

## **Graffiti Against the Void Liberalism's Crisis in Georgia**

**Giorgi Razmadze**

PhD in Art History

Research Scientist, Dimitri Janelidze Scientific Research Institute

The Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University

[grazmadze@tafu.edu.ge](mailto:grazmadze@tafu.edu.ge)

### **Abstract**

In the last decade, graffiti and stencil art have become increasingly prominent elements of Tbilisi's urban landscape. As an anonymous and site-specific visual practice, graffiti reconfigures city walls into provisional exhibition spaces while transforming passersby into unintentional viewers. Georgian writer Givi Margvelashvili famously characterized graffiti as a "wall newspaper," emphasizing its narrative immediacy and responsiveness to social and political events. While some inscriptions remain personal or mundane, a significant portion of street interventions directly engage with moments of crisis, collective trauma, or political confrontation.

Graffiti differs from institutional visual art through its ephemerality, illegality, and anonymity – qualities that intensify its political potential. Its brief existence allows it to bypass censorship and function as an unmediated form of public speech. Although anonymity recalls traditions of religious wall painting, contemporary graffiti reverses their function: rather than sanctifying enclosed interiors, it symbolically reclaims urban space itself. Through these temporary interventions, street artists participate in shaping the visual and ideological identity of the city, prioritizing urgent social concerns.

One such concern emerged after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which prompted a large-scale relocation of Russian citizens to Georgia. This demographic shift dramatically altered economic conditions, particularly in Tbilisi, where housing prices and living costs surged. In response, anti-Russian graffiti proliferated, seemingly articulating a decolonial stance. This article examines these visual narratives and questions their political efficacy, asking whether decolonial critique can function meaningfully outside a coherent ideological and economic framework. It argues that within Georgia's entrenched neoliberal order, much of this graffiti functions as "empty protest" – a symbolic performance that circulates in virtual urban space while leaving material structures of domination unchallenged.

**Keywords:** Urban Wall Writing; Post-soviet Visual Culture; Symbolic Decolonization; Neoliberal Urbanism; Political Anonymity; Gentrification Discourse