

**From Tradition to Civility: Georgian  
Hospitality after the Rose Revolution  
(2003-2012)**

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**Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**



## **Declaration**

I, Costanza Curro, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Date

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Signature



## Abstract

This thesis explores the relation between hospitality and civil values. I focus on articulations and performances of hospitality in Georgia after the Rose Revolution (2003-2012). Drawing upon data collected through participant observation and follow-up interviews, the thesis analyses hospitality practices which rest on the blurred boundaries between the public and the private.

My argument challenges the negative view of unofficial practices grounded in local contexts as being detrimental to democratisation. I highlight the ambivalence of hospitality practices and maintain that their embeddedness in local civic traditions of solidarity and reciprocity is a potential source of democratic values *vis-à-vis* the social fragmentation generated by the modernisation project implemented by the post-revolutionary political leadership. On the one hand, political elites stereotyped hospitality as a national specific, used to promote the country to outsiders. On the other hand, everyday hospitality was regarded as a backward practice associated with grey zones of informality which hindered the country's modernisation.

Focusing on the ambivalence emerging from people's articulations and performances, I investigate the tension between hospitality traditions and modernisation narratives across three dimensions: increasing social inequalities predicated upon images of otherness, the negotiation of ascribed identities (notably gender and generational) amid individual and collective change, and the transformation of urban public space.

My analysis shows that the political leadership's obliviousness to the ambivalent effects which hospitality has on people's everyday lives divided society deeply, while at the same time undermining the legitimacy of institutions. Highlighting dramatic inconsistencies at the heart of modernisation narratives, I explore the potential of hospitality practices as the basis for enacting social justice and democratic participation.



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# INTRODUCTION

## HOSPITALITY PRACTICES: A DEVICE TO ORGANISE SOCIETY

*This is not commonplace, privately consumed food and drink, partaken of by individuals.*

*This is a popular feast, a “banquet for all the world”.*

(Bakhtin, “Rabelais and His World”).

This thesis investigates the role of hospitality practices as potential sources of civic values in the context of reforms implemented from above and aimed at fostering a society’s political and economic development. I analyse articulations and performances of hospitality as practices embedded in local traditions of solidarity and reciprocity, which rest on the blurred boundaries between the public and the private. While stemming from everyday spaces, relationships and habits, hospitality practices regulate material and non-material exchanges between individuals, groups and institutions. Hosts and guests who share food around the table are not just performing a mundane act of collective consumption. Hospitality practices are underpinned by publicly shared norms through which hosts and guests negotiate their mutual interaction and their position within society.

I focus on Georgian hospitality practices in the years between the Rose Revolution and the electoral defeat of President Mikheil Saak’ashvili and his United National Movement (2003-2012).<sup>1</sup> My study highlights the inconsistencies which lay at the heart of the modernisation project, which the post-revolutionary government intended to use to bring Georgia within the circle of Western democracies and market economies. I argue that the clear-cut stigmatisation of local practices of hospitality as obstacles on the country’s path to modernisation led to deep divisions across

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<sup>1</sup> Note on transliteration: Georgian usage follows the Apridonidze – Chkhaidze system (for more information on different system of transliteration of Georgia into English see <https://transliteration.eki.ee/pdf/Georgian.pdf>)

Georgian society, ultimately undermining the government's legitimacy. My analysis considers the potential of hospitality practices as sources of civility, expressed as the "public use of private good", *vis-à-vis* divisions engendered by the top-down imposition of external moral, cultural, social, political and economic models.

Georgian people's penchant for hospitality is a recurrent image in national literary sources and foreign travellers' accounts. Paradigmatic expressions of hospitality, notably the Georgian feast and the toasts which structure it (*supra* and *tamadoba*), have been defined as pillars of national identity by both local and international scholarship and popular narratives. As an "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983), hospitality is a powerful means of shaping and reproducing individual and collective identities on the basis of a seemingly immutable set of practices.

I consider hospitality to be a cluster of social practices grounded on speech, gestures and materiality. These features are intertwined in turn with various aspects of everyday life: from the division of labour to gender divides, from production and distribution to consumption, from kinship to religiosity. Social actors reproduce the tradition of hospitality across a variety of practices according to their own meanings and purposes.

The "everyday pursuits" which people articulate and perform through hospitality practices need to be analysed in their relationship with "particular circumstances" (De Certeau 1984: ix). Hosts and guests redefine their respective identities and roles, producing constantly changing narratives about themselves and the world around them. At the same time, people's agency is enabled and constrained by historical, cultural, social, political and economic structures (Giddens 1984, Bourdieu 1977). While hospitality practices shape social actors' physical and social surroundings, they are simultaneously embedded in specific contexts and are therefore defined by various contingencies.

Hospitality is an established topic in Caucasian studies. Georgian practices of welcoming guests have been the focus of anthropological research and literary and cultural studies (Ram 2014, Muehlfried 2006, Tuite 2005, Manning 2003, Chatwin 1997, Kotthoff 1995, Dragadze 1988, Mars & Altman 1987), as well as at the centre of cultural, social and political debates among local scholars, analysts and

intellectuals since Soviet time (Shatirishvili 2003, 2000, Gotsiridze 2001, Nodia 2000, Bregadze 2000, Jgerenaia 2000). Taking this previous research as its starting point, this thesis provides a comprehensive investigation of the ways in which articulations and performances of hospitality changed in the context of the dramatic transformations which took place in the years between the Rose Revolution and Saakashvili's political defeat.

The Rose Revolution came across as a radical break with an undemocratic and chaotic past, represented by the Soviet regime and the decade which followed the demise of the socialist system (1991-2003).<sup>2</sup> The post-revolutionary political leadership opposed the social, political and economic decay which had plagued the country prior to 2003 with narratives of radical modernisation, which was to be carried out under the banner of Western values.

Hospitality, largely articulated and performed as tradition by Georgian hosts and guests, had a problematic status in a context where the primary goal was rapid change. On the one hand, post-revolutionary narratives stereotyped traditional hospitality as an ancestral practice which they used to present the country to outsiders as an exotically charming place. The image of hospitality as a bond tying all Georgians to one another also underpinned nationalist rhetoric in internal and foreign politics. On the other hand, the modernisation narratives promoted by the political leadership and resonating across part of the population stigmatised everyday practices of hospitality as expressions of backwardness and murkiness which were hindering Georgia's path to the West.

I argue that the awkwardness of hospitality practices *vis-à-vis* the post-revolutionary modernisation project lies in hospitality's ambivalence. Ambivalence is classified by Bauman as a fundamental feature of modernity which rules out the possibility of classifying the world according to clear-cut oppositions (Bauman 1990; see also Ledeneva 2014, 2013). Ambivalence encapsulates opposite extremes in multifaceted and often unpredictable ways. What is understood and articulated in a

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout the thesis, I refer to this period as "the 1990s". This definition is widely used in academic and media sources, as well as in Georgian people's articulations. Another common way for people to refer to the years between the end of the Soviet Union and the Rose Revolution is "Shevardnadze's time" (*Shevardnadzis dro*). The second president of Georgia, in power for more than a decade from early 1992, is closely associated with the era of ethnic conflict, economic stagnation and endemic corruption which preceded the major political shifts of 2003.

certain way in a given context can be understood and articulated as something else in a different context. As it will be highlighted throughout the thesis, hospitality is ambivalent since people involved may perceive and define these practices as generous *and* calculated, friendly *and* competitive, empowering *and* constrictive. Hosts' and guests' ambivalent feelings and attitudes towards hospitality shift along with people's shifting social role, mutual relationships, and power of negotiation in hospitality practices.

Drawing upon data collected through participant observation and follow-up interviews, my study explores the ambivalence of hospitality practices as practices which, generated by personal dispositions and relationships grounded in the private realm of intimacy and domesticity, work as a device for organising people's positions and mutual interactions in society on the basis of publicly shared norms. I identify hospitality as a "grey zone" (Harboe Knudsen & Frederiksen 2015, Thomassen 2015, Roy 2008, Robertson 2006), an area of ambivalence which penetrates the porous boundaries between the public and the private.

The categories of public and private generally refer to institutions which represent collective interests and the realm of household and family respectively. Scholars in several fields, from the social and political sciences to law and political philosophy, have challenged the rigidity of the public/private divide (Clarke 2004, Bailey 2000, Slater 1998, Weintraub & Kumar 1997, Habermas 1991 [1962], 1974 [1964], Kennedy 1981). Intermediate areas in politics and society have been identified, with civil society defined as a sphere which connects private individuals to the public realm through the negotiation of interests between citizens and state institutions (Kubik 2005, Allen 1997, Kumar 1993).

In hospitality practices, the blurred lines between and across private and public are constantly crossed and redrawn by hosts and guests in their interaction with specific moral, cultural, social, political and economic contexts. A normative definition of public and private does not allow the flexibility necessary if grey zones are to be explored and hospitality grasped in its ambivalence. Hospitality practices, stemming from private feelings of good-heartedness, are a public tradition whose underpinning norms are shared knowledge. The boundaries of public and private penetrate one another as: the private space of house and family, where hospitality



practices unfold, becomes a stage for public display by hosts and guests; the personal ties which people establish through hospitality exchanges spread into social and physical public spaces, informing the relationship between citizens and institutions; and, as in the quote from Bakhtin about banquet imagery which opens this introduction (1984 [1965]: 278), a private practice such as food consumption becomes a public act.

Hospitality's ambivalence clashed with post-revolutionary reforms grounded on clear-cut dichotomies framing the public and the private as two neatly separated spheres. The political leadership regarded the absence of well-defined lines between the public and the private as a fundamental flaw which had hindered Georgia's social, political and economic development before the Rose Revolution. In Soviet times, an over-controlling state encroached on the sphere of private life, preventing citizens from pursuing their own goals. In the 1990s, corruption and organised crime were expressions of private interests which paralysed public institutions.

The Rose Revolution aimed to re-establish clear-cut boundaries between the public and the private. Following Western neoliberalism, Saak'ashvili's government favoured private initiative (especially in the economy), while also reasserting the primary role of the state as the source of law and order. The division between public and private in the moral, cultural, social, political and economic spheres was considered a fundamental step towards transparency, which the leadership regarded as a mark of a society's modernity.

Transparency stood in opposition to what post-revolutionary narratives depicted as a widespread habit among the population: the circumvention of official norms through informal means (Ledeneva 2006, 1998, Manning 2003, Suny 1988, Mars & Altman 1987, 1983). In the Soviet years, as well as in the 1990s, hospitality practices were a way to circulate material and non-material goods and services across the public and the private, overcoming the endemic shortages entailed by the flaws of the official system, which took the form of a planned economy, political oppression and failed institutions.

In line with the stigmatisation and obliteration of grey zones pursued by post-revolutionary modernisation narratives, hospitality practices too had to become transparent, that is, separated in an independent public and private not connected by

ambivalent ties. In these narratives, the public face of hospitality was a stereotypical picture of the inherently welcoming spirit of Georgians which, alongside promotion of the country's resources, would appeal to visitors and foreign investors. Private hospitality practices were framed as a form of entertainment to be purchased like any other commodity, engaged in by individuals out of a desire for sociability and according to their financial capacity.

My thesis analyses the images of hospitality promoted by post-revolutionary narratives *vis-à-vis* people's everyday practices of hospitality. De Certeau highlights the need to first analyse how the images produced and circulated by "elites", "as the key of socioeconomic advancement", are manipulated by social actors who are not "makers" but "users" of such images (1984: xiii). Drawing upon this point, I highlight the inconsistencies at the heart of the post-revolutionary modernisation project. I focus on three social and interactional dimensions in which the public narratives of modern hospitality spread by the post-revolutionary political leadership are "manipulated" in people's private articulations and performances of hospitality. These are: contexts in which people deal with changing images of the guest/stranger; processes of re-elaboration of traditional hospitality norms across divides which are drawn along lines of ascribed gender and generational identities; and contestation of meanings of hospitality underpinning transformations of the urban public space.

Analysis of modernisation narratives *vis-à-vis* hospitality practices in these three contexts highlights deep divisions across post-revolutionary Georgian society. The top-down implementation of Western moral, cultural, social, political and economic models envisaged by the modernisation project was meant to make society more civil. From the perspective of the political leadership, civility entailed order and transparency, represented by accountable public institutions which were bestowed with legitimacy but which did not interfere with citizens' individual liberties. Private citizens would voice their interests in public by gathering spontaneously into civil society.

However, bold neoliberal economic reforms increased social inequality, while growing state authoritarianism thwarted political pluralism and participation. Socio-economic and political divides were predicated on narratives which split the population along moral and cultural lines, distinguishing citizens who were

welcomed into the country's bright future from people who belonged to a despised past (Gotfredsen 2014, Frederiksen 2013). The way people articulated and performed hospitality was a fundamental mark of the division between past and future Georgia. Yet, the government's obliviousness of hospitality's ambivalence worsened the urgent social and political problems, ultimately undermining the leadership's legitimacy.

My thesis investigates hospitality as a source of civil values based on local practices, drawing upon Putnam and colleagues' argument that the quality of institutions in a society depends on their social and cultural surroundings (Putnam et al. 1994). Challenging mainstream post-revolutionary political narratives which largely depicted hospitality as a backward and harmful practice, I argue that ties of solidarity and reciprocity generated by people's private hospitality practices form the basis for the collective pursuit of the "public good" in the form of social equality and political inclusiveness. In contrast to the post-revolutionary modernisation project, which undermined social justice and political legitimacy by introducing top-down models of civility "imported" from the West, locally based practices of hospitality may support the strengthening of democratic institutions.

My study of Georgian hospitality challenges negative perspectives on unofficial practices as detrimental to democratisation and good governance. However, my conclusive remarks warn against uncritical "romanticisation" of hospitality practices as grass-roots expressions of resistance to social inequality and political oppression (Abu-Lughod 1990: 41). Overlooking the ambivalence of hospitality – ambivalence that unfolds along with the tension between tradition and pragmatism, solidarity and competition, equality and hierarchy, generosity and calculation – would mean ignoring the conservative and exclusionary character that these practices may have. This thesis contributes to debates which postulate a role for local practices as fundamental voices in wider social and political processes (Morris & Polese 2014, Polese et al. 2014, Aliyev 2014b, Ledeneva 2009). Yet, the results of my research highlight the need for further investigation if the ambivalent mechanisms through which local practices organise the way in which people interact with their physical, social and political surroundings are to be understood.

## Perspectives and methods

The *Oxford English Dictionary* refers to “hospitality” as “the act or practice of being hospitable; the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers, with liberality and goodwill” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989). In my thesis, this definition of hospitality is operationalised as a set of practices in which crisscrossing narratives and functions are embodied. I investigate people’s articulations and performances of these narratives and functions, focusing on the way in which they trespass and redraw the blurred lines between public and private. Private expressions of solidarity are intertwined with public displays of munificence (see Chapter 1). Private internalisation of hospitality norms intersects with public criticism of the inequalities inherent to such norms (see Chapter 4). Physical and social public and private spaces penetrate one another, as do conflicting practices aimed at making spaces hospitable (see Chapter 5).

A recurrent criticism I have met when presenting my research asks how “unique” Georgian hospitality is *vis-à-vis* hospitality in other societies. As many comments on my work have pointed out, the norms and rituals of hospitality in Georgia find correspondence in other Caucasian societies (the Northern Caucasus and Armenia; Gould 2016, Shagoyan 2015), as well as in Southern and South-Eastern Europe (the Balkans, Greece, Italy, or Corse for example; see Cheliotis 2013, Candea 2012, Henig 2012, Sorge 2009, Heatherington 2001, Herzfeld 1987, 1985). If the way people articulate and perform hospitality in Georgia does not differ substantially from other contexts, why focus on Georgian hospitality?

My study is not interested in making comparisons which uphold or challenge local narratives which state that hospitality in Georgia is like nowhere else, because it stems from the Georgian people’s specific moral and cultural background. Rather, the aim of my thesis is twofold. First, I wish to provide insights on contemporary Georgia. The empirical contribution that this study makes, depicting people’s articulations and performances of hospitality embedded in places, times and themes, casts a light on the often conflicting interaction between citizens’ everyday practices and political narratives. Second, I seek to highlight the role of ambivalence as a fertile perspective from which to analyse the relation between everyday practices and different sociopolitical constitutions on a more general basis. The case of hospitality

in post-revolutionary Georgia is revealing of the moral, social, political and economic divisions generated within a society when official institutions overlook, stigmatise and repress the ambivalence of unofficial practices. The post-revolutionary government's modernisation project aimed to get rid of ambivalence. Mainstream narratives, and their reflection in people's articulations and performances, shaped hospitality as *either* a public façade offered to outsiders *or* a private leisure activity. After an initially enthusiastic reception at the national and international level, which identified Georgia as an extremely successful example of post-socialist "transition", the modernisation project attracted criticism from both Georgian citizens and external observers for failing to deliver on many of its promises. Post-revolutionary Georgia has been marked by increasing social inequality and political alienation brought about by a project aimed at modernising society from above. Focusing on this context, my thesis draws attention to the tradition of hospitality (understood in terms of local practices of solidarity and reciprocity) in order to critically investigate alternative ways to strengthen social inclusion and political participation in a society. I propose hospitality and its ambivalence as an alternative key to read and understand the social, political and economic developments of post-revolutionary Georgia. In the thesis, I discuss hospitality practices in their potential of building civility through everyday relationships and exchanges rather than through the "top-down" imposition of images of "modernity" and "civility" based on external models.

