalism of the Mitrophanic tradition embodies an essentialist position based on essential attributes of producer (the Laghidze’s name) and product (“medicinal, dietary and gustatory properties”). That is, this is a productivist critique, a naturalizing critique of production (Western and Soviet alike) from the perspective of use-values, incarnated in the ideal socialist commodity, Laghidze’s Waters. This, by the way, points up the ways that the “secret” of Laghidze’s is not what one might expect, a trade secret that could be written down on paper, stolen, kept secret, published or patented as private property, it is a property of the producer, as inalienable as the tip of Mitrophanic Laghidze’s tongue.

In critiques of this form, the “secret of Laghidze”, the “Mitrophanic tradition” is set up as an ideal form of socialist production, again, initially in opposition to capitalist products like Pepsi, which then allows it to in turn be used to critique existing socialist production as a betrayal of this tradition. Sometimes the critiques were quite savage. According to this proletarian letter writer, Laghidze’s waters were an international success because of their intrinsic qualities, and the name of Laghdize’s was derived from the qualities of the man and the qualities of the drink, very much unlike, for example, foreign drinks with “made up names”, but also unlike socialist production because he did not use input substitutions generated by the need to fulfill plan targets (Kornai 1986, 1992, Verdery 1991):

The waters of Mitrophanic Laghidze made his name renowned far and wide. Today they drink Laghidze’s with pleasure not only among us, but in America, in Austria, in Japan and in other foreign countries. We however drink “Pepsi Cola”, “Fanta” and “Fiesta” (?) poured according to a foreign recipe. ...Nevertheless

where should we seek the secret of the phenomenal success of Mitrophan Laghidze's wonderful waters? In the first place, of course, in his talent and in his love of work, in his conscientiousness and respectability. He gathered fruit only according to Micro-region, doubtless used spring water for the preparation of juices and syrups, he didn't economize on his sugar supplies nor did he sneak in left over fruit that was to be thrown away. This is why everyone thirsted for Laghidze's waters. (Aleksandria1989: 2)

Such is the ideal embodied in the myth of Mitrophan Laghidze, but this author continues to show how this socialist inheritance was squandered in reality. In the khachapuri restaurant the author is describing (which, he grants, is associated with a factory and is supplied only indirectly by Laghidze's), sometimes the water lacks gas, sometimes it is warm, and worst of all, the selection of flavors is poor, when the Laghidze's name is precisely associated with variegated assortments of flavors: Of the ten kinds of khachapuri advertised on the menu, only two, sometimes three are available, of the six containers for syrup, three are always empty. All of which raises the more basic point, why, under socialism, has the secret Laghidze left the people been so squandered? "Why do we so impoverish the production of the bold genius of Mitrophan Laghidze?" Adding that "soon in Kutaisi a Laghidze's waters brand-name-store (*sapirno maghazia*) will be opened and, perhaps we will be able to try every kind of their product then" (Aleksandria 1989: 2)

Almost 20 years later, with the advantage of hindsight, it is hard to imagine the way that reformers of the late socialist period saw the future, not as a radical break with socialism, but as a realization of it. We know, of course, that it all ended quite horribly, and we are used to the idea that businesses and brands fail, and we are not surprised that Laghidze's Waters after socialism failed to compete with the global brand, Coca-Cola, on its home turf, much less internationally. We are also not surprised that Laghidze's Café

on Rustaveli Prospect, an empty, haunted reminder of socialism, finally succumbed to the zeal of the Rose Revolutionaries, who deny emphatically that anything worthwhile could have been produced by socialism, and was privatized as storefront real estate in 2008.

We have come to accept the categories of neo-liberal capitalism as a kind of second nature, even if we revile their tragic implications. Thus, we see in Laghidze's café an expression of a universal category of consumption, we see in Laghidze's the story of a brand, we see in these late socialist critiques a sign of an inchoate, almost natural, critique of socialist production from the naturalized external perspective of capitalism.

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<sup>i</sup> (one which is often taken by anthropologists to be a curious doppelganger of Mauss' argument in *The Gift* to argue that here anthropological literature on exchange and brand theory converge on a critique of the opposition of subject and object, human and non-human. But it is not clear to me that simply adopting a kind of animism or fetishism overcomes the opposition of human and non-human)

<sup>ii</sup> I note in passing that this particular form of brand fetishism, in which properties of subject and object, human and non-human, are mixed in the figure of the brand, which represents a kind of 'prosthetic persona', here, a figure of the consumer in the brand, but in earlier forms of capitalism, a figure of the producer, will incorrectly seem reminiscent of the Marxian commodity fetish, which refers specifically to the alienated properties of producers (value) which allows commodities to form social relations with one another. The only value that can come with lumping these various fetishisms together under an more capacious and yet more nebulous category of the fetish that leads to further mystification.

<sup>iii</sup> These are not soft drinks ready to be consumed, but syrups that could, with the right technology, be used to prepare soft drinks. Additionally one notes that like many such socialist labels, space is given over at the edges for the marking of expiration dates [bottom, year; left side, month; right side, day], since socialist products did not use preservatives. Such markings are also typically diagnostic of socialist style labels.

<sup>iv</sup> While brand is seldom if ever given a satisfying definition (like consumption, it is often treated as being more or less coextensive with semiosis as such by its more enthusiastic promulgators), I will follow Mazarella who treats brand as being a "conceptual extension of trademarks" (2003: 185). While this is not at all to ignore the ways that "consumers...construct all kinds of intimate and idiosyncratic relationships with the products they consume" (Mazarella 2003: 186), *pace* brand theorists who want any relationship between a thing and a person to count as brand (see Ak'opiani 2007 above for a typical statement of this kind of thing), if we are to disaggregate "brand" from being just another name for a wide variety of forms of semio-material involvement ("objectification", "consumption") (Miller 1995) which become so vague as to be analytically useless, we must insist that whatever other functions it may have, a brand must serve some of the traditional functions of a trademark.

<sup>v</sup> Rosemary Coombe defines 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). See also Foster