



JOHNS HOPKINS
UNIVERSITY

INTERNATIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE

Authoritarianism, Narratives, and Cultures:

Continuity, Disruption, and Change, Past and Present

PROGRAM

15–16 October 2026

Sponsored by

Caucasus University (CU), Tbilisi, Georgia;

Johns Hopkins University (JHU)

Department of Comparative Thought and Literature

Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, Baltimore, USA

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2. Program Overview & Timetable

Time	Session/title	Location/Chair
DAY 1: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15		
08:30 - 09:15	Registration and morning coffee	CU Hall
09:15–09:45	Opening Ceremony & Welcome Nana Sharikadze, CU Eavan Cully, Cultural Attaché at the US Embassy in Tbilisi Peter J.Schmelz, JHU	CU Hall
09:45–10:45	Keynote Address I: <i>The Uses of Autocracy and the Cycle of Resistance</i> Stephen F. Jones Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University; Mount Holyoke College (USA)	CU Hall
10:45–11:15	Coffee Break	CU Hall
11:15–12:15	SESSION 1: Postcolonial Debates Chair: Kevin Karnes (Emory University) 1.1. Maia Sigua (Tbilisi State Conservatoire) <i>The Coloniality of Musical Space: Iconography, Canon, and Imperial Power in the Recital Hall of the Tbilisi State Conservatoire</i> 1.2. Giorgi Tskhadaia (Caucasus School of Governance, Caucasus University) <i>"The Ambivalent Oligarchy in Georgia"</i>	CU Hall
12:15–13:30	Lunch	CU cantina



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13:30–15:00

SESSION 2: Jazz / Folklore / Freedom

CU Hall

Chair: Prof. Peter J. Schmelz, Johns Hopkins University

2.1. Petr Ferenc (National Museum, Prague)

Taking the Regime at Its Own Word

2.2. Kateryna Ielysieieva (Institute of Art Studies,
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences; National Academy of
Culture and Art Management, Ukraine)

*Staged Folklore as a Model of State Representation in
Socialist Regimes*

2.3. Cristina Pascu (National Academy of Music “Gheorghe
Dima”)

*Performing the Piano under Authoritarianism:
Educational and Concert Life in Communist Romania*

15:00–15:30

Coffee Break

CU Hall

15:30–17:00

**SESSION 3: Religion and Authoritarian Identities (part
I)**

CU Hall

Chair: Prof. Phillip Ross Bullock, Oxford University

3.1. Rebecca Mitchell (Middlebury College, USA)

*Hagiographic Memory as National Memory: Sacred
Chant and the Politics of Saint-Making in
Contemporary Georgia*

3.2 Ruta Stanevičiūtė (Lithuanian Academy of Music and
Theatre)

*Revising the Uncomfortable Past: From Desovietization
to Decolonial Approach*

3.3. Tsotne Tchanturia (Georgian Institute of Public
Affairs), **Vincenc Kopeček** and **Lenka Kopečková**
(University of Ostrava)

*Georgian Television Discourse on 28 November 2024
and Georgia's EU U-turn*



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Time	Session/title	Location/Chair
DAY 2: FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16		
09:00–10:00	Keynote Address II: “Safe Afghanistan — Kingdom of Wonder: On the Aesthetics of Tourism in Authoritarian Regimes” Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht <i>Freie Universität Berlin (Germany)</i>	CU HALL
10:00–11:30	Session 4: Religion and Authoritarian Identities (part II) Chair: Laura Emmery (Emory University) 4.1. Ana Mgaoblishvili (Caucasus University) <i>Religious Visual Signs: Authoritarian Legacies and Cultural Transformations in Georgia</i> 4.2. Mariam Manjgaladze (Caucasus University) Language and Ideology: The Linguistic Dimension of Political Discourse 4.3. Ketevan Grdzeldze (Caucasus University) <i>War, Violence, and Indifference through the Lens of Poetry</i>	CU HALL
11:30–12:00	Coffee Break	CU HALL
12:00–13:30	Session 5: Navigating Transitional Ambiguities Chair: Maia Sigua (Tbilisi State Conservatoire) 5.1. Kevin Karnes (Emory University) <i>Anarchy in the Tornis! Building Community on the Remains of Empire in Riga, 1989–1992</i> 5.2. Laura Emmery (Emory University) <i>Last Songs: The Magnificent Seven and Yugoslav Disintegration</i> 5.3. Ivana Miladinović Prica (University of Arts in Belgrade) <i>Music as Epistemic Agency in the Late Yugoslav Crisis</i>	CU HALL
13:30–14:30	Lunch	CU HALL



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14:30–16:00 Session 6: Global Perspectives on Authoritarianism CU HALL

Chair: Nana Sharikadze, Caucasus University

6.1. Lesar Yurtsever (Freie Universität Berlin)
*A Modern Authoritarian Brand: Music and U.S.–
Turkish Relations in the Interwar Period*

6.2. Angelina Zhivova (University of Udine)
Authority and Dissent in Animation

6.3. Medea Abulashvili and Anna Berishvili (Ivane
Javakishvili Tbilisi State University)
*Between Repression and Exile: Greek Lives across
Stalinism and Postwar Greece*

16:00–16:30 Coffee Break CU HALL

16:30–17:30 Round Table: Authoritarianism, cultural memory, and CU HALL
the challenges of comparative perspectives and
approaches.

Moderators: Peter Schmelz (Johns Hopkins
University) and Nana Sharikadze (Caucasus
University)

17:30 – 18:00 Georgian Folk Music CU HALL

performed by a Georgian folk ensemble specially
assembled and directed by Giorgi Ushikishvili¹

19:30 Conference Dinner – Hosted for conference Place TBA
speakers

¹ **Giorgi Ushikishvili** is a Georgian folk-music specialist, ensemble leader, educator, and cultural administrator. Born in Akhmeta in 1978, he graduated from the Tbilisi State University of Culture and Arts. Since the early 1990s, he has been actively engaged in the teaching, performance, preservation, and promotion of Georgian traditional music.

From 2004 to 2013, Ushikishvili served as Director of the State Folklore Centre of Georgia, where he contributed to the preservation and revival of historically documented Georgian folk repertoire, including the reconstruction of songs from archival recordings. He worked extensively in television and music broadcasting. An experienced leader of a Georgian traditional folk ensemble, Ushikishvili brings to the conference a deep practical knowledge of Georgian vocal traditions and their transmission. For this programme, he will assemble a special Georgian folk ensemble presenting a selection of traditional Georgian folk music.