Researching hospitality in the field is a double-edged experience. In a way, hospitality is shared knowledge among ethnographers, since the researcher "is a guest in both the local and the national sense" (Herzfeld 1987: 75). At first glance, the ethnographer's work seems to be thus simplified, because all researchers are required to "examine the assumptions that undergird their own presence in the host community" (76). Ethnographic research requires the researcher to be aware of the hospitality norms that operate in a community, since the outcome of research depends largely on opportunities and constraints emanating from such norms. Ethnographers of hospitality are therefore just dealing with what all their fellow researchers face by virtue of being in the field.

For these same reasons, however, researchers of hospitality may struggle to

draw a distinction between their everyday experiences of hospitality as strangers in the hosting communities and hospitality as the object of their investigation. Two risks are entailed by this condition. Drawing a clear line between their everyday experience and systematic research may lead ethnographers to impose their own categories of hospitality on what their hosts think, say and do. In this way, the researcher unconsciously contributes to the making of stereotypes about a community's hospitable attitudes (Herzfeld 1987). Conversely, labelling all interaction in the field as hospitality may undermine the ethnographer's analytical distance. Hospitality becomes a vague notion attached to various substantially differing phenomena.

I believe that my well-established familiarity with the context of my research on the one hand, and my understanding of the limitations entailed by my method (which I discuss below) on the other hand, have helped me maintain a balance between distance from and proximity to the field. A thorough re-elaboration of my experiences in the field has allowed me to focus on the points I wanted to address, but at the same time to be open to modifying the scope of my investigation to include dimensions of hospitality which I had not previously envisaged as such. My first contact with Georgia dates back to long before the idea of writing a PhD on hospitality ever crossed my mind. In early 2008, I was awarded a visiting fellowship as part of a student exchange between "Ca' Foscari" University of Venice and Tbilisi State University. I extended my stay until October 2009, spending a total sixteen months in Georgia, based in Tbilisi but also travelling around the country.

During that time, while researching Russian imperial power in Georgia in Tbilisi's historical archives, I realised that Georgian people's "extremely hospitable nature", of which I had received a full account prior to my trip, was not just a cliché. I was impressed by the ease with which half-strangers invited me to their houses, where I was generously treated to food and drink, given gifts and asked to stay over as long as I wanted. But I also perceived that hospitality practices were a source of expectations and anxiety for the people involved. I became intrigued by the social mechanisms which lay beneath the statement that "all Georgians love guests", which was repeated to me in every encounter with local people. Hospitality appeared to me to be a social device informing the way in which people categorise themselves and others.

When I started my PhD, this past experience, thanks to which I could develop a vivid picture of the pervasiveness of hospitality, offered me a solid basis from which to develop my research in more systematic ways.

. Hospitality practices provide an angle from which the ethnographer can observe a multitude of social mechanisms, from gender and generational divides, through people's articulations of politics, to the relationship between individuals and the surrounding space. I regard hospitality as a type of Maussian "total social phenomenon", in which "all kinds of institutions are given expression at one and the same time – religious, juridical and moral, which relate to both politics and the family; likewise economic ones, which suppose special forms of production and consumption [...]" (Mauss 2002 [1925]: 3).

In summer 2014, I travelled back to Georgia to carry out research by following up on people whom I had met a few years before and also by getting in touch with new participants. In preparation for my trip, I conducted a pilot project, recording 25 semi-structured interviews with Georgian people in London. Many interviews took place in participants' houses, where I was often treated to Georgian food and drink following the patterns of the traditional feast. I also took part in activities organised by the Georgian church in north London, as well as in events (Christmas fairs, Georgian cookery classes and fundraising evenings) organised by the Georgian Community in the UK.

From July to September 2014 I was based in Tbilisi (while also travelling to the mountains on two occasions), collecting data through participant observation and conversations with old and new friends and acquaintances. Meanwhile, in October 2012, Saakashvili and his UNM had been defeated by the Georgian Dream coalition in elections regarded both in Georgia and externally as a major shift in the country's democratic history. My participants were keen to discuss the legacy of the recently concluded political era, which had left behind a deeply fragmented landscape.

Interacting with a diverse range of participants was essential to ensuring the quality of my database. Since hospitality practices draw lines of inclusion and exclusion between people, I made sure that my participants varied in age, gender, socioeconomic status, level of education, occupational strata and life experiences.

I collected a variety of perspectives on hospitality, which at times conflicted

with one another. Both women and men contributed to my research, aged between 18 and around 80. Among my participants were students, the unemployed, housewives, pensioners, teachers, engineers, carpenters, academics, artists, salesmen and social workers. However, in spite of the diversity of my sources, this study does not claim to be representative of “the Georgian people” as a whole. Due to the snowball sampling through which I got in touch with the majority of my participants, I am aware that my research may suffer from representation bias, especially along lines of class. My fieldwork in Georgia was concerned to a large extent with lower-middle class and working class people, while the ethnographic data collected in London is the result of my interaction with far better-off participants on the average.

Yet, it would be misleading to assume that divisive narratives of “old” against “new”, “past” against “future”, “worthy” against “unworthy” conveyed through articulations and performances of hospitality reflects class fractures across society in a straightforward way. While post-revolutionary political narratives emphasised such clear-cut division along the lines of “tradition” against “modernity”, people’s own understanding of what is tradition and modernity are negotiated in far more nuanced, and, indeed, ambivalent ways. In order to highlight the way in which these nuances intersect across various social groups, and avoid the reification of dichotomies conveyed by the post-revolutionary modernisation project, I will provide details of the various samples of participants with whom I dealt throughout the dissertation.

I do not provide a list of participants, since this would necessarily exclude many people whose random gestures and remarks added precious details to the picture of hospitality I outlined. Interactions with people took place in Georgian or, when my knowledge of the local language was not good enough, Russian. I wrote my observations in a notebook at the end of each day, and I re-organised my material at a later stage. The interviews for my pilot project in London were conducted in English, recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Various factors either challenged or facilitated my access to specific contexts in the field. Strict gender divides had a double-edged effect on opportunities to talk about certain topics, meet certain people and enter certain spaces. My male participants did not expect me to behave like a Georgian woman, so it was not usually problem for me to be involved in activities such as drinking or be interested in



controversial phenomena such as *birzha* (a form of male street socialisation often linked to the criminal world, see Chapter 5). Yet, the openness of male participants was partly counterbalanced by the strict attitude of certain – mostly elderly – women, who were at odds with what they regarded as rather unorthodox behaviour for a female. Nevertheless, I developed ties of affection with many female participants, who liked to discuss various issues with me, not least the challenge of living in a highly patriarchal society.

Nationality was similarly a twofold factor. As a foreigner interested in Georgia, I was met by locals with curiosity, if not enthusiasm. People were happy to explain Georgian society, culture, history, politics and of course hospitality to me in detail. I was often invited to people's homes, shown around Tbilisi or taken on trips out of town. Yet, pervasive narratives of Georgian distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* outsiders sometimes fostered dismissive attitudes in some of my participants, who assumed that because I was not a Georgian I would be unable to understand the context in which I was living.

Still, my Italian nationality was highly regarded by local people. I was repeatedly told that Georgians and Italians are “like brothers”. Our peoples supposedly share the same warm nature, which translates as a common penchant for eating, drinking wine and having a good time with family and friends. People who had grown up in the Soviet Union also had enthusiastic memories of the Italian music and films which circulated in Georgia and other Eastern bloc countries in the 1970s and 1980s, which contributed to the welcoming attitudes with which I was surrounded.

Finally, my knowledge of the Georgian language, however minimal at the beginning, was also key to getting access to the field. Foreigners who spoke the local language were apparently not common, so even basic competence was met with amazement, thanks to which people were often happy to patiently explain their viewpoints to me over and over again.

## Structure of the thesis

In Chapter 1, I introduce Georgian hospitality as a practice which draws upon private dispositions of good-heartedness, but at the same time is regulated by publicly shared norms. I outline theoretical approaches which define hospitality as a conundrum resting on irreconcilable oppositions. I distance my perspective from these approaches, presenting ambivalence as a more proficient notion for exploring hospitality's apparent paradoxes. I discuss the ambivalence of hospitality as a practice generated in private spaces of intimacy and domesticity, but which makes such spaces a public stage for simultaneously displaying both welcoming and hostility. Analysing the ambivalent relationship between hospitality practices and the official system (notably, the Soviet regime and the political leadership of the 1990s), I introduce the notion of grey zones as moral, cultural, social, political and economic areas in which clear-cut oppositions vanish. I frame hospitality practices as grey zones, pointing out that these ambivalent areas were defined as undesired legacies of the past by the narratives of radical renovation which followed the Rose Revolution.

In Chapter 2, I analyse the narratives informing the modernisation project through which the post-revolutionary political leadership meant to bring Georgia closer to the West. These narratives stigmatised a past in which grey zones pervaded the mechanisms regulating the country's social, political and economic life. Instead, transparency was endorsed as a fundamental mark of a society's modernity. Post-revolutionary narratives articulated images of transparency on clear-cut oppositions, such as past/future, backward/modern or evil/good.

As an ambivalent practice penetrating the porous boundaries between public and private, hospitality was at odds with these narratives, which envisaged public and private as two autonomous spheres. The public face of hospitality which the government presented to outsiders was based on stereotyped images of an inherently welcoming country which maintained a fascinating air of exoticism while modernising rapidly. Conversely, private hospitality was an individual business, a form of leisure in which people became involved depending on their penchant for conviviality and their financial capability.

The chapter concludes by analysing the relationship between hospitality and

civil society. In the model of clearly separated public and private spheres envisaged by the modernisation project, civil society was an in-between area in which private citizens could voice their own interests *vis-à-vis* accountable but not invasive state institutions. I explore the discrepancies between normative ideas of civil society and hospitality, but I also highlight the failures of post-revolutionary civil society, which was unable to act as a tool of social inclusion and political participation amid increasing social inequality and political control. In this context, I introduce the perspective of hospitality as civility, from which I analyse articulations and performances of hospitality in their potential to “bridge” people’s everyday practices in the private sphere to wider social and political debate and action, fostering the collective pursue of the “public good”.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 provide the ethnographic support for my argument, exploring hospitality practices across the tension between tradition and modernity, continuity and rupture, reproduction and rejection. The analysis carried out in each chapter points out the discrepancies between modernisation narratives, resting on the separation between the public and the private, and people’s practices of hospitality, articulated and performed simultaneously at the private and public levels. Overlooking hospitality’s ambivalence, these narratives deepened moral, cultural, social, political and economic divides across the population, exposing dramatic inconsistencies at the heart of the post-revolutionary modernisation project. I highlight the ambivalent ways in which my participants reproduced, challenged and subverted these inconsistencies in various contexts of hospitality: hosts dealing with changing images of the stranger/guest; the negotiation of ascribed gender and generational identities around (or away from) the feasting table; the contestation of hospitality across transforming urban public spaces. In each chapter, I discuss the way in which ambivalent articulations and performances of hospitality may generate civility under the conditions of social, political and economic disintegration brought about by the post-revolutionary modernisation project. .

Chapter 3 analyses changing images of the stranger-guest in the fragmented social landscape of post-revolutionary Georgia. I investigate the tension between unity and division underpinning the images of the “public stranger” promoted by post-revolutionary narratives *vis-à-vis* the articulation of figures of strangers-guests in people’s everyday practices of hospitality. Defining individuals and groups as

“strangers-guests” requires hosts to display welcoming attitudes prescribed by hospitality norms. However, individuals and groups treated as “strangers-guests” are at the same time alienated by the community of insiders/hosts. Exploring the way in which images of “public strangers” have been transformed since Soviet times, I point out how these images are constructed along moral and cultural lines, which in turn are predicated on social and economic differences. Narratives defining the “public stranger” as someone who did not fit the post-revolutionary modernisation project legitimised on moral grounds the social, political and economic fragmentation largely brought about by the government’s reforms. However, I highlight that the ambivalent ways in which people define and approach “strangers-guests” in their everyday practices, rather than laying the foundations for exclusion and marginalisation, may open up to the “bridging” of different communities.

In Chapter 4, I focus on articulations and performances of hospitality by women and youth. Both women and young people, while expected to comply with traditional norms, are excluded from the active making of hospitality practices, which rest on a plot centred on older males. Post-revolutionary narratives depicted emancipated women escaping the patriarchal burden of hospitality, or a proactive young generation more interested in self-realisation than in wasting time feasting with their older relatives. Yet, these narratives neglected the tension between continuity and rupture underpinning the hospitality practices of women and young people. On the blurred line between the private domestic space and the sphere of public relations, women internalised male-dominated norms of hospitality, but also reappropriated hospitality practices from their own perspective. Young people, apparently intolerant of the traditional hospitality norms enforced upon them by their fathers, reproduced hospitality among their peers in ways which simultaneously expressed rejection and endorsement of tradition. The search for more inclusive practices of hospitality, which does not necessarily entail the stigmatisation of “tradition” and people attached to it, highlights the potentials of hospitality as a source of civility.

Young people are also the focus of Chapter 5, which explores conflicting understandings of hospitability *vis-à-vis* hospitality practices in the post-revolutionary urban space. My case study is centred on the form of young male street socialisation known as *birzha*. Closely linked to neighbourhood life, *birzha* is

regulated by shared moral and social norms, while also potentially being the initial step in a criminal career. I define *birzha* as an expression of street hospitality, which, through a code of solidarity and reciprocity, makes urban spaces between the public and the private hospitable. Practices of hospitality in urban public spaces clashed with the government's ideas of what a hospitable space looks like. The hectic renovation of the cityscape launched by the political leadership in both Tbilisi and other cities and towns aimed to build Western-style urban spaces under the banner of transparency. Zero-tolerance approaches to *birzha* were meant to efface from the cityscape those people and practices which jeopardised the image of a modern space inhabited by modern citizens. The government's arbitrary enforcement of this model of hospitality on urban spaces annihilated social expressions perceived as legacies of a despised past. Yet, the government's increasingly exclusive attitude to its own citizens ultimately undermined state legitimacy for the population. The segregation, and intended obliteration, of peoples, practices and spaces was a remarkably "uncivil" outcome of the post-revolutionary modernisation project, bringing about exclusion and inequality rather than feeding political participation and social solidarity across the citizenry.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the inconsistencies of the post-revolutionary modernisation project highlighted in the thesis, exploring hospitality practices as a source of civility. I define civility as "the public use of private good". Civility is made up by the set of norms and practices which keep a community together on the basis of shared understandings of what the "public good" is. I point out that the top-down introduction of Western social, political and economic models as the only way of modernising the country divided Georgian society deeply, making it uncivil. In contrast with post-revolutionary political narratives which depicted ambivalent hospitality practices as backward and harmful to the country's development, I investigate hospitality practices as embedded in local traditions of trust, solidarity and generosity which can reinforce democratic values within a community. Drawing upon Putnam's argument about the positive correlation between the strength of democratic institutions and the social and cultural background from which they develop, I propose hospitality practices as potential sources of civil values which, in turn, bolster institutional quality, paving the way for social inclusion and political participation.

My conclusion shows that obliviousness to hospitality's ambivalence, as with the post-revolutionary modernisation project, leads to moral stigmatisation, social marginalisation, political oppression and economic inequality, which amount to incivility. By defining the Georgian government's relationship with hospitality practices as "obliviousness", I do not mean that the political leadership was unaware either of the pervasiveness of these practices across society or of the ambivalent ways in which these practices work. Rather, the government approached ambivalence as a wholly negative phenomenon, failing to appreciate either that the ambivalent way in which these practices are embedded in people's life may have a positive value for society as a whole, or that marginalising and repressing these practices would eventually backfire in terms of loss of political legitimacy. As opposed to divisions brought about by the top-down introduction of external models, private practices of hospitality grounded in local traditions create the basis for public inclusion and equality. I highlights the potentials of unofficial practices to generate civility, contributing to the scholarship which challenges negative views on these practices as detrimental to political and economic development.

However, I emphasise the need to take into consideration also the "reverse side" of the ambivalence of hospitality, where solidarity merges with competitiveness, generosity with calculation, inclusion with exclusion. I warn against a superficial "romanticisation" of hospitality practices as grass-roots tools for change. Another risk entailed by uncritical endorsement of hospitality practices as a source of resistance is that, in a context of bold neoliberalism where institutionalised social protection is nearly absent, the support provided by everyday practices is not enough. The spread of practices through which citizens get by in spite of official institutions' shortcomings may be a sign that the state is unable, or unwilling, to tackle urgent social problems, unburdening its responsibilities onto people's own strategies. These considerations are not specific to the case of Georgian hospitality, but can be extended to various social practices articulated and performed by citizens of other post-socialist countries, as well as in Western Europe. For this reason, I believe that future research on the relationship between local practices and social, political and economic systems needs to frame the ambivalence of these practices within wider debates on social wellbeing, political inclusion and economic development.

# 1

## THE GEORGIAN TRADITION OF HOSPITALITY: BLURRED BOUNDARIES BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE

### 1.1 Public tradition or private strategy? Beyond clear-cut dichotomies

#### 1.1.1 Public norms, private feelings

In his poem “The Guest and the Host”, “*St’umar-Maspindzeli*” (1893), the Georgian writer Vazha-Pshavela (the pen-name of Luk’a Razik’ashvili, 1861-1915) depicts the feuds and fights between Caucasian mountain tribes. Jokhala (a member of the Kist tribe) offers hospitality to a stranger met by chance while hunting. He does not know that the stranger is a merciless enemy of his village, who had killed many in the Kist community. When the villagers realise who Jokhala’s guest is, they rush to his home to claim the enemy’s blood. However, even when the guest’s identity is revealed, Jokhala abides by laws of hospitality, which prescribe honour and protection even for enemies, as long as they are in one’s house.

