

Prologue. Leo Esakia and his Georgia, by Yuri Gurevich¹

In July 1972, my family and I moved to Tbilisi, mainly to seek permission to emigrate from the USSR to Israel; Georgia was a safer place to do that. Surprisingly the plan worked, and we left the USSR in early October 1973. It is during my time in Georgia that I struck up a life-long friendship with Leo Esakia, “Gulik” to his friends. We also discovered how tolerant and hospitable Georgia was. Here is a short story of our Georgian period. It is ostensibly about us but really about Gulik and his Georgia, through our eyes. Our life had other aspects, like learning and teaching Hebrew (which was definitely not encouraged by the Soviet authorities) and even a hunger strike, but that is a different story.

Georgian logic has a long tradition. “This is probably accounted for by the fact that Georgian culture was a peculiar offshoot of its Greek-Byzantine counterpart, logic always forming an indisputable element of Greek-Byzantine education” [2, p. 19]. But mathematical logic was young in Georgia. In a sense it was young in the whole USSR in spite of the presence of great logicians like Andrey N. Kolmogorov, Pyotr S. Novikov and Anatoly I. Maltsev. They all stopped publishing logic papers in 1930s and resumed logic activities only twenty or so years later. For a while it wasn’t safe to do mathematical logic in the USSR. Why? This is a long and interesting story that cannot be properly addressed here. See article [1] in this connection.

So it is not surprising that Gulik was a self-taught logician (as was I); he was educated as a physicist. To a great extent, he is the founder of mathematical logic in Georgia. I knew his name when we decided to move to Tbilisi. He and his students met us cordially and helped us throughout our stint in Tbilisi. Besides him and his students, there were a few other graduate students interested in mathematical logic. Some of them worked with outside advisers, and one of them, Tristan Turashvili, had been working with me for a couple of years albeit informally and sporadically.

Gulik was an erudite intellectual, soft-spoken and shy. There was something intrinsically noble about him. We spoke endlessly, mostly about logic but also about literature, arts (his father was a film director quite famous in Georgia, and his mother was an actress) and of course about politics. He lived, with his wife and two children, rather modestly; an honest salaried family in a corrupt environment. And Georgia was corrupt. People even joked about a curse “I wish you to live on your salary”. But the corruption should be put in perspective. Central planning is too rigid, and underground businesses brought a level of prosperity to Georgia comparative to the other Soviet republics.

Gulik was my first exposure to the esteemed Georgian intelligentsia. Thanks to him, I met a number of Georgian intellectuals. Zurab Mikeladze, a philosophical logician and dissident, spent time in a Soviet concentration camp. He was

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quite an expert on Georgian history. Once I asked him why Georgia was so tolerant and hospitable. He said this, among other things. Georgia used to be large and powerful on the scale of Caucasus. But then it was devastated by various invaders. To preserve the territory, Georgians welcomed every community willing to accept the supremacy of the Georgian state. The communities were free to speak their languages and to pray to their gods.

My KGB file followed me to Tbilisi. I had suspected that such a file existed but only in Tbilisi was that confirmed. All that (and a bit more) I learned via friends of Gulik's friends. Nevertheless I applied to various academic institutions for a job but none of them wanted or dared to hire me. One official mimed to me, by pointing his finger up and squeezing his mouth, that they cannot hire me because of an order from above and that he couldn't talk about it. The miming amused me; I could not imagine such friendly behavior in Russia.

To provide for the family, I gave private lessons in mathematics. To provide for the soul, I initiated a logic seminar at the Computing Center of Georgian Academy of Sciences where Tristan Turashvili worked. In a few months, David Kveselava, the director of the Center, appointed me to a halftime research position. Of course I was pleased. But I also was surprised by his courage and was worried about him. "That's all right", he said, "you help our young, and we have not been good hosts to you".

In order to apply for permission to emigrate we needed a document from an Israeli citizen sworn to materially support us if needed. A number of such affidavits had been sent to us. In May 1973, one of them finally reached us. That very day I also learned that David Kveselava appointed me to a fulltime research position. With some trepidation I told him that I just got an affidavit from Israel and that I would be applying for a permission to emigrate. A period of silence followed. I did not know what to expect. It surely wasn't easy for him — and he might have taken risks — to arrange a fulltime position for me. I was afraid of recriminations, but none followed. "We haven't treated you well", he said and went on to propose me to become his scientific deputy in conjunction with some additional perks. I was touched, deeply touched. That was a far cry from how my fellow emigration-seekers were treated in Moscow or Leningrad or Sverdlovsk. I told him how grateful I was to him and to Georgia. I said that we fell in love with Georgia but our destiny was different.

Everybody, including us, believed that we would become "refuseniks" for years to come. But, unexpectedly, in the end of August 1973 we were permitted to leave the USSR. Each one of my colleagues in the Computing Center came to congratulate me with getting the permission to leave and to wish me a good life in Israel. I went to Kveselava to resign. "Why?", he said, "you are working here until you cross the Soviet border".

In the end of September Gulik saw us off. Our apartment was supposed to be returned to the local authorities. "Don't worry about that", said Gulik, "I'll take the key and I'll keep it until I know that you reached your destination". Things might have gone wrong before we left the USSR, and they nearly did (when we were in Moscow on our way out, and the Yom Kippur War started). Only in Georgia could an emigrant keep his job and his apartment until he

leaves the Soviet Union.

The next time I saw Gulik at a logic workshop in Luminy, France, near Marseille, in 1988. Soviet authorities allowed him to attend the workshop but sent along a companion who was not a logician. Gulik and I discussed logic but not literature, not arts and certainly not politics. Throughout the following years, our communication was primarily by means of letters and later the internet. There we endlessly discussed logic, literature, arts and of course politics. I am going to miss my friend Gulik.

References

- [1] Valentin Bazhanov, “Logic and Ideologized Science Phenomenon (Case of the URSS)”, in *Essays on the foundations of mathematics and logic*, G. Sica (ed.), Polimetrica International Scientific Publisher, 43–48, 2005.
- [2] Michael Bezhanishvili and Leri Mchedlishvili. *Logic in Georgia*. Meridian Publishers, Tbilisi, 1995.