Although not unique in the genre (the theme of the dreadful enemy who is still offered hospitality is widespread in the literature and popular imagery of some Mediterranean societies, such as Corsica or highland Greece, Candea 2012, Herzfeld 1985, 1987), this episode reveals the meanings which Georgian people attach to hospitality. The Georgian term for “hospitality”, *st’umartmoq’vareoba*, is composed of the noun *st’umari*, “guest”, and the verb *miq’vars*, “to love”.<sup>3</sup> This word indicates hospitality in its broader sense, as an attitude of people who like to have visitors. Georgians may also refer to hospitality as *p’urmarilianoba*, from *p’uri*, “bread” and *marili*, “salt”, which is related to the consumption of food and drinks in a festive context.

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<sup>3</sup> The same notion is expressed by the Greek word *filoksenia*, in which *ksenia* refers to “the ancient word for the reciprocal host-guest relationship” (Herzfeld 1987: 83; see also Cheliotis 2013, Herzfeld 1985).

The definition of hospitality as “love for the guest” locates hospitality in the sphere of the private feelings which individuals display towards outsiders. At the same time, in many literary works and popular narratives, hospitality is largely defined as a fundamental feature of being Georgian, a distinctive mark of the whole national community. As an attribute bestowed upon and required of all Georgians, proneness to hospitality transcends the sphere of intimate attitudes, standing out as a public issue. The way in which individuals and groups interact with each other in hospitable settings is a matter of concern that spreads through different levels of “publicness” (Varna & Tiesdell 2010), beyond the boundaries of the home and the neighbourhood, to the local, regional, national and international context.

The tension between the public and the private in hospitality emerges dramatically from Vazha-Pshavela’s poem. Jokhala stands against the community to defend his guest, no matter who the latter is, and eventually pays for this choice with his life. Jokhala’s honour as a private individual demands that he respects the norms of hospitality, even though this means going against his own community’s norms. The conflicts between these two normative systems unfolds along the blurred boundaries between the public shame of breaching laws which preserve the community’s security and reputation and the private honour which, through unconditional compliance with hospitality norms, enhances the protagonist’s moral status. In this case, the community’s public will overcomes Jokhala’s private choice, trespassing the boundaries between public and private in an attempt to kill a “public enemy” in Jokhala’s private domestic realm. Practices of hospitality stand out as potentially disruptive of the public/private opposition.

Rather than framing the public and the private as a “grand dichotomy” (Weintraub & Kumar 1997), my perspective on hospitality shifts the focus of attention to the blurred boundaries between the two realms. From the angle of hospitality, I investigate articulations and performances of hospitality through which the porous divide between the public and the private is trespassed and redrawn. Hospitality, which stems from the tension between private feelings and public reputation, between private space and public display, is framed as “neither public in an official sense nor private in a personal one” (Eickelman & Anderson quoted in Shyrock 2004: 38).



Norms regulating hospitality practices are revealing of the blurred nature of the lines which frame the public/private opposition. On the one hand, hospitality is articulated and performed in the private sphere of emotions, intimacy and domesticity: the way in which hosts and guests interact with each other, the quality and quantity of food and drink served, the pattern followed by hospitality events. On the other hand, these norms are thought to be universal, never-changing and naturally internalised by all Georgians at birth. Features that are considered inherent to Georgian hospitality are part and parcel of public narratives.

According to hospitality norms, a good Georgian must make no distinction between guests (Goldstein 1999, Chatwin 1997). Everyone is to be welcomed in the warmest way, following the proverb “an enemy may come as far as the door of your house, but once he enters, he is a friend” (Goldstein 1999: xviii). These norms, which relate to intimate feelings informing the way in which people interact with each other, acquire public relevance in the core practice of Georgian hospitality, *supra*. *Supra*, and its guiding structure of toasting and drinking, called *tamadoba*, usually take place in private houses. However, with their tension between welcoming and hostility, solidarity and competition, generosity and calculation, these practices are the public expression of hospitality *par excellence*.

### **1.1.2 The public tradition of *supra* and *tamadoba***

Literally meaning “tablecloth”, *supra* is the traditional way of feasting in which hosts and guests gather at a table for many hours, consuming huge quantities of food and drink, delivering speeches and toasts and singing traditional songs. *Supra* is considered a founding national institution, to such an extent that “whoever wishes to learn about Georgian society, to understand Georgian culture, the *supra* encapsulates it all” (Altman 2011: 2; see also Nodia 2014, Muehlfried 2006, 2005).

This fundamental expression of hospitality has been defined as: “a marker of Georgian or Caucasian identity” (Tuite 2005: 9); “an institution reconciling two themes running through Georgian culture: a great emphasis placed on competition, and a concomitant need for cooperation” (Mars & Altman 1987: 276); a practice “heavily loaded with political implications”, particularly regarding issues such as “gender, labour and consumption” (Tuite 2005: 9); a place where “relationships are

formed, commitments exchanged, deals cemented and bonds reaffirmed” (Altman 2011: 2); and a “stage on which reciprocity is played out” (Chatwin 1997: 88). From these definitions, it emerges that *supra* has a moral, cultural, social, political and economic scope which spreads beyond the boundaries of receiving guests privately within a domestic space. Food and drink consumption in traditional hospitality settings is regulated by norms which have public meaning in assigning people a place within society.

*Supra* must be as conspicuous as possible (Altman 2011, Zanca 2010). The traditional pattern for this event requires that a large variety of food is put on the table from the beginning of the feast. As a result, the *supra* table is piled with a multitude of small serving dishes from which those present can help themselves, and which are constantly refilled throughout the banquet. Cooking is subject to strict norms. Although each household may give a personalised touch to traditional dishes, Georgian dishes follow fixed recipes in terms of ingredients, preparation and presentation. As a result, despite the apparently large variety, guests are treated “to a fairly unitary menu [...] (which is) standard and repetitive” (Altman 2011:4).

Basic *supra* food includes fresh bread and cheese, tomatoes, cucumbers, herbs, pickles, *khach'ap'uri* (cheesy bread, see 1.1.3), aubergines stuffed with walnuts, *pkhali* (beetroot or spinach mixed with walnuts and spices), cold meat and fish, as well as cakes and sweets. Food consumption does not follow a specific order, with savoury and sweet dishes often randomly alternated. In addition, hot dishes, mostly in the form of stewed and roast meat, are served throughout the feast. The fundamental drink at *supra* is homemade wine, which is consumed in a ritualised way (see below). Soft drinks include sweet fizzy beverages, usually pear or tarragon flavoured. Beer and water (with the partial exception of the renowned naturally carbonated mineral waters *Borjomi* and *Nabeghlavi*) are rarely consumed at a *supra*.

Food offered at *supra* is thought to be healthy since it is homemade and prepared with products grown by the household itself or obtained from the countryside (Polese 2010, Dunn 2008, Caldwell 2002). However, due to the length of the event and the spirit of conviviality (which often translates to tablemates pushing one another to eat as much as they can, see 3.4 and 6.2; see also Zanca 2010,

Polese 2010), it is hard for guests to refrain from overeating and (if they are male) excessive drinking.

Different foods have particular meanings. Bread (*p'uri*) and cheese (*q'veli*) are the basic substances for welcoming and feeding guests: *q'veli da p'uri, k'etili guli* (“cheese and bread, happy hearth”), a popular proverb says. Meat, instead, is regarded as a mark of virility. Although the Georgian culinary tradition is rich in several other ingredients, such as dairy and vegetables, a meal without meat is hardly conceivable in the presence of guests. The lack of meat can jeopardise a host's reputation as a proper Georgian man. A meatless *supra*, unless in times of religious fasting, is a meaningless event, through which manliness cannot be asserted (Herzfeld 1985).

While appearing to be personal interactions confined to the physical and social realm of house and family, the dynamics of a *supra* are publicly shared norms which affect the public position of individuals and groups in the community. The public meaning of hospitality norms is reinforced by the resilience and low tolerance to change that these norms have. *Supra's* highly codified structure of toasting and drinking (Douglas 1987), called *tamadoba*, illustrates the rigidity of this processes.

*Tamadoba* regulates the conspicuous consumption of alcohol, which is pivotal to big hospitable events. Wine is very prominent, as Georgians talk about themselves as the inventors of this beverage (Muehlfried 2007, Goldstein 1999). The ritual consumption of wine stretches its meaning beyond the religious association between wine and Christ's blood. Wine is a metaphor for Georgian blood itself, evoking “a sense of culture and community” (Goldstein 1999: xviii). Sharing wine at a *supra* means symbolically becoming kinsmen (Muehlfried 2007, Herzfeld 1985).

*Tamadoba* is led by a toastmaster, the *tamada*, who is chosen from the males present to deliver toasts (*sadghegrdzelo*).<sup>4</sup> The *tamada* has a key role in the successful outcome of a *supra*, since he is expected to create “social heat” (Chau 2008: 485). Toasts have “a predictable internal organisation, combined with an apparent freedom of expression”. To some extent, improvisation is allowed “within a well-defined structure. Repetition, formulaic speech, parallelism, extravagant wording, and other

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<sup>4</sup> Some participants pointed out that women can also be *tamada* nowadays. However, since this usually happens at informal all-female events (see Chapter 4), and also because drinking is still widely considered, by both men and women, as a typically male activity, I refer to *tamadoba* and *tamada* in male terms.

factors of verbal art play an important role” (Kotthoff 1995: 354). A good *tamada* has sense of humour and mastery of Georgian history and culture. He brings about matters of shared knowledge, creating a sense of commonality among participants (Muehlfried 2007). He is sensitive to the participants’ mood and ensures everyone’s involvement while avoiding boredom, awkwardness and cold-heartedness. Scrupulous management of drinking also prevents *supra* from degenerating into chaotic drunkenness (Manning 2003, Chatwin 1997).

A *supra* may start with praise of the host (*maspinzeli*), and his/her family. Drinking to children, women, the dead and ancestors is also customary. Many toasts are dedicated to love and friendship, to Georgia and its history and culture, to the homelands of foreign guests and to friendship between people (guests’ co-nationals and Georgians). All toasts are pronounced with the formulaic expression “*gaumarjos!*”, “victory to...” For example, “(victory) to Georgia!” is “*Sakartvelos gaumarjos!*” Sipping wine is not allowed outside of proposed toasts, when glasses are emptied in one go. Certain toasts require participants to stand up, and specific items are used as wine containers – namely horns (*q’antsi*) and clay pots of various sizes. On such occasions, the *tamada* drinks first and then passes the container on to the others, who in turn say a few words and drink. Participants are expected to follow the given structure.

While many *supras* (first and foremost those organised for mourning occasions, called *ch’inis supra*, but also banquets celebrating important life-cycle events, such as birthdays, baptises and weddings, called *lkhinis supra*, Muehlfried 2007, Tuite 2005) require the solemn compliance with norms regulating speech, gestures, materiality and substances, in several occasions such festive meals unfold in more informal and spontaneous ways. These events are usually referred to as *keipi*, which indicates a kind of *supra* openly oriented towards fun, which is generally achieved through the conspicuous consumption of alcohol. The expression *keipze mosvla* translates as “to be in good spirits”, while the related verb *keipoba* is used to indicate a group of people engaged in feasting and getting drunk in a cheerful and often improvised way – “*Vikeipot!*” means “Let’s have a *keipi!*”/”Let’s get drunk!” (see also Muehlfried 2007).

### **1.1.3 *Supra* and *tamadoba*: Public religion vs. private religiosity**

Some of the most conspicuous *supras* take place during religious festivities. The autocephalous Georgian Orthodox Church enjoys great popularity across the population (*Full Speed Westward* 2013, Grdzelidze 2010, Di Puppò 2010). In popular narratives as well as in historical accounts and political speech, the Church is often referred to as the moral, cultural, social and political institution which bonds Georgians together. As a small Christian country surrounded by powerful and aggressive neighbours belonging to other confessions (Turks, Arabs, Persians, North Caucasians), for centuries Georgia has relied on the Christian faith to preserve its identity in times of political disintegration (Rayfield 2013, Magarotto 2004).

Georgian nationalism, which played a key role in undermining the already weakened foundations of the Soviet system and which gained further momentum after Georgia's independence in 1991, strictly connects nationality to Christianity (Grdzelidze 2010, Pelkmans 2002). In 1995, 80 per cent of Georgians declared as having a religious affiliation, with only 4 per cent defining themselves as atheists (Froese 2004: 59). Although Georgia is not a religiously homogenous country (for example, the southwestern region of Ach'ara has been Muslim historically, while some pre-Christian traditions survive in mountainous regions such as Tusheti and Khevsureti) (Pelkmans 2002, Muehlfried 2014a), arguably the vast majority of this percentage is made up of Orthodox Christians. The Church's alleged function as a national bond frames religious authorities as trustworthy social and political entities. Surveys conducted in the late 2000s indicate that the Church is the institution most trusted by Georgians, ahead of the army and national media (Di Puppò 2010).

Although the relationship between the Church and the post-revolutionary government is relevant when investigating the tension between traditional practices and modernisation narratives, such an analysis falls outside the scope of this research. Yet, religion and hospitality are related in specific ways which highlight how public discourse is variously appropriated and reproduced in the private sphere – and vice versa. Hospitality is a recurrent image in Christian tradition, which preaches the duty to welcome the poor and weak (Ahn 2010, O'Gorman 2007). In Georgia, hospitality tradition states that all guests must be regarded as “gifts from God”, sent to bless the hosts and their household and community (Muehlfried 2007, Tuite 2005).

There is a strong link between the ritualised consumption of food and wine and religious holidays. A paradigmatic expression of this link is represented by Easter (*Aghdgoma*) celebrations. Although a long mass takes place between Saturday and Sunday, with *supras* possibly following a night of prayer, the pivotal day of the whole celebration is Easter Monday, the Day of Death, in which families go to graveyards to visit their deceased. Most graveyards are located outside urban centres, and are usually scattered across fields, with visitors gathering around tables and benches set among the tombstones. On Easter Monday, people bring food and wine to the graveyard and symbolically feast with the deceased. When toasts are said, wine is poured on graves, where red-dyed eggs and slices of *Paskha* (traditional Easter cake) are also set down.<sup>5</sup>

It must be emphasised that religious convictions do not have necessarily much to do with the yearly repetition of these rituals. While Christian symbolism is strong in gestures, speech and the materiality of the event, many of the people involved are not practicing Orthodox Christians or even believers at all. Identity bonds which hold both small and large communities together (from the family to the neighbourhood, from the village to the nation) play a more fundamental role than publicly promoted religious values, which are not necessarily endorsed by people performing religion-based hospitality. The same also applies to fasting, which is prescribed during Lent as well as in the days or weeks preceding other festivities (for example *Mariamoba*, see below) and involves abstaining from meat, and sometimes also dairy and egg-based products. While it is underpinned by religious norms, people who are not actively religious also often engage in fasting as a practice shared across the community which is also a matter of social convention.

The tension expressed by hospitality practices between public images of religion and private re-elaborations of these images also emerges in other festivities. Besides life-cycle celebrations such as baptisms, weddings, funerals and *ormotsi*,<sup>6</sup> the religious calendar includes various holidays to celebrate Georgian saints (Chatwin

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<sup>5</sup> BBC News (2013). “Dining with the dead: Georgian families’ graveyard feasts”, 12 May. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22480990>

<sup>6</sup> *Ormotsi* (forty) is a celebration held forty days after a person’s death and subsequent burial (with the burial normally taking place three days after death). It is believed that the dead person’s soul remains in her/his house for forty days before leaving this world for good. This event, which is preceded by the celebration of the actual funeral and burial, is marked by a huge banquet, with many friends and relatives, both close and distant, attending, some coming from far away.

1997). Festivities such as *Giorgoba* (the day of Saint George, Georgia's patron saint), *Ninoba* (Saint Nino's day, after the woman saint who brought Christianity to Georgia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century) and *Mariamoba* (the day of the Virgin Mary) are widely popular among Georgians. Even if it is not always possible to organise a huge *supra* on these occasions, families usually prepare some "special" food, such as *khach'ap'uri* or *khink'ali* (meat dumplings), and gather to eat and drink with relatives and friends.

According to Chatwin (1997), figures of saints have a specific meaning for Georgians, which again overcomes the observation of religious norms. Dating back to ancient forms of social identity among mountain populations, in urban contexts figures of saints have retained the function of reinforcing kinship networks. Moreover, in times of trouble, the image of the saint-defender (epitomised by Saint George) was central to the preservation of a unified identity.

In one of my hosting households in Tbilisi, *Giorgoba* (28th November) was the most important celebration of the year, since Giorgi was the name passed down the generations to male members of the family. On that day, male relatives would kill a sheep and cook it in various ways, and a huge *supra* lasted throughout the day. Male members of the family were joined by friends and neighbours to toast, drink, roast meat and eat in the garden of the house, while women were busy serving at the table, cleaning and looking after children. The event was of the most solemn kind, even though my hosting family was not religious at all. Private bonds of masculinity and kinship, related to the first name of male family members, were celebrated in a public festivity envisaged by the Orthodox calendar. Faith, a sense of the sacred and compliance with religious norms are negotiated by people in hospitality practices along with kinship, gender and national identity.

*Supra* and *tamadoba*, whether or not they are performed on religious occasions, reflect the tensions of hospitality as a practice between and across the public and the private. In their attempts to grasp these tensions, several studies frame hospitality as an unsolvable paradox. On the one hand, hospitality is depicted as a universal principle, informed by openness towards all human (and even non-human) beings. This idea of hospitality is encapsulated in the articulation of tradition as a timeless set of feelings, norms and practices. On the other hand, pragmatic dynamics

are emphasised as equally fundamental features of hospitality, or even as the “objective truths” which underpin it (Bourdieu 1977: 171-172).

This approach to hospitality results in a series of oppositions. On the one hand, pragmatism refers to hospitality as a strategy which social actors actively transform and fit in their own purposes. Pragmatic dynamics of hospitality include competitiveness and calculation. On the other hand, tradition emphasises the immutability of hospitality as a universal disposition informed by principles of disinterested solidarity and generosity. To what extent do these abstract oppositions shed light on articulations and performances of hospitality as an everyday practice? Is hospitality a conundrum resting on irreconcilable dichotomies? In what way does a focus on the ambivalence of hospitality help handle and resolve the tensions expressed in these dichotomies?

#### **1.1.4 Paradox or ambivalence?**

The tension between tradition and pragmatism is a crucial feature of Georgian hospitality. On the one hand, tradition is conceived as commonplace, a public trademark of Georgian society which is thought to be resilient in time and space. On the other hand, personal and collective private strategies unfold along with specific historical, socio-political and economic contexts, reproducing hospitality practices in multifaceted ways. As a stage to display various expressions of belonging, hospitality practices encapsulate the collective cultural and social values through which people negotiate their identity along with changing local, national, and international contexts (Dragadze 1988, Mars & Altman 1987, 1983, Herzfeld 1987).

Some studies approach hospitality from an ethical perspective, partly related to Christian tradition (see 1.1.3 and 3.1). Hospitality is envisaged as “unconditional”, that is free from limits defined by law and politics. Unconditional hospitality is offered to everybody in whatever circumstance (Derrida 2000). Hosts must take care of the least fortunate, since hospitality is framed as an act of mercy (Ahn 2010, Friese 2009, O’ Gorman 2007). Manifestations of hospitality are conceptualised through the distinction between “visitation” and “invitation”, with the first term referring to a spontaneous, even irrational welcoming of unexpected visitors, who embody a general notion of alterity to be embraced (Barnett 2005: 13).



Pragmatism is emphasised in literature which approaches hospitality as practices channelled by social networks which provide access to material and non-material resources (Sorge 2009, Heatherington 2001, Mars & Altman 1987, 1983). The emphasis on the exclusiveness of these networks highlights hospitality as a competitive practice behind the façade of solidarity. Drawing upon the Maussian idea of reciprocity as the principle underlying gift exchange (Mauss 2002 [1925]; see also Sahlins 1972), hospitality is the case of a conditional give-and-take between the host and the guest (Komter 2005, Laidlaw 2000, Gouldner 1977).

The tension between universalism of tradition and contingent pragmatism is reflected by theoretical approaches concerned (possibly in a critical way) with the notion of hospitality as a “scale-free abstraction”, an analytical tool capable of relating phenomena and items of different size and nature (Candea 2012, Chau 2006, Herzfeld 1987). Hospitality and its components are framed as universal concepts (“the Host”, “the Guest”, “the Stranger”, “the House”, “the Threshold”, and so on), which switch between different scales (local vs. national, individual vs. collective, particular vs. general). Hospitality is a metaphor which conveys various dynamics and relationships (for example, images of guests and hosts associated with migrants and receiving countries, Rosello 2001).

However, the unproblematic “scaling-up” of hospitality from the house to the nation, from local people’s attitudes to foreigners to a country’s foreign policy, overlooks the everyday relationships from which hospitality develops, and the material forms in which hospitality is grounded (Candea 2012). Hospitality’s embeddedness is emphasised by other approaches which highlight the deep-rooting of hospitality practices in specific foods, drinks, home fittings, places (houses, restaurants, streets and squares), vocal and bodily expressions (speech, gestures, songs and dances; Allerton 2012, Zanca 2010, Chau 2008, Shyrock 2004). A pragmatic angle is also taken by literature dealing with social cooperation and sharing in so-called “atomistic societies” (Gilmore 1975; for a further analysis of this and related concepts of “amoral familism” and “limited good” see 1.2.1): hostility, exclusiveness and conflict are indicated as inherent (counter)parts of hospitable manifestations.

As a result, hospitality is first theorised as a universal phenomenon, consisting of all-fitting categories but practiced in particular interactions and grounded in specific items, speech, gestures and substances. Secondly, hospitality practices appear to present an insolvable conundrum, as people's hospitable acts are torn by binary oppositions such as tradition/pragmatism, solidarity/competitiveness, inclusion/exclusion, all of which are somehow encapsulated within the hospitality/hostility dichotomy.

This tension can be found in the etymology of the word "hospitality" itself, whose root is traced back to the Proto-Indo-European *ghos-ti*, "stranger, guest, host". The word later evolved into the Latin *hostis*, "enemy, army", and *hostia*, "sacrifice" (O'Gorman 2005). The distinction between host and guest-stranger is blurred, and both have an ambiguous friendly-hostile status (Pitt-Rivers 1968): the terms "hospitality" and "hostility" are etymologically close (Lashley 2000, Selwyn 2000). Derrida coined the term "hostipitality" (Derrida 2000), underlining what he sees as "a radical antinomy at the very heart of hospitality, [...] buffeted from absolute self-annihilating openness to the most virulent xenophobia and back again [...]" (Candea 2012: S46).

Yet, speculations on the "impossibility of hospitality" as inherently paradoxical (Derrida 1988) obscure the way in which everyday hospitality practices are embedded in specific historical, cultural, social, political and economic contexts, and reproduced through social actors' strategies. I believe that the contradictions on which hospitality apparently rests are more proficiently investigated through the notion of ambivalence (Ledeneva 2014, 2013, Bauman 1990). Ambivalence is an essential component of modernity, associated with a negative condition of disorder in which categorising the world according to clear-cut oppositions is not possible (Bauman 1990). Unlike ambiguity, which is "multi-polar", ambivalence is "a situation of co-existing thesis and anti-thesis, without possibility and certainty of their synthesis, yet without uncertainty as to what co-existing views, attitudes and beliefs are" (Ledeneva 2014: 19; see also 3.1).

From this perspective, hospitality ceases to be a paradox doomed to end up as one extreme collapsing into the other. On the contrary, ambivalence entails the co-existence of reproducing tradition and pragmatic reasoning, of sociability and

instrumentality (Ledeneva 2013), generosity and calculation, solidarity and competition, openness and exclusion. All such elements, rather than being mutually exclusive dichotomies, interact along blurred boundaries which are trespassed and redrawn. What is perceived as disinterested generosity by participating hosts and guests comes across as blatant opportunism to observers. Hosts can be extraordinarily welcoming towards certain guests, while at the same time meeting other guests with coldness, depending on the visitors' status in the community. Or still, contingent factors such as political and economic crises affect the way people draw boundaries between hospitality and hostility (see Chapter 3). This means that strictly speaking hospitality is not *either/or*: disinterested or calculated. *Both* conditions co-exist within practices of hospitality, manifesting themselves in an alternating and sometimes unpredictable way.

The common understanding of hospitality as a practice stemming from tradition, while depicting the phenomenon as timeless and deeply internalised by social actors, does not account for the multifaceted underpinnings of hospitality's ambivalence. In the following section, I analyse hospitality *vis-à-vis* notions of "invented tradition" and "*habitus*" as conceptual tools which help frame hospitality's ambivalence rooted in people's practices. On the one hand, a perspective which sees hospitality traditions as "invented" (Hobsbawn & Ranger 1983) casts light on the contingency of hospitality practices as phenomena embedded in specific contexts and susceptible to social actors' changing strategies, yet perceived as timeless and therefore hardly questioned. On the other hand, conceiving hospitality as *habitus* dissolves the apparently irreconcilable opposition between the automatic assimilation and reproduction of unchanging beliefs, attitudes and gestures and the active negotiation of practices.

### **1.1.5 How to research ambivalence: Two conceptual tools**

The resilience of what is articulated as tradition gives hospitality a public meaning in Georgian social life. Yet, people have private strategies for adapting hospitality practices to the contingent conditions of everyday life. The immutability bestowed upon hospitality tradition is reshaped by individuals and groups, who negotiate practices between and across the public and the private. Practices stretched across

time and space reproduce the structures of tradition, but are also shaped by them. Social actors' agency is negotiated along with structural limits (Giddens 1984, Bourdieu 1977).

In a relationship of mutual dependence with people's strategies, the tradition of Georgian hospitality is "invented" (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). "Invented tradition" is defined as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (1). This apparent link with the past does not mean that tradition is never-changing, suspended throughout time and space. On the contrary, tradition is constantly reinvented, on the one hand to fit the present and on the other hand to maintain strong continuity between a "suitable historical past" (1) and a desirable future.

Features of hospitality which form public knowledge are shaped as timeless structures and collocated in an ancestral past. Yet, practices articulated as traditional are the product of people's personal and collective re-elaboration, which may consolidate as shared knowledge within a community. For example, some of my participants maintained that *khach'ap'uri*,<sup>7</sup> the ubiquitous cheesy flat bread considered a pillar of traditional cuisine, is actually a relatively recent addition to the national culinary landscape. *Khach'ap'uri* reportedly spread only in the twentieth century when, for various environmental, social and economic reasons – such as the decline of hunting or the scarcity of some products in the Soviet planned economic system – meat became less available and partially lost its primary role in the Georgian diet. Regardless of the historical soundness of this perspective, the perceived timelessness of a "traditional" food such as *khach'ap'uri* is led back to the social and economic contingencies of recent history and the way people dealt with such specific contexts in their everyday practices.

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<sup>7</sup>*Khach'a'puri* (literally "cheese-bread") is allegedly the most popular Georgian food. It is flat bread filled with Georgian cheese mixed with eggs and butter, normally baked or pan-fried. There are many regional variations of *khach'ap'uri*. For example, *megruli khach'ap'uri*, from the western region of Samegrelo (Mingrelia) is topped with extra cheese, while *ach'aruli khach'ap'uri*, typical of the Ach'ara region on the Black Sea coast, has a fried egg on top. While often prepared at home, *khach'ap'uri* is also sold in shops and kiosks as street food or as a snack.

Studies of Georgian hospitality (Muehlfried 2005, Tuite 2005) point out that although both national scholarship and popular narratives largely deem *supra* and *tamadoba* to be rooted in a remote past, historical and literary sources indicate that the current form of such practices dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see also Ram 2014, Nodia 2014). Between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Western travellers' accounts described the widespread habit of wine consumption without mentioning specific related rituals. In addition, Muehlfried highlights that words for “toast” and “toastmaster” cannot be found in the main Georgian dictionary from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and that even the renowned 19<sup>th</sup> century national poet Ak'ak'i Ts'ereteli noted in his work that “the ancestors' did not propose toasts at a table and would be ashamed if they witnessed the present-day phenomenon” (Muehlfried 2005: 17).<sup>8</sup> The “invention” of the traditional Georgian feast nurtures images of national identity.

As an “invented tradition”, hospitality is a social phenomenon which people actively frame, adapting articulations and performances to their individual and collective purposes. Yet, articulations and performances are underpinned by the tension between automatic reproduction of cultural institutions (framed as “tradition”) and calculated agency. In appearance, tradition and pragmatism are in opposition to each other. What is considered public knowledge, perpetuated across generations and bringing together the national community, is not subject to private agency.

The way in which the “invented tradition” of hospitality is commonly understood as timeless and inherent to the national community is clarified by analysing hospitality through the notion of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977). *Habitus* is defined as a “subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class” (86; see also 4.1). In conversations with my participants (especially with those I knew only superficially), when I first asked what hospitality and being hospitable meant for them I received a fairly homogeneous range of replies. This widespread

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<sup>8</sup> Locating the origins of contemporary *supra* in the imperial context, Nodia notes that “when a Georgian found himself participating in a Russian party, he would often be asked to drink a *gruzinskii tost*, ‘a Georgian toast’ – something Russians found exotic and entertaining” (2014: 70). Yet, Nodia specifies that the toasts that Georgians offered to Russians differed in their style from toasting in the native environment, pointing out the contingent character of what was regarded as tradition by both insiders and outsiders.

perspective is encapsulated by the words of Teona (42, teacher; see also Chapter 3),<sup>9</sup> who defined hospitality as:

just a way of life. You have to do this. It's like when you breathe, you never think about that. You just respect your guest and are happy to do that, you don't think that you have to be happy, you are naturally happy.

Teona's words are a paradigmatic expression of *habitus*. She perceives hospitality as a timeless cultural institution, or even as a biological feature inherent to all Georgian people, and depicts this practice as an automatically enacted phenomenon. The set of attitudes displayed in hospitality practices is thought to be resilient across time and space.

Yet, out of this “non-conscious set of dispositions and classificatory schemes”, people improvise and negotiate the creation of new practices. Through experience and repetition, social actors acquire what seems to be innate competence. These “regularities” are modified while “adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation”, becoming part of the “set of durable dispositions”, and therefore providing *habitus* with constantly changing features (Vertovec 1997: 27). Variations in the features of hospitality in relation to both specific historical and socio-political circumstances and social actors' individual and collective agency are (conscious and non-conscious) adaptations of *habitus* to changing contexts. These adaptations are gradually assimilated as if they were timeless features of national tradition and identity

From the perspective of *habitus*, “naturally” hospitable dispositions are an inner feature, which belongs to the realm of Georgians' personal attitudes. At the same time, though, people bestow a public meaning upon such attitudes. From many of my participants' perspective, which share Teona's view, the attribute of “being hospitable” is attached to the Georgian community as a public *habitus*, articulated as

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<sup>9</sup> In order to preserve the anonymity of the individuals who participated in this research, all names of persons have been changed.

“tradition”. In turn, the social, political and economic contingencies which frame public life are critical for people’s reshaping of their private *habitus* in terms of intimate understandings of what “hospitality” and “to be hospitable” mean.

The tension between public and private epitomises the ambivalence of hospitality as a practice stemming from private attitudes yet bestowed with public significance, as a phenomenon unfolding within private spaces such as the family and the house, but working as a public stage for displaying individual and collective selves before the community. In the following sections, I provide observations from my fieldwork to highlight how the domestic space stands out as a contested site of hospitality between the public and the private. Often conceptualised as a space of intimacy and genuineness *vis-à-vis* the public realm’s intrusiveness and artificiality, the private house becomes a public field of tension between welcoming and trespass. This tension is expressed through people’s concerns about their status within the community, which is negotiated between closure and openness, privacy and display, parsimony and generosity.

## **1.2 Crossing thresholds between private space and public display**

### **1.2.1 The house as a contested realm of hospitality**

The focus on hospitality in relation to the public and the private highlights a primary spatial opposition between “inside” and “outside”. Intuitively, domestic hospitality is consistent with the private sphere, while commercial settings such as restaurants and bars, as well as the official contexts of politics and business, are the background of “public” hospitality (see Chapter 2). Yet, a focus on Georgian hospitality practices in the domestic realm questions the house/private association as opposed to outer space/public. I explore the Georgian house (*sakhli*) as the crucial site of hospitality. In contrast to the alleged “renaissance” of “home” as the real place of human and social values against a hostile and fictitious public sphere (Kumar 1997), I highlight the house as a space of conflict, underpinned by a tension between openness and closure, freedom and constriction, protection and imprisonment.

Georgian society has been sometimes analysed as “atomistic” (Gilmore 1975), that is, supposedly organised at the family and household level, while other social, political, and economic entities – from state institutions to civil society – are either absent, or non-functioning and/or mistrusted (Manning 2007, Tuite 2005, Dragadze 1988).<sup>10</sup> In anthropological studies of the Mediterranean, atomistic societies are underpinned by principles of “limited good” (Foster 1965) and “amoral familism” (Banfield 1958), which envisage a social struggle to maximise one’s family’s advantage in a context of perennial shortage of goods. Boundaries between insiders and outsiders are marked by chronic distrust of “others”. Social life is exhausted in the private sphere, whereas the public outside is almost non-existent.

The house becomes a sacred and secret place, to be defended from outsiders. Yet, how is domestic inviolability reconciled with essential principles of hospitality, which imply that guests feel “at home” at the host’s place? In Georgia, normally the first step in socialisation with strangers is to spontaneously open one’s house. Home hospitality encompasses all aspects of domestic life: besides being offered food and drinks, guests are often invited to stay overnight. Domestic events are shared beyond the nuclear family, including the household’s friends and acquaintances who show up to greet visitors.

Restaurants are popular, particularly for special celebrations. Yet, especially with visitors who are recent acquaintances, primary expressions of welcoming unfold within the domestic space. Most of my participants considered home hospitality to be a more respectful form of hosting, since the opening of the host’s house to strangers implies a level of trust and care that is not required with a gathering in a neutral commercial setting. Although food in restaurants is usually good and relatively affordable, it is hardly conceivable that a new guest be treated to anything but food prepared by the hosting family. In general, homemade food is considered to be inherently better. Spending money on something that could be more successfully prepared at home is largely seen as pointless, regardless of the amount of time and money required (Polese 2010, Chatwin 1997).

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<sup>10</sup>This point, echoing the Durkheimian distinction between “mechanical” and “organic”, is elaborated in German sociologist Tonnies’ analysis of “atomistic societies” as opposed to “organic communities” (Mijuskovic 1992).



The primacy of home as the hospitable place is reiterated in the spatial organisation of restaurants. The tension between domestic intimacy and the event's "publicness" is expressed by the arrangement of many restaurants as a cluster of separated spaces in which groups of guests sit and feast. In some cases, tables are just separated by a wall or partition, while in other cases, especially in rural restaurants, guests are placed in separate buildings, shaped like small houses, in an open space. All buildings are provided with heating, a music player and sometimes a TV. These are the most popular places with customers, since they recreate domestic familiarity in a commercial setting. In contrast, proximity to other people gathering in the same public space is considered a source of potential annoyance (Figure 1).

Domestic hospitality is the predominant form of receiving guests primarily because it entails the host's mastery over a place (Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000). The house is the host's realm, in which power relationships between insiders and outsiders are negotiated (Herzfeld 1987). Domestic rites of welcoming "are meant to create an ambience of privileged inclusion and a (no less pronounced) feeling of precise containment" (Shyrock 2004: 37). Guests are "prisoners" of the host as they lack the power to behave freely in the host's space (Grant 2009, Shyrock 2004). Some thresholds cannot be trespassed, as certain things must be shielded from the visitor's sight. In a Georgian house, guests are often left alone to watch TV in the living room while *supra* is being prepared, and they are excluded from other domestic spaces. While this is considered a sign of kindness towards visitors – who are not supposed to take on any chores – this separation from the rest of the household may make guests feel awkward.

The house is divided into an inner and an outer dimension. The private realm of family life is kept away from outsiders' eyes. The "public" layer of the domestic space is regulated by hospitality norms which apply to both hosts and guests. Although "hospitality creates a moral space in which outsiders can be treated as provisional members of the house" (Shyrock 2004: 36), guests are constantly reminded of their alien position. The common expression "As in your [own] house!" reproduces "a formula of exaggerated praise that actually foregrounds its own potential for ironic inversion" (Herzfeld 1987: 76). Prompting guests to "feel at home" implies that they are *not* at home. Rigid boundaries between insiders and outsiders are constantly highlighted (see also Chapter 3). In Georgia, the traditional

formula to welcome a guest entering a house for the first time is “shall your foot be merry in this house”, “*k’etili iq’os sheni pekhi am sakhlshi*”. A guest’s step into the host’s realm is “merry” only if the two parts respects their rights and duties, even at the expense of easiness on both sides.

Behavioural norms regulating public interaction between insiders and outsiders in private houses operate on a mundane basis, and not just on the occasion of major hospitality events. Blurred lines between insiders and outsiders in the domestic space are redrawn in daily relationships within the family and between household members and surrounding people, notably neighbours and friends. Indeed, since people’s socialisation, especially at a young age, takes place mostly within the neighbourhood, it is common for long-lasting relationships to be tied to one’s domestic surroundings: friends *are* neighbours (and the other way round). These are neither guests nor family members, but embody both statuses depending on the contingencies of the context. A precarious balance between intrusiveness and solidarity, between privacy and mutual dependency, informs everyday interactions within enlarged households, which provide security but also enforce social control.

### **1.2.2 Intrusiveness or solidarity? Everyday relationships in the domestic space**

The ambivalence of the house as both a protective place and an over-controlling environment is not limited to manifestations of hospitality towards strangers. Multifaceted feelings towards the domestic space express tensions underpinning everyday interactions in the circle of kin, friends, and neighbours. At the time of one of my fieldwork trips (summer 2014), I was hosted for several weeks at Lela’s house (53, social worker). Lela and her family (her husband and three children in their twenties) had recently moved to the outskirts of Tbilisi, where, together with Lela’s sister, they had built detached houses on two adjacent plots of land. Before this, Lela had lived in the city centre, in an “Italian-style” house. These are nineteenth century wooden constructions, typical of Tbilisi’s old town, which surround a shared inner court, or “Italian courtyard” (*It’aliuri ezo*), so-called for its supposed resemblance to Italian Renaissance architecture (Van Assche & Salukvadze 2012). Life within and around the Italian courtyard develops on a communal basis, entailing both benefits

and burdens. “All neighbours (*mezoblebi*, singular *mezobeli*) were very close to each other,” Lela explained:

We visited each other all the time, entrusted our children and relatives to each other, and exchanged all sort of things. For example, a woman who lived next door had a bakery and used to bring me bread every morning. Other neighbours had allotments in the countryside, so we got fresh fruit and vegetables from them.

Lela’s account depicts social relationships based on solidarity and reciprocal exchange. However, this context also entails mutual obligation, which may result in lack of freedom and privacy. She continued:

When we moved out, I was really sick of that place. You have to hide in your own house, stay away from the windows, if you want to have a moment for yourself. Still, neighbours call you all the time, ‘Lelaaaaaa!’ So you either pretend not to be at home, or you have to go and see what they want. Here it is much quieter, and my sister is just next door, so I don’t feel lonely.

Another participant, Tamuna (35), lives in London and works as a language teacher. When she went back to Tbilisi in summer 2014 for a holiday, she invited me to her family’s place, where we spent time eating and drinking with her mother and uncle. When it was time for me to go, Tamuna insisted on walking me to the bus stop. As soon as we left the house, she started smoking, saying that she could not wait any more. She had stayed at home over the previous days, welcoming visiting friends, relatives and neighbours. She had had to conceal her smoking habit, which her mother and the community at large would strongly disapprove of. The stigmatisation of smoking was just one reason why Tamuna did not feel at ease in the domestic environment. Although there is increasing tolerance towards this habit, this is not an

unusual experience for women, since female smoking is still partially considered a sign of promiscuity. Women are not supposed to smoke in the street, in public, and the domestic private sphere also often fails to offer a “refuge” in this regard.

Tamuna was also weary of her mother’s criticism of her going out with friends at night. The mother’s preoccupations mostly focused on what neighbours would think and say. This was part of a wider concern about the fact that Tamuna was 35 and did not have a husband and children, and moreover was living abroad. Because of the controlling atmosphere, Tamuna regarded the time spent outside of home – and of Georgia – as a liberating frame in which she could be herself without worrying about other people’s judgment. However, at the same time Tamuna recognised the fundamental sense of protection provided by such all-encompassing social relationships within and around the household. The neighbours who made her mother feel anxious and herself constricted were the same people who constantly “kept an eye” on her mother, who as a widow mostly lived alone when Tamuna was away. If her mother felt unwell or needed help with food shopping or other housekeeping chores, Tamuna knew that she could always count on the neighbours.

In these examples, the house does not appear to be “the private realm in an increasingly public and intrusive world”, “the place where the self can be expressed outside of social roles and where the individual can exert autonomy [...]” (Saunders quoted in Kumar 1997: 207). People’s behaviour inside the domestic space is controlled and sanctioned by both neighbours and the family itself. Lela’s appreciation of her sister’s proximity reveals that the withdrawal into the private sphere of close relatives is a relief from “public” responsibilities within the enlarged domestic space (which includes friends and neighbours). As for Tamuna, the sense of oppression originating from the controlling attitude of her mother and the wider neighbourhood which treated Tamuna’s private life as a public matter is made ambivalent by the assistance provided by the same neighbours, which allows Tamuna to live abroad without worrying excessively about her mother being alone.

Boundaries between private intimacy and public responsibility, private spontaneity and public display, are trespassed and redrawn within the domestic space. On the one hand, as the realm of intimacy and the keeper of the family’s secrets and resources, the house is private, hence is hardly accessible to outsiders. On the other

hand, when opened to visitors, households become public spaces in which the behaviour of insiders and outsiders is regulated by socially shared norms. The family household, while seen as a safe refuge from the hostile outside world, is underpinned by power relations which spread beyond domestic walls. Public concerns associated with hospitality extend from the household to the larger community, shaping people's personal and collective reputation on the tension underpinning the mutual expectations and responsibilities of hosts and guests.

### **1.2.2 Welcoming or hostility? Shaping public reputation through hospitality**

The social ties which develop within and around the household are informed by the tension between solidarity and judgement, mutual help and competition, welcoming and segregation. When crossing the domestic threshold, guests rarely discover a relaxed environment. Hospitality practices are entangled in complex community dynamics, with social implications which by definition transcend the private sphere.

Hospitality is a crucial practice for hosts and guests to negotiate their status within the community. The evaluation of people's ability to provide and reciprocate adequate hospitality can trigger conflicts between individuals and households. . The Ts'ik'lauri family, with whom I stayed for a few months between 2008 and 2009, lived not far from the centre of Tbilisi, in a big house with a huge garden and a *satone*, a covered space with a table, a grill and a traditional brick oven (*tone*) dug into the ground. The house, and particularly the *satone*, were regularly used by the neighbourhood's younger and older men – relatives, friends or acquaintances of Gurami (63, retired) and his son Vakho (26, unemployed, sporadically working as a builder) – for eating, drinking and toasting together (Figure 2).

The Ts'ik'lauris were proud of their openness to guests. Yet, family members also shared a sense of resentment as they felt that such hospitable attitudes were not reciprocated by others with equal generosity. In particular, son-in-law Nik'o, a 34-year old policeman married to Gurami's daughter, and his family were criticised for their alleged opportunism. Gurami often stressed that he had taken care of Nik'o like a son, treating his son-in-law's family very generously – for example, buying them a car. In contrast, Nik'o's family enjoyed this munificence without reciprocating.

Nik'o's relatives were also mocked for being Mingrelians, *Megreli* (from the Samegrelo region in North-West Georgia), whom popular stereotypes denigrate as sly, deceitful "wheeler-dealers" (*aperisti*).

In this framework, hospitality was the *casus belli* for a thorny episode. A *supra* was organised at Nik'o's place on the occasion of his birthday. This news was immediately met by sarcastic comments from my hosts, because hospitality exchanges between the Ts'ik'lauris and Nik'o's house were perceived as almost unidirectional. Jokes were made about the small quantity and poor quality of wine and food that Nik'o's family would supposedly offer at the party. Both Gurami and Vakho, Nik'o's father- and brother-in-law respectively, were invited, but Gurami was not keen and stayed at home.

Before heading off to the *supra*, Vakho received a call from Nik'o, who asked him to bring a bottle of vodka. This request that a guest (*that* guest) provide drinks, and on one of the rare occasions when Nik'o's family were reciprocating the Ts'ik'lauris' hospitality, was considered so outrageous that Vakho did not go to the party either. The atmosphere was further exacerbated when Maia, Gurami's wife, who was helping to prepare food for Nik'o's *supra*, came home and reported that the banquet had been poor, and all that had been offered to guests was fried aubergines stuffed with walnuts (*badrijani nigvzit*). Malicious gossip about the behaviour of Niko's family went on for weeks, spreading around the neighbourhood. Although there was never an open confrontation between the two families – Nik'o was Gurami's daughter's husband after all – a hostile atmosphere was palpable, and Nik'o did not show up at the Ts'ik'lauri's for a while.

Niko's improper management of hospitality norms compromised his family's reputation in the community. Hospitality exchanges are a dominant means of negotiating power relations. . While hosts enforce this power by excluding supposedly unworthy people from the circle of invitations, guests contribute to such hierarchies by declining to visit households considered insufficiently respectable for various reasons (Abu-Zahra 1974). The fact that Gurami and Vakho did not attend Nik'o's *supra* indicates that even (in-law) relatives are not immune from these sanctions. Moreover, as the circulation of gossip about Niko's outrageous behaviour shows, the word of guests has the power to jeopardise a host's status.

As Shyrock reports (2004:36), a well-known Jordanian proverb warns that “the host must fear the guest. When he sits [and shares your food], he is company. When he stands [and leaves your house], he is a poet”. The poet-guest spreads rumours in the wider world about the host’s household and the treatment received. Hosts are concerned with showing a positive “public” façade of their domestic environment to visitors, while at the same time concealing aspects of the household that can be harmful to the family’s reputation. Even when guests are close associates, such as neighbours, relatives and friends (as in the case of Tamuna and her mother, see 1.2.2), opening one’s house to the outside gaze is a constant source of anxiety.

The domestic space as the primary realm of hospitality – intended in its broad sense as the welcoming of outsiders into the host’s house – is the framework of practices which, while taking place in the intimate circle of family members, close friends and neighbours, are a way for people to negotiate their public status before the community. Boundaries between private space and public performance, between private intimacy and public responsibility, are blurred. Social relationships developed through hospitality exchanges are a source of support and solidarity, but also of social control. The following sections investigate the way in which hospitality practices, generated in the domestic space, are channelled through the social networks of relatives, friends, neighbours and acquaintances. In their ambivalence between inclusion and exclusion, between solidarity and competitiveness, these networks are expression of moral, social, political and economic norms, which, stemming from everyday practices, interact with – and often challenge – institutionalised power relations.

### **1.3 Grey zones of hospitality: Between the official system and personal connections**

#### **1.3.1 Hospitality norms vs. official rules**

Hospitality practices, unfolding on the blurred boundaries between the public and the private, influence various spheres of social life beyond the welcoming of guests. The ambivalence between tradition and pragmatism, sociability and instrumentality, welcoming and trespass, frames hospitality practices as a field in which identities are

defined, status is negotiated and social relationships are built – or severed. Everyday exchanges of hospitality tie hosts and guests into ongoing relationships of mutual dependence (Gregory 1982). Reciprocal invitations, along with the circulation of material and non-material items, consolidate social links between the people involved. A common Georgian toast celebrates the beginning of ongoing connections: “to our future relationship!” – *chven shemdgom urtiertobas gaumarjos!* The image of hospitality rituals as means to “turn strangers into friends” (Pitt-Rivers 1968) is found in the Georgian term for “friend”, *megobari*. The word’s root, *gobi*, indicates a big bowl from which tablemates collectively grab food. A friend is thus somebody with whom to eat from the same *gobi*.

The public role that everyday hospitality practices assume in regulating people’s interaction within the larger community defines hospitality as a device to organise society. The flow of hospitality exchanges does not necessarily end in a binary relation between donor and recipient. Exchanges might be circular, involving third parties and, possibly, larger social groups (Sahlins 1972). In the Georgian context, networks channelling hospitality exchanges have often been analysed as means of psychological, social, and economic protection against the shortcomings of official institutions (Manning 2003, Chatwin 1997, Dragadze 1988, Mars & Altman 1983, 1987; see 1.3.2; see also Chapter 3). People cope with the official system’s inability to allocate adequate resources by getting involved in relationships of mutual assistance. Such relationships are a source of solidarity, in the form of shelter, food and most importantly long-lasting connections

A number of studies included in the literature of informality is relevant to my analysis of hospitality practices. Although this scholarship has flourished in relation to a variety of geographical, socio-cultural, and political-economic areas (De Sardan 2013, Pardo 2004, Lomnitz 1988), it finds an extremely prolific source of empirical contributions in post-socialist societies (Rekhviashvili L. 2015, Knudsen & Frederiksen 2015, Polese 2015, 2014, 2008, Morris & Polese 2014, Ledeneva 2013, 2009, 2006, 1998, Round & Williams 2010, Smith & Stenning 2006). These studies move away from perspectives which identify informality as an economic phenomenon with overwhelmingly negative connotations, doomed to fade away in the presence of appropriate formal institutions (Kaufmann, Kraay & Mastruzzi 2011, Rothstein & Teorell 2008). Following a more nuanced approach, the ambivalent



relation between the formal and the informal in everyday practices is brought under the focus of analysis.

When analysed as “coping strategies” adopted to overcome the formal system’s shortcomings (Giordano & Hayoz 2013, Round & Williams 2010, Smith & Rochovská 2007, Clarke 1999), informal practices have sometimes been conceptualised as “everyday forms of resistance” (Scott 1986) against political oppression and social inequality. The association of informal practices with “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1985) envisages informality as a realm in which the dominated “either [...] mitigate or [...] deny claims” made by the dominant, or “advance (their) own claims” (Scott 1986: 22). Yet, the notion of informal resistance, with such a clear-cut distinction between dominant and dominated, overlooks hospitality’s ambivalence. Hospitality is not a strategy of the dispossessed and the subaltern, who lack more “direct” forms of struggle. Rather, hospitality is informed by practices of domination *and* resistance, generating dynamics which are both supportive and subversive of the official system – what Ledeneva conceptualises as “functional ambivalence” (2013:5).

The functional ambivalence of hospitality practices *vis-à-vis* the official system can be illustrated by various examples from Georgia’s recent history and related scholarship (see 1.3.2). Social norms regulating the circle of hospitality exchanges establish ties of personal trust and mutual responsibility which often outweigh loyalty to official institutions. Yet, while standing out as “informal” in its relation to the official system, hospitality has a highly formalised internal structure. Although improvisation around the table is a highly valued skill (see Herzfeld 1985), hospitality is not simply a matter of individual attitudes to strangers, or of spontaneous feasting. Hospitality practices (especially in the traditional form of *supra*) are regulated by a rigid set of rules which are part of public knowledge. The ambivalence of hospitality norms is underpinned by a structure which, in turn, is embedded in certain social and cultural specifics.

Following locally famous stories, novels, films and anecdotes, certain analyses link the moral, cultural and social bases of hospitality norms to the construction of supposedly specific Georgian attributes. (Tuite 2005, Goldstein 1999, Mars & Altman 1987, 1983). These features envisage Georgians as priding

themselves “explicitly on their disregard for the constraints of time as for other rules and limitations”, especially if such rules are imposed by what is seen as an illegitimate power (Braund 1994, quoted in Tuite 2005: 19). While disregarding rules “upheld by the State, the Church, the traffic police or even God Himself”, at the same time Georgians are allegedly keen to comply with “the unwritten conventions of the *supra*” and its related practices” (Tuite 2005: 19), to such an extent that local scholars have claimed that “Georgians are never as serious and rigorous in following rules as when they try to get drunk (Nodia 2014: 71) In these analyses, the codified structure of hospitality is depicted not only as a set of norms more worthy of respect than laws enforced from outside, but also as a way to challenge official rules. The compliance with hospitality norms is a way for reasserting what is perceived as the Georgian distinctive identity *vis-à-vis* outsiders, reinforcing trust-based networks within and across the community (see Chapter 3).

Social networks which channel exchanges of hospitality are a means of reciprocal solidarity which provides individuals and groups with psychological, social, and economic support *vis-à-vis* the shortcomings of the official system. Involvement in these networks, with the benefits and responsibilities this entails, is conditional on people’s compliance with the norms regulating the circulation of material and non-material items as well as the interaction between hosts and guests. At various stages of Georgia’s recent history, expanded social ties, generated and reinforced through hospitality exchanges, have represented an alternative source of values and resources, often in opposition to official political and economic structures. The following section analyses the relationship between practices of hospitality and official power in the Soviet era. I focus on the ambivalence which tied hospitality practices, which were supposed to unfold in the private sphere, to the social, political, and economic public. Ambivalence was reiterated throughout the decade following the demise of the socialist system in 1991. The dissolution of the boundaries between public institutions and private interests severely undermined the state’s political and economic capacity, while increasingly necessitating people’s everyday reliance on informal means.

### **1.3.2 From the Soviet era to the 1990s: Ambivalent ties of hospitality**

The relation between formal and informal is particularly problematic in socialist systems, due to the specifically ambivalent nature of the public and private and the interaction between them (Oswald & Voronkov 2004, Zdravomyslova & Voronkov 2002, Garcelon 1997). The Soviet-type social and political structure envisages “the realm of *officialdom*” on the one hand, including the ruling elite, *apparatus* and *nomenklatura*, and “the *domestic* realm of family and friendship” on the other hand, resting upon kinship ties, intimacy networks and shared value commitments. Yet, in between there is a “*social* realm’ encompassing the enormous and complex domain developing between the top level of the Party-state and family and friends networks – that is, the domain of work, routine administration, and ‘official’ associational life” (Garcelon 1997: 317, emphasis original). Only on the surface is this intermediate space organised through ideological, meritocratic or authoritarian principles; its core structure develops “along lines of bargaining, reciprocal favours, mutual dependencies, networks of connections, dissimulation, circumvention of regulations and procedures” (317).

This “private-public realm” or “second public” (Oswald & Voronkov 2004: 106) is a socialised space evolving out of the domestic private, but still clearly separated from the official public. While the latter is ruled by formal norms and subject to state control and repression, all realms of social life outside it are regulated by the norms of everyday life, or “informal customary law”. In Western democracies, official and customary law supposedly exist side by side: the latter does not expand at the former’s detriment, but is contained by official norms. In the Soviet system, in contrast, spheres governed by the norms of everyday life are opposed to the realm of official law, often appropriating the latter’s space (Oswald & Voronkov 2004: 105).

This “in-between” area contradicts images of the socialist system as a monolithic state opposed to a crippled private everyday context. The intermediate space is penetrated by networks which channel reciprocal exchanges based on personal connections (Ledeneva 1998, Yang 1994, Mars & Altman 1987, 1983). Such informal contacts are used “to obtain goods and services in short supply and to find a way around formal procedures” (Ledeneva 1998: 1). Stemming from kinship and friendship relationships, networks convey “favours of access”, involving the use

of public resources for private purposes. The use of connections is “the ‘reverse side’ of an overcontrolling centre, a reaction of ordinary people to the structural constraints of the socialist system of distribution – a series of practices which enabled the Soviet system to function and made it tolerable, but also subverted it” (3).

Hospitality practices were linked to the Soviet state by an ambivalent relationship of support and subversion. On the one hand, the exchanges involved in hospitality practices worked where the state-led provision of goods and services did not, enabling people to cope with the system and therefore preserving the system itself. Reinforcing social connections, hospitality networks of “dependable allies” enabled insiders to obtain “favours, [...] information, hospitality, loans, recommendations [...]. The lack of vacancies in hotels, banks and job opportunities without personal recommendations (made) the service of kin and affines invaluable” (Dragadze 1988: 99).

On the other hand, hospitality practices were subversive of Soviet morality, politics and economics. In a socialist system, the Georgian *supra*, although appearing to be merely a blatant display of food, wine and excessive behaviour, is “a rational use of scarce resources that serves to maintain and extend prestige and contacts. It also helps to explain how individualistic concerns can be catered to in a Soviet economy” (Mars & Altman 1987: 270; see also 3.2).

Networks maintained by hospitality were pervasive of the Soviet public and private, which, despite official narratives, were linked by an ambivalent relation. Hospitality practices were both supportive and subversive of the official system. On the one hand, hospitality exchanges were essential for people to cope with institutional shortcomings, perpetuating the system by making it tolerable. On the other hand, the lavish display of resources at the *supra*, along with the proud assertion of Georgian identity conveyed through hospitality practices (Muehlfried 2007, 2005; see also 3.2 and 3.4), were at odds with Soviet moral and social norms. In addition, networks tying together individuals and groups through hospitality exchanges formed the basis of a strong second economy, which, especially towards the end of the Soviet regime, stood out for its increasing scope and criminal character (Manning 2003, Mars & Altman 1983, 1987, Suny 1988, Dragadze 1988; see also 3.2).

In the Soviet system, the public and the private, although porous, were given formal recognition by both authorities and citizens, who, switching behaviour between “officially” public and “unofficially” private contexts, were accustomed to “a doubling of standards of communication” (Oswald & Voronkov 2004: 105; see also Ledeneva 2014, 1998, Zinoviev 1985). When the Soviet Union came to an end, even this distinction into official and unofficial seemed to collapse. The public sphere of politics and the economy was taken over by the private interests of organised criminal groups or paramilitary squads, which infiltrated and paralysed the state, preventing public institutions from fulfilling their basic functions (Slade 2014, K’up’at’adze 2009, K’ukhianidze 2009).

Endemic corruption, which was pervasive of all aspects of public life, from politics and business to education, from the police to the health system (Shelley et al. 2007), epitomised a situation in which blurred lines between the public and the private entailed the abuse of public resources for the benefit of private interests. While pointing out the greed of corrupt politicians and businessmen as a major cause of the country’s miserable conditions, citizens themselves resorted to petty bribery as the easiest, and sometimes the only possible way to secure essential goods and services (Polese 2008).

The physical and social public space was ravaged by violence and decay. Citizens’ public life withdrew into the private domestic sphere. Acts of hospitality between relatives, friends and neighbours were fundamental means of survival for those who had been hit most severely by the crisis (Dudwick 2002, Chatwin 1997). However, the reciprocal exchanges of which hospitality structures were part were often conducive to corrupt deals, entailing the use of personal connections to attain individual privileges at the expense of the wider community. Hospitality practices were both a reaction to and a cause of social deprivation, political indifference and economic inequality. Furthermore, hospitality had an ambivalent character as both a practice of horizontal solidarity and a marker of increasing social and economic inequality. While the majority of citizens experienced frustration at being unable to treat guests in the way prescribed by tradition (or, in most cases, to treat guests at all, Shelley et al. 2007, Dudwick 2002), the political and economic elites emerging from the collapse of the Soviet system used lavish hospitality to show off their privileged position (Manning 2009a, 2009b, Muehlfried 2005; see also 3.3).

Official narratives described the socialist system as clearly divided between a (predominant) public realm and a (secluded) private – sphere. Yet, everyday interactions between the state and citizens were regulated by reciprocal exchanges, which were greatly reinforced by hospitality practices. Following the Soviet Union’s demise, the social and political public space became the prey of private – and often criminal – interests. Hospitality was ambivalent as both an expression of horizontal solidarity amid poverty and a structure resting on personalised ties and therefore conducive to potentially corrupt deals.

The ability to display hospitality also stood out as a sign of the deepening gap between a deprived majority and the elites emerging from the murky background of the Soviet regime’s collapse. Moving on from the ambivalent relation between hospitality and official power in the Soviet years and during the 1990s, in section 1.3.3 I introduce the notion of the “grey zone” in order to frame the ambivalence of hospitality *vis-à-vis* the public/private divide. Following Harboe Knudsen and Frederiksen, I argue for hospitality to be considered a grey zone in its own right rather than a by-product of collateral conditions related to the imperfections of transitory social, political and economic structures. I subsequently highlight that the effacement of such ambivalent grey zones was the primary goal expressed in the moral, social and political narratives brought about by the Rose Revolution in 2003, which was meant to be a landmark break with the country’s recent past.

### **1.3.3 Grey zones of hospitality: An undesired legacy?**

An increasingly popular notion in post-colonial and post-socialist studies, grey zones are often associated with in-betweenness, liminality, marginality and ambiguity (Harboe Knudsen & Frederiksen 2015, Thomassen 2015, Roy 2008, Robertson 2006). Grey zones are an object of research and an analytical tool, both of which disrupt the “Manichean tendency, which shuns half-tints and complexities [...] prone to reduce the river of human occurrences to conflicts, and the conflicts to duels – we and they” (Levi quoted in Auyero 2007: 32, in Harboe Knudsen & Frederiksen 2015: 1; see also Levi 2004 [1988]).

The image of grey as a tone between black and white does not imply that grey zones are a transitional stage between two clearly defined extremes. Harboe Knudsen

and Frederiksen, referring to the Eastern European context, emphasise the need to overcome the problematic fact that, “despite criticism from the field of social science, such unsettled situations are still often seen as but a phase in a larger transition from a Soviet socialist past to a presumed capitalist society” (Harboe Knudsen & Frederiksen 2015: 2). Conversely, they argue that grey zones should be conceived as “things in and of themselves”, that is no longer as mere socialist legacies of a transitory nature, but as “areas, phenomena, or situations [...] which have instead become embedded in Eastern Europe” (and beyond, 3).

Considering grey zones in their own right rather than as a transitory status of various social phenomena matters not only for the move away from various “transitologies” which still inform certain analytical approaches to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Carothers 2002). With regard to the public and the private, focusing on grey zones prevents the conceptualisation of these ambivalent areas as neutral fields between two extremes. The public and the private are themselves porous. Grey zones penetrate these pores, emerging in contexts which otherwise would clearly appear to be either “public” or “private”.

Hospitality emerges as a grey zone stemming from the porous boundaries of contexts which are formally defined through clear-cut dichotomies. Hospitality and its underpinning norms and values spread beyond the domestic sphere, becoming a public device to organise the social world. In Soviet Georgia, hospitality was stigmatised by authorities both as a private waste of resources and as an expression of national specifics *vis-à-vis* an all-embracing idea of Soviet identity. Yet, hospitality practices made the system sustainable by providing goods and services to people involved in reciprocal exchanges.

Personal connections stemming from hospitality became increasingly powerful towards the end of the socialist regime, taking over the public sphere in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse. Throughout the 1990s, the public realm was dominated by private interests, while the private domain of everyday life lacked social, legal or financial protection. On the one hand, hospitality made up for the social, political and economic wreckage, redistributing scarce resources among people and fostering horizontal solidarity in a hostile context. On the other hand, the personal connections which were reinforced around the Georgian table were activated

in more or less illicit ways in order to attain individual benefits within a collective framework of deprivation. The elites which emerged from this murky landscape showed off hospitality as a sign of their newly acquired wealth (see 3.3).

Increasing dissatisfaction with these conditions and anger at those responsible resulted in mass protests. Beginning with student demonstrations in 2001, the protests ultimately led to president Shevardnadze's resignation – after allegedly rigged elections – and the landslide victory of Mikheil Saak'ashvili and his United National Movement (UNM – *Ertiani Natsionaluri Modzraoba* or ENM in Georgian, Manning 2007, Jones 2006, Broers 2005). The Rose Revolution let loose a desire to break with the Soviet and post-Soviet past<sup>11</sup> in the most definite way and bring Georgia within the circle of Western democracies to which the country was seen as rightfully belonging.

The ruling elite which emerged from the Rose Revolution introduced narratives of modernisation depicting a “culture of informality” (Aliyev 2014) which allegedly pervaded Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia's moral, social, political and economic landscape, and which was identified as the main sign of the country's backwardness. To become truly modern, Georgian society had to efface the grey zones of ambivalence and replace them with clear-cut dichotomies. These narratives neatly opposed good and evil, future and past, order and chaos, West and East. In this context, a fundamental step towards the country's modernisation was to establish a clear division between the public and the private, whose boundaries had to be defined by official norms. The ambivalence which had characterised the relationship between citizens' private practices and public institutions in the Soviet era and throughout the 1990s was stigmatised as a backward expression of the lack of rule of law.

How did the modernisation narratives promoted by the post-revolutionary government change hospitality practices? How did hospitality fit into these narratives and the policies which stemmed from them? The tradition of hospitality was a public feature of Georgianness, which served the emerging political leadership's nationalist rhetoric while also making Georgia attractive to foreign tourists and investors. Yet,

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<sup>11</sup> Rather than being a mere chronological categorisation, applying the “post-Soviet” label to the years between the end of the Soviet Union and the Rose Revolution (roughly corresponding to Eduard Shevardnadze's 1992-2003 presidency) has negative connotations of the social, political and economic context to which the Rose Revolution meant to put an end.



mainstream political narratives depicted traditional hospitality practices as backward. These narratives also associated personal connections stemming from hospitality exchanges with the grey zones which the post-revolutionary government intended to eradicate. In order to be accorded a place in the moral, cultural, social, political and economic landscape of Saakashvili's Georgia, hospitality had to become "modern", reframing itself as a private *or* public practice, and therefore no longer informed by ambivalent features.

## FROM BACKWARDNESS TO MODERNITY: HOSPITALITY GOES WEST

### 2.1 Clearing grey zones: Moral politics in modernising Georgia

#### 2.1.1 A narrative of clear-cut oppositions

In the aftermath of the 2003 Rose Revolution, the newly-elected president Mikheil Saak'ashvili declared that the “transition” from socialism in Georgia was over: the country had exited an intermediate stage and was ready to become a full Western-style democracy (Dunn & Frederiksen 2014). From the perspective of the then-president and his entourage, this turn consisted in “changing everything, and changing everything fast” (*Full Speed Westward* 2013) through a relentless move from the back to the front, from the “before” to the “now” and the “after”.

The political leadership's narratives which underpinned the country's transformation rested on dichotomies which divided society into mutually opposed parts. Despite the sometimes violent nationalist rhetoric which accompanied Saakashvili's raise to power (see 2.2.1), these narratives classified citizens according to specific clear-cut oppositions. First and foremost, the post-revolutionary government emphasised a deep cleavage separating the “future” from the “past” in the development of Georgian society. This opposition delineated people's moral, cultural, and social attributes as either compatible or incompatible with the post-revolutionary project of radical renovation (Gotfredsen 2014, Frederiksen 2013). Saakashvili reiterated these essential divisions between citizens in his speech. The 2013 documentary film *Full Speed Westward*, shot by German film-maker Stefan Tolz in the months around the 2012 parliamentary elections, includes an interview with the then president, in which he declared:

I think that once Georgians have tasted it, [...] some of them didn't like the taste initially. But eventually I think they will miss it and

no matter who tries to stop it, it will come back, the longing for this something that they have already tasted: modernity, fast development, openness. And also part of it: democratisation (*Full Speed Westward* 2013).

Referring to Georgian citizens' ability to enjoy the effects of the reforms implemented under the banner of "modernity, fast development, openness ... and democratisation", Saak'ashvili highlighted that part of the population (which he referred to as "some of *them*") were not keen on the changes, remaining attached to the "old" social, political and economic models. However, nothing could stop Georgia's rapid transformation into a Western-style country, no matter if some people were not ready for this transformation.

The gap between "past" and "future" citizens was delineated in a harsher tone in another presidential speech, given on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2011 as part of the commemorations of the victory in World War II:

The major difference between our and their dreams is that their dream is oriented towards the past, to something which will never be restored, and our dream is a desire of having something, which we never had before—[a] very successful democracy [sic]. We are adjusted to the future and they are oriented towards the past—the future will always prevail over the past. Good is on the future's side and evil on the side of the past (Saak'ashvili 2011 quoted in Gotfredsen 2014: 246).

Past and future, as mirrors of the good/evil opposition, matched the opposition between Russia and the West as two mutually exclusive moral, cultural, social, political and economic systems (see 3.4). The backwardness, authoritarianism and murkiness attributed to the Russian/Soviet "past", whose evil influence had supposedly outlasted the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and persisted until the 2003

Rose Revolution, was opposed to progress, freedom and transparency, supposedly the distinctive features of Western democracies.

Post-revolutionary political narratives pointed out transparency as the most prominent sign of a society's modernity, as opposed to the blurred boundaries informing citizens' relationship with the state and the rule of law (Frederiksen 2015). In these narratives, the Georgian population was depicted as pervaded by a "culture of informality" (Aliyev 2014a), which supposedly affected all social mechanisms. People's alleged habit of circumventing formal rules to "get things done" was not considered merely a necessary by-product of institutional inefficiencies, but a way of thinking which had corrupted citizens' moral principles.

Transparency implied the (re-)establishment of clear-cut divisions which had been turned into murky grey zones by the degenerate system which had ruled Soviet Georgia and its successor republic in the 1990s. As seen in another extract from the interview quoted above, Saak'ashvili attacked people's way of relating to official rules, stressing that dramatic changes at the institutional level must go hand in hand with a radical transformation of the population's moral and cultural ground:

But everybody has to pay (taxes), it's (not) something that has ever been heard of here. Or when everybody had to put seatbelts on, unheard of in our part of the world. Or nobody could take bribes, you know, very unusual. And you know when you ask people say, even today when we did opinion polls and you ask people: What is a crime? People say: "Oh killing somebody is a crime, raping is a crime, not paying taxes not really a crime, I mean just taking bribes, oh well, he has to feed his family, right? This official, he took like 500 euros, so what a big deal". People were saying that in opinion polls. Overcoming that I guess, that takes a couple of generations (*Full Speed Westward* 2013).

In order to accustom citizens to trust institutions and abide by the law, what was legal needed to be clearly separated from what was not, removing all possible

ambivalence. The way to secure strong rule of law was to establish an efficient public in a transparent and independent relationship with a protected private, in which citizens could pursue their interests. Neoliberalism, as a political-economic model but also as an ideology addressing people's cultural and moral values (Swader 2013, Muehlebach 2012, Evans & Sewell 2013, Smith & Rochovská 2007, Humphrey & Mandel 2002), provided the foundation for the country's thorough modernisation. In the following section, I analyse the neoliberal images of public and private put forward by the post-revolutionary government, highlighting the way in which these images aimed to efface grey zones of ambivalence. Subsequently, I locate hospitality, as a phenomenon which dissolves clear-cut oppositions (see Chapter 1), within the post-revolutionary modernisation narrative and its underpinning dichotomies.

### **2.1.2 Where the public ends and the private begins: Endorsing dichotomies as a sign of modernity**

Many studies of both Soviet and 1990s Georgia discuss citizens' alienation from political institutions as a crucial factor in determining the spread of practices which circumvent official norms (Muehlfried 2014, Jones 2006, Tuite 2005, Goldstein 1999, Chatwin 1997). It is argued that "state laws have been avoided not only because they were bad but because the population could manage better without them" (Jones 2006: 44). The Rose Revolution, as depicted in collective narratives, political analyses and media coverage, was expected to reverse this trend, and "perhaps for the first time in Georgia's modern history, establish the congruity of private and public well-being" (Jones 2006: 44). In order to fulfil this purpose, the public and the private needed to be clearly delineated, each with its specific scope and function. Neoliberalism was the most suitable model to follow, since it offered a marked distinction between the public and the private in which the former – in the form of the state – in no way limits the latter as the domain of individual liberties (Clarke 2004, Slater 1998).

In the communist era, the mistrust which informed the relationship between state and citizens stemmed from the perception of public institutions as the expression of a hostile power (Tuite 2005). In the 1990s, the public sphere of the state, rather than representing the "common good", was seen by citizens as the arena in which

greedy officials fought for their private interests, neglecting the miserable conditions of a large part of the population (Shelley et al. 2007, Dudwick 2002). The Rose Revolution pledged to make the public realm, embodied by state institutions, finally accountable. It is therefore no surprise that the post-revolutionary leadership's most substantial efforts were directed against corruption, "the private use of public good". As the opposite of corruption, transparency was the banner under which radical reforms were carried out: from the police to the judicial system, from public services (which were increasingly made available online) to the construction of glass buildings hosting political and financial institutions – ministries, banks and police stations (Engvall 2012, Di Puccio 2010, K'ukhianidze 2009, Stefes 2008, King 2004; see also Chapter 5).<sup>12</sup>

Anti-corruption reforms were part and parcel of the government's effort to establish a protected private sphere as a counterpart of trustworthy public institutions. Swift privatisation was a paradigmatic expression of this approach (Gujaraidze 2014). The stigmatisation of private property was an ideological, social, political and economic pillar of the Soviet system. In 1990s Georgia, private property existed but was not secured (Polese 2015, 2010, Slade 2014, Ledeneva 2013a, 2006, K'ukhianidze 2009, K'up'at'adze 2009, Shelley et al. 2007), and in a country ruled by lawlessness, property and enterprises could be stolen, judges and state officials were easily bribed and the norms that in theory regulated property rights were bypassed. The establishment of safe conditions for the flourishing of private property and investment was a fundamental step in the Saakashvili's government's efforts to modernise the country.

The modern public and private were supposed to be inhabited by modern individuals. The ideal citizens of post-revolutionary Georgia were patriotic but also cosmopolitan, independent, ambitious and law-abiding. People's everyday practices mattered for defining social profiles which fitted, or did not fit, the country's radical renovation. As indicators of citizens' "orientation towards the future", social

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<sup>12</sup> Lomsadze, G. (2010). "The Glass Age Comes to Georgia", Eurasianet.org, 11 August. Available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61718>

practices had to conform to modernisation narratives, embodying trust in institutions, respect for the law, an ambitious way of thinking and an efficient lifestyle.

Most importantly, people's practices were expected to stick to the clear-cut division between the public and the private. Grey zones of ambivalence were defined as undesired legacies of a despised past, which could jeopardise the country's smooth transformation into a Western-style democracy and a successful market economy. How did the ambivalence of hospitality, as a public tradition reproduced through various private strategies, fit mainstream modernisation narratives?

In the following section, I analyse the foundational ambivalence of hospitality *vis-à-vis* the post-revolutionary modernisation project. I highlight two main related points which make the adaptation of hospitality to this project problematic. Firstly, the articulation of hospitality as tradition may be at odds with the overwhelming emphasis on modernisation as a radical break with the past which informed the Rose Revolution and its aftermath. Secondly, the blurred boundaries between the private and the public on which hospitality rests made hospitality practice appear murky and therefore backward in a context in which transparency was the most prominent sign of modernity. I suggest that hospitality was expected to cease to be a grey zone in order to become fully "modern".

## **2.2 "No time to spend at *supra*": Past ambivalence and future transparency**

### **2.2.1 National identity or backwardness?**

While hospitality is embedded in everyday life, both local narratives and accounts from external observers largely frame it as timeless tradition. No matter how "invented" this tradition is, hospitality, especially in the form of *supra* (and *tamadoba*), is described as a foundational cultural form of Georgian identity in both local and external accounts (Nodia 2014, Ram 2014, Muehlfried 2007, 2005). After his presidential inauguration in 2004, Saak'ashvili's political rhetoric carried nationalist undertones, the harshest forms of which recalled the "blood and soil"

narrative of Gamsakhurdia, the first Georgian president (Vach'ridze 2012).<sup>13</sup> Saak'ashvili's emphasis on Georgian uniqueness (especially with respect to Russia, see Chapter 3) might suggest that traditional practices of "local ethnocultural authenticity" (Nodia 2014: 72) such as *supra* would be celebrated in political narratives as a mark of the distinctiveness of the Georgian people, epitomised by an inherently good-hearted spirit.

However, the nation which the post-revolutionary elites had in mind, while built on the legacy of a glorious past – represented by heroes such as King David The Builder (*Davit Aghmashenebeli*, 1073-1125) or the Three Hundred Aragvians (*Samasi Aragveli*), who fought and died to defend Tbilisi against Persian invasion in 1795 (Rayfield 2013, Allen 1971 [1932], Lang 1957) – aimed to become a fully-fledged member of the circle of Western democracies. In order to do so, the country's recent past, represented by the Soviet era and the 1990s, had to be publicly condemned and its legacies eradicated. Saakashvili established himself as Georgia's "architect-in-chief",<sup>14</sup> the man who would rebuild Georgian society on the expectations he set at his swearing-in ceremony:

Georgia needs to become a model of democracy where every citizen will be equal under the law, where every citizen will have equal opportunities for success and self-realisation. Georgia needs to and will turn into the homeland for independent, educated and proud individuals" (Saakashvili 2004 quoted in Vach'ridze 2012).

In modernisation narratives, hospitality practices were assessed according to their suitability for the country's modernisation project. Certain aspects of traditional hospitality were positively orientalist (Said 2003 [1978]) to make Georgia attractive to foreigners. Abstract images of Georgians' inherent friendliness were promoted in

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<sup>13</sup> Rayfield, D. (2008). "The Georgia-Russia conflict: Lost territory, found nation", *OpenDemocracy*, 18 August. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/the-georgia-russia-conflict-lost-territory-found-nation>

<sup>14</sup> Collin, M. (2010). "Saakashvili is Georgia's 'Architect – in – Chief'", *Moscow Times*, 25 October. Available at: <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/sitemap/free/2010/10/article/saakashvili-is-georgias-architect-in-chief/420907.html>



public discourse, from political speech to national and international media (see 2.3.1). Attributes of rustic genuineness were attached to typical products such as wine and cheese, as well as to stereotyped figures of shepherds and mountaineers keeping ancient methods of food preparation and conservation alive.

However, the meaning that hospitality practices had in many people's everyday lives, articulated and performed as tradition, was dismissed, if not openly stigmatised. Celebration of what mainstream narratives defined as "Western lifestyle", with its ideals of efficiency and rationality, clashed with traditional hospitality practices such as *supra*, which was seen as an unnecessary waste of time and money, a practice conducive to overeating, drunkenness, noisiness and aggressiveness. Post-revolutionary elites emphasised their willingness to break radically with the socialist past. Yet, contempt for *supra* practices as expression of "dissipation and debauchery" (Muehlfried 2014: 64) ironically mirrored Soviet authorities' attitudes towards traditional hospitality, seen as an irrational display of resources in contrast with the foundational principles of the Soviet state (see Chapter 3; see also Muehlfried 2014, 2007, Mars & Altman 1987).

Post-revolutionary nationalism appears to be ambivalent in itself. In mainstream post-revolutionary narratives, the "nation" was conceived as a positively distinct unity only to the extent to which Georgian people matched the image of a Western "independent, educated, and proud" community. Practices such as *supra* did not just account for the private habits of a few people, but were bestowed by widespread local narratives with the public authority of national tradition. For this reason, framing something or somebody as "typically Georgian" did not have a straightforwardly positive connotation. As an expression of cleavages across the population, in several cases the attribute "Georgian" carried a derogatory meaning as a reference to habits considered at odds with modernisation narratives (see chapters 3 and 6).

Mainstream political narratives depicted *supra* and its related habits, such as the unrestrained consumption of food and wine, as backward and therefore incompatible with modernisation narratives.

Furthermore, many people bestowed social connections created and reinforced through hospitality practices with higher authority and trust than official institutions (Aliyev 2014a, 2014b, Tuite 2005, Manning 2003). In Saak'ashvili's Georgia, the state, in line with neoliberal doctrine, gave up its power to intervene in social and economic matters (Rekhviashvili L. 2015, Gugushvili 2014). Yet, the post-revolutionary government aimed to restore the political role of the state as the unique body to emanate legitimacy, inspire loyalty and dispense coercion. Networks of hospitality, as a social phenomenon which contested this power with the state, had to be limited and eventually eliminated.

### **2.2.2 Tackling the ambivalence of hospitality ties**

Hospitality practices are regulated by a set of norms, which as a matter of public knowledge define “good” or “bad” hosts and guests along lines of mutual trust and social respectability. The principle of reciprocity expressed in the main components of *supra* – in particular toasting and drinking throughout the *tamadoba* structure – tie people together in long-lasting relationships. These connections, while stemming from affective bonds of kinship and friendship, can be mobilised to secure goods and services, circumventing (and possibly breaking) official rules (Manning 2003, Ledeneva 1998, Mars & Altman 1987, 1983). Personal relationships cultivated at *supra* may have a crucial role in the public arena of society, politics and economics.

In the Soviet era and the 1990s, hospitality practices were a source of support and (conditional) solidarity for citizens against inefficient and corrupt institutions. People's reliance on personal connections was explicable through the assumption that the official system was irreparably unreliable. On the contrary, institutions emerging from the Rose Revolution presented themselves as accountable, impartial and balanced, that is modern. In a context of a clearly separated public and private, citizens could deal with institutions in a transparent way. As long as they respected state authority, people could be sure of receiving fair treatment. Supporting the logic of meritocracy, mainstream narratives emphasised that various opportunities for self-realisation were available to deserving individuals.

Resorting to personal connections stemming from hospitality exchanges in order to “get things done” was not just morally and legally unacceptable (see below),

but also pointless. Market mechanisms would distribute resources across the population in a rational way, while people's own spirit of initiative, flexibility, and hard-working attitude would determine who gained and who lost in the everyday social struggle. Citing the example of the policemen fired in large numbers and at an impressively fast pace as part of the radical anti-corruption reforms (Di Puccio 2010, K'up'at'adze 2009), Muehlfried points out that such a provision "signalled to the whole society that private networks and informal status no longer counted [...]. No time, then, to spend at the *supra*, and no need because, in any case, the alliances forged on this occasion would not count in 'real life'" (2014: 64).

Excessive expressions of hospitality – endless feasts, drunkenness, overeating, loudness – were not problematic insofar as they were marginal expression of private individuals' bad habits. Yet, the trespass of personal connections stemming from hospitality into the public domain of "real life" did not fit into the country's hectic modernisation process. Porous boundaries between the public and the private provided the basis for ambivalent practices of hospitality whose mechanisms, while seemingly harmless, were conducive to socially harmful or even criminal behaviour. Under the principle of reciprocity, hospitality exchanges could degenerate into corrupt deals in the absence of well-marked boundaries between the realm of private relationships and the sphere of public institutions (as has been also reported by Transparency International [2014], which counts favours, gift-giving and "excessive hospitality" as types of bribery).

The government's provisions for tackling practices which circumvented official norms aimed to be all-encompassing. Besides the tightening up of sanctions against petty crime or unlicensed activities (Rekhviashvili L. 2015, Slade 2014, K'up'at'adze 2009, Shelley et al. 2007; see also Chapter 5), a battle was initiated to "win back the hearts of the Georgian people for the state and for the law" (Slade 2007: 172). The legacy of state unaccountability left by previous systems continued to haunt many citizens' relationships with official institutions. No matter the degree of institutional improvement following the Rose Revolution, it was hard to "recover" people who were used to relying on unofficial means to get by in everyday life. The division between past and future Georgia, on which post-revolutionary narratives were built, divided citizens into the unworthy and the worthy. The former had been corrupted by the pre-revolutionary order in its various forms, resulting in reliance on

excessive state aid, mistrust of official institutions and open disregard for the rule of law. On the contrary, the latter were a generation of future Georgians, embodying all the features of modern citizens: ambition, efficiency and loyalty to the state and its norms.

. Hospitality practices, resting on blurred boundaries that were constantly trespassed and redrawn, were considered backward and socially harmful by mainstream political narratives. Nonetheless, hospitality was also a distinctive mark of national identity, for which Georgia and its people had been known for centuries. Post-revolutionary political narratives reframed hospitality to feed positive ideas of Georgianness, which, while maintaining a sense of pride in the glorious national past, displayed a public image of a modern country and a modern people to the outside world. At the same time, everyday practices of hospitality in the sphere of private life were left to people's desire for sociability, their penchant for feasting and their ability to afford hospitality events (see Chapter 3). Grey zones of hospitality would fade away as backward remnants of a past no longer needed, and as a result of the government's assertive efforts to modernise the country.

## **2.3 Modern hospitality: Redrawing lines between the public and the private**

### **2.3.1 From architecture to politics: The public face of hospitality**

The ambivalence underpinning hospitality practices was to be effaced by drawing clear boundaries between public and private hospitality. Public hospitality accounts for all images which presented hospitality to outsiders as a practice consistent with modernisation narratives – no matter if certain of these images referred to commercial venues for hospitality owned by private companies. The pivotal traits of public hospitality were the organisation of “hospitable” spaces across the country (see also Chapter 5), the promotion of Georgia as an inherently welcoming place, reiterated by the media and the tourism industry, and images of hospitality presented in public rhetoric at the national and international level.

Selected images of traditional hospitality depicted Georgia as a friendly country, which although rapidly modernising was able to offer its visitors a taste of

exotic authenticity. Stereotyped portrayals of tradition went hand in hand with the reorganisation of the national space in order to make the country attractive to outsiders. Images of the dangerous Georgia of the 1990s were replaced by depictions of a young democracy travelling “full speed Westward” (*Full Speed Westward* 2013). Initially, the government intervened to erase the most evident marks which years of decay and negligence had left on the urban landscape. In Tbilisi, several potholed roads were paved and a few buildings were painted.<sup>15</sup>

Following these basic interventions to repair the effects of the recent crisis years, the construction of suitable tourist infrastructure could begin, so as to show foreign guests the country’s transformation. With the aim of attracting tourists, foreign investors and businessmen, hotels, restaurants and conferences centres were built or refurbished, as were highways, tunnels, railway lines and airports. To a large extent, the newly-built tourist infrastructure was targeted at visitors able and willing to spend money in Georgia. A paradigmatic example of the government’s “high-profile” projects is the luxurious Radisson Blu Iveria Hotel in the centre of Tbilisi. One of several majestic structures to have emerged in the city since 2003, this building had special connotations, since in the early 1990s it had been inhabited by refugees fleeing Abkhazia (Manning 2009c). Previously a symbol of turmoil, the hotel became an image of modernity, embodying the new leadership’s spirit.<sup>16</sup> Other remarkable interventions in this direction were the reconstruction of the small town of Signaghi in eastern Georgia (see also Manning 2009b), which was completely rebuilt with state money and foreign funding as a “chocolate-box” village for wine tourism; the inauguration of ski resorts in the mountain areas of Bak’uriani and Gudauri; and the promotion of the previously isolated area of Svaneti in the mountains of north-western Georgia as an international destination for hikers, climbers and horse-riders.<sup>17</sup>

However, besides local products and customs – traditional food, drink, music and dance – Western visitors were also offered a more modern kind of entertainment,

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<sup>15</sup> A major refurbishment was undertaken for the 2005 visit of George W. Bush, to whom one of Tbilisi’s main streets is dedicated. Many people were reportedly irritated by this renovation, as the light pastel colours chosen to paint the buildings on the city centre street were considered “not Georgian” (Manning 2007: 202).

<sup>16</sup> For similar developments in the coastal city of Batumi see Frederiksen 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Corso, M. (2010). “Georgia: Tbilisi tries to make a Switzerland out of Svaneti”, Eurasianet.org, 13 October. Available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62144>

closer to what they were accustomed to in their home countries. In Tbilisi, along with expensive hotels (often owned by international companies), the commitment to modernising hospitality was focused on the bars and clubs around the pedestrian area of Chardin (*Shardeni*), a refurbished part of the old town, or on the riversides (Figure 3). These venues offered “Western” entertainment and products – music played by foreign DJs or cocktails made with imported spirits – which could accommodate visitors’ tastes. The new bars and clubs were mostly frequented by tourists or foreigners working in the country, and by the not many locals who could afford a night out in such places.

Images of traditional hospitality were promoted to foreigners as a distinctive mark of Georgia, which visitors could enjoy as one of the country’s beauties – along with its wild nature, churches and archaeological sites – and consume like any other commodity. This perspective resonated, and is still widespread in outsiders’ approach to the country. Tourist guides, information networks and travellers’ blogs<sup>18</sup> listed hospitality as one of Georgia’s central attractions, a matter of cultural heritage informed by Georgian people’s “natural” attitudes. In 2013 the English-speaking news channel “Georgian Journal” reported an online article listing “The Friendliest Countries in the World”, in which Georgia took third place (behind Colombia and Fiji). This success was attributed to Georgians’ “witty sense of humour and politeness, combined with a keenness to spread the word about their little known country through good deeds and remarkable hospitality”. Hospitable attitudes were shared by “everyone, from the people on the street and bus drivers to police officers and street vendors”.<sup>19</sup> An inherent sense of hospitality is also highlighted in Georgia’s profile on the BBC website: “Situated at the strategically important crossroads where Europe meets Asia, Georgia has a unique and ancient cultural heritage, and is famed for its traditions of hospitality and cuisine”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See for example: Caitlin, C. (2012) Runaway Train [blog]. *Georgian hospitality*. Available at: <http://caitlin-runawaytrain.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/georgian-hospitality.html>; Nathan, N. (2012) Making a difference: The official blog of Teach and Learn with Georgia [blog]. *From the window of a moving train*. Available at: <http://teachandlearnwithgeorgia.wordpress.com/2012/03/01/from-the-window-of-a-moving-train/>

<sup>19</sup> Georgian Journal (2013). “Georgia is third in World’s Friendliest Countries”, 4 September. Available at: <http://www.georgianjournal.ge/discover-georgia/24566-georgia-is-third-in-worlds-friendliest-countries.html>

<sup>20</sup> BBC News (2013) “Georgia country profile”, 6 March. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17301647>

Hospitality as an intrinsic feature of Georgia, its people and its institutions also played a role in political rhetoric. In 2012, when commenting on his government's decision to lift travel visas for Russian citizens, Saak'ashvili stated: "Let Russian tourists know that they [can] arrive here at any time [...]. [In Georgia no one would] "ban them from drinking Georgian wine and *Borjomi*, which they miss so much" (Saak'ashvili referred here to Russia's embargo on Georgian wine and mineral water, imposed in 2006 and then partially lifted).<sup>21</sup> On the Russian side, commenting on the arrest in Tbilisi of a Russian businessman for allegedly entering Abkhazia, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Lukashevich commented: "While continuing to hypocritically harangue about hospitality and aspiration for friendship with the Russian people, the Georgian leadership, in fact, systematically organises against Russian citizens visiting the country".<sup>22</sup> (For hospitality relationships between Georgia and Russia see also 3.4).

As a modernised version of tradition, post-revolutionary public hospitality was framed as a monolithic item, insusceptible to being changed on people's own initiative. "Georgian Hospitality", for which the country was renowned across the world, was represented by renovated spaces with luxurious buildings and trendy bars and clubs, praised by the media, foreign visitors and tourist guides and blogs, and promoted in political speeches as a sign of the country's openness-cum-resoluteness towards friends and enemies at home and abroad.

In parallel to this public image, private life was the frame in which people could engage in their personal hospitality practices, if they so wished. In post-revolutionary Georgia, the private sphere was supposed to develop autonomously from the public realm, allowing individuals to pursue their interests and fulfil their aspirations according to their personal initiative and capability. Hospitality practices between relatives, friends and neighbours were treated in mainstream narratives as a private manifestation of sociability entirely left to people's willingness and ability to be hosts and guests. What happened in the frame of private hospitality should not have anything to do with the public sphere of relationships between the state and citizens. Conceived as a matter of personal leisure, private hospitality was supposed

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<sup>21</sup> Civil.Ge (2012). "Georgia to lift visa rules for Russian citizens", 28 February. Available at: [http://www.civil.ge/eng\\_old/article.php?id=24494](http://www.civil.ge/eng_old/article.php?id=24494)

<sup>22</sup> RT (2012). "Russians not safe in Georgia – FM", 27 March. Available from: <http://rt.com/politics/georgia-russians-safety-lukashevich-554/>

to simply reflect people's inclinations, without pressure from shared norms articulated as tradition. However, the separation of public and private hospitality, was oblivious of hospitality's ambivalence. In a dramatically changing context, which saw many citizens' everyday life severely hit by neoliberal reforms within an increasingly authoritarian political environment (see below), the everyday articulation of hospitality practices trespassed the boundaries between the public and the private, which modernisation narratives depicted as impenetrable.

### **2.3.2 When the public and the private encroach upon one another: The inconsistencies of modernisation narratives**

Images of public hospitality promoted by political narratives, endorsed by the media and foreign accounts and embodied in substantial renovation of the country's urban and natural landscape were negotiated by people in their everyday articulation and performances. In line with the neoliberal principles of individual freedom pursued by post-revolutionary political elites, the practices with which people engaged in their private lives were not a matter of concern for the public. The private sphere was considered an inviolable realm in which the public, in the form of the state, should not interfere. Citizens' private lives were supposedly regulated by market mechanisms, which would provide to everyone according to their own merits. In turn, people would adjust their expectations in line with their capabilities, managing their private resources in a rational way.

From this perspective, hospitality was just a matter of private leisure and consumption, which people could choose to enjoy according to their penchant for sociability and financial capability (see 3.5). Hosts and guests framed hospitality's reciprocal exchange as a "public" obligation, which was therefore perceived as a source of anxiety (see 1.2). Hospitality was loaded with competitiveness, crossing the lines between welcoming and hostility. Conversely, in the post-revolutionary context of separated public and private, hospitality practices would be a matter of individuals' free choice, both from a qualitative and quantitative perspective. The frequency at which invitations are exchanged, the choice of hospitality venues (houses, restaurants, hotels), how many and which people are invited, the amount and quality of food and drinks offered: all this would reflect people's personal desire for



conviviality along with the ability to afford such a desire. People's public status was not supposed to be affected.

However, the emphasis on a clear-cut division between public hospitality, consisting of positive images of the country to be displayed to outsiders, and private hospitality, in the form of mundane conviviality to be purchased as a commodity, reveals that at its core post-revolutionary modernisation was oblivious to hospitality's ambivalence. I point out three main contexts in which such obliviousness is manifested, as well as the effects that it had on Georgia's social, political, and economic life. First, neoliberal reforms, entailing swift privatisation and deregulation, while achieving substantial results in terms of general economic growth, at the same time failed to tackle poverty, and actually worsened it (Gugushvili 2014).<sup>23</sup> Many citizens could not afford the luxury of hospitality as a private practice, paid for from households' private funds. In spite of economic hardship and in contrast with modernisation narratives which ruled out the use of personal relationships to attain goods and services, private practices of hospitality maintained a public meaning for many Georgians as a way to "get things done".. Personal relationships persisted as a more powerful source of trust than official institutions, which, despite claims of radical change, had overall failed to improve citizens' life conditions (Aliyev 2014a, 2014b, Slade 2007, Jones 2012, 2006, De Waal 2011).

Second, the post-revolutionary government itself dealt with the boundaries between public and private in ambivalent ways. People's private practices of hospitality were publicly ranked and either stigmatised or praised as expressions of the past or the future. Besides moral disapproval and social stigmatisation of practices regarded as backward, the state intervened concretely to stifle social expressions which hindered Georgia's development into a modern country. A case in point is *birzha*, a form of male street socialisation which I refer to as street hospitality, and which was met with an iron hand as a socially harmful practice (see Chapter 5). The motif of a public which establishes control over private hospitality practices is found in Vazha Pshavela's poem, "The Guest and the Host". The village community

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<sup>23</sup> Social policy researcher Dimitri Gugushvili, referring to the Georgian statistical office's quarterly Integrated Household Survey, reported that during Saak'ashvili's rule (2004-2012) poverty increased from 18 to 26 per cent (2014: 7).

physically breaks into the protagonist's private house to eliminate the latter's guest, who is their deadly enemy. Private practices of hospitality taking place in an individual's domestic space are at odds with public rules, which eventually prevail (see Chapter 1).

Third, in a moral, cultural, social, political and economic context which was radically changing in a short time span, people saw hospitality as a way to define their individual and collective selves within the larger community. The public and the private were undergoing a radical transformation under Saak'ashvili's leadership. While in the Soviet years and during the 1990s hospitality practices flourished in the grey zones between and across the public and the private, as a result of post-revolutionary reforms hospitality found hostile ground in both the private and the public spheres.

Spaces for hospitality were made accessible through the spending of money. Moreover, strict norms regulated behaviours and practices in public spaces such as streets, squares and parks, which were intended to be a showcase for the government's achievements rather than places of sociable exchange (Curro 2015, Rekhviashvili L. 2015, Frederiksen 2013; see also Chapter 5). At the same time, neoliberal reforms impoverished many households. The expectations many Georgian families had of better life conditions were not met, and they were also denied the ability to afford hospitality events. In addition, while officially promoting the inviolability of the private sphere as the realm of individual freedom, the government controlled, sanctioned and repressed a variety of practices taking place at the private level. Echoing several of my participants' accounts, Manning notes that during Saak'ashvili's rule, following the revelation that the government was routinely listening to mobile phone calls, for the first time people became "reluctant to discuss political matters on the phone, or, indeed, in public settings, such as restaurants" (2007:202).

This dramatically changing context also provided people with an opportunity to negotiate the articulations and performances of hospitality along with the tension between tradition and modernity, conservation and change, continuity and rupture. I refer to private hospitality as the way in which people accommodate their own values, norms, strategies and purposes within mainstream narratives. In post-revolutionary

Georgia, private hospitality is informed by multifaceted dynamics of endorsement, rejection, opposition or subversion of public images of hospitality. At the same time, the way in which people articulate and perform hospitality on an everyday basis in their houses, among their friends and families, reflects wider relationships between citizens and the state, the law and images of “public good”.

Hospitality persisted as a grey zone between and across the public and the private, providing a channel through which social actors could articulate their meanings and purposes in a dramatically changing context. Western political thought assigns the intermediate space between the public and the private to civil society. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines civil society as “that aspect of society concerned with and operating for the collective good, independent of state control or commercial influence; all social groups, networks, [etc.], above the level of the family, which engage in voluntary collective action” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989). In post-revolutionary narratives, the flourishing of Western-style civil society was an essential development expected from the process of modernisation.

The inconsistencies inherent to the narratives promoted by the post-revolutionary political leadership undermined the public sphere’s openness while also hitting people’s everyday private lives. In a context so dense with conflicts, a vibrant civil society would work as the arena in which citizens voice their discontent towards the state while pursuing their own personal and collective interests. In the following section, I investigate the relationship between hospitality and civil society. Drawing upon various analyses of pre-Rose Revolution Georgia, I examine the role of hospitality as a form of civil society in the Soviet era and during the 1990s. Amid the flaws of the Soviet system, and in the desolate public context which developed after Georgia’s independence, hospitality practices brought people together beyond the narrow realm of the household in the absence of a “proper” civil society. Discussing the viability of such a comparison, I subsequently explore the role of post-revolutionary hospitality *vis-à-vis* civil society in Saak’ashvili’s Georgia, which mainstream narratives depicted as strong, autonomous and pluralistic.

## 2.4 From hospitality practices to civil society

### 2.4.1 An expression or a rival of civil society?

In political and philosophical debates about the public, the private and their boundaries, civil society is portrayed as a realm between the family and the state, a congregation of private citizens addressing issues of public concern (Bailey 2000, Pye 1999, Slater 1998, Allen 1997, Garcelon 1997, Gellner 1994, Kumar 1993, Bryant 1993, Habermas 1974 [1964]). This scholarship envisages civil society as a cluster of secondary groups – that is groups that organise beyond the kinship level – which gather spontaneously and are publicly accountable, tolerant and protected by the law (Kubik 2005). In “transitional” contexts, civil society is deemed to be “the driving force behind and guarantee of democratisation and the containment of the state” (Allen 1997: 329). The absence of a legally protected civil society is seen as a distinctive mark of authoritarian regimes. Conversely, the development of citizens’ associations standing out as an alternative – and often an opposition – to the state is allegedly a sign that a country is on the right track towards “full democratisation”.

In line with these assumptions, several studies have identified the non-existence of a Western-style civil society of the kind described above as a prominent feature of Soviet Georgia (a characteristic shared by other socialist countries – Aliyev 2014b, Ekiert & Kubik 2014, Shelley et al. 2007, Tuite 2005, Broers 2005, Howard 2003). Yet, the boundaries between an oppressive public realm and the secluded sphere of private life were blurred: grey zones were criss-crossed by hospitality practices (see 1.3.2; see also Tuite 2005, Oswald & Voronkov 2004, Nodia et al. 2000). Several observers and scholars have questioned whether hospitality, as an ambivalent practice between public and private, can be considered a form of civil society in Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia.<sup>24</sup> According to some, if the notion of civil society is stretched to include any association of citizens outside state supervision that goes beyond the family, hospitality as the ongoing relationship between hosts

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<sup>24</sup> A variety of positions in this debate are set out in a small booklet published in 2000 and edited by the Georgian political analysts Gia Nodia. The book is titled “The Georgian banquet (*supra*) and civil society” (“*Kartuli supra da samokalako sazogadoeba*”) and contains contributions of intellectuals and academics from various disciplines, from history to literature, from sociology to linguistics. Discussing issues such as the actual antiquity of *supra* and the controversial relation between *supra* and modernity, democracy and freedom, the publication has had a strong impact on studies of Georgian hospitality both in the country and abroad (Ram 2014, Nodia 2014, Muehlfried 2014, Tuite 2005, Manning 2003).

and guests fulfilled this function in Soviet times – and can even be regarded as the only expression of civil society under Soviet rule (Tuite 2005, Nodia et al. 2000). The social relationships generated through hospitality exchanges crosscut the land between people’s doorsteps and official institutions, carving physical and social spaces out of state control (Tuite 2005, Manning 2003, Nodia et al. 2000, Mars & Altman 1987, 1983).

Civil society as a spontaneous association of social actors separated from the state was also severely underdeveloped in 1990s Georgia. The lack of both a viable public sphere and secure private property impeded citizens’ ability to voice their interests in a democratic debate with the state. Rather than resulting in collective organisation, mistrust of official institutions was expressed through passivity or lawlessness. Harsh living conditions, endemic corruption and ethnic conflict turned public and private life into a daily struggle of all against all. In a context where “the human order ends at the front door of the private domicile”, while “the public space is a wild space characterised by an absence of order” (Manning 2009b: 945; see also Tuite 2005), ties of hospitality were social devices fundamental to connecting people through solidarity and reciprocity beyond the nuclear family.

However, when it comes to the post-revolutionary Georgian context, there are two main reasons why analysing hospitality as civil society is problematic. Firstly, hospitality as tradition has an ambivalent status in a system which aims to be craves “modern”. Secondly, personal connections stemming from hospitality exchanges, while being potentially conducive to positive ties of mutual help, may also degenerate into corrupt relationships which are not only morally despicable, but also legally forbidden. Below, I will discuss these two points, focusing on how they highlight the apparently mutual exclusive relationship between traditional hospitality and civil society.

Cultural and anthropological studies focusing on the structure of *supra* and *tamadoba* point out that the traditional Georgian feast rests on an “authoritarian” system, which clashes with more “democratic” Western models of social gathering (Tuite 2005, Muehlfried 2005, Manning 2003, Nodia et al. 2000, Chatwin 1997, Kotthoff 1995). The vertical structure of *supra* means that the highest authority, the *tamada*, dictates the mood of the banquet and limits tablemates’ freedom of choice

(for example over whether or not, and what, to eat and drink), of expression (in the sequence and content of toasts), and of movement (to stand up from the table, unless this is prescribed, walk around or leave the *supra* before it ends). On the contrary, Western models, such as the *à-la-fourchette* reception (Tuite 2005, Manning 2003, Nodia et al. 2000), present a horizontal structure in which participants interact freely, helping themselves from a buffet.

Western models of civil society, envisaging a public arena where people express their interests in full respect of each other's personal freedom, clash with the hierarchical, exclusive yet intrusive system of *supra*. *Supra*'s structure, which although it stems from norms of conviviality entails aggressive competition, differs radically from the horizontal sphere of civil society, in which opinions are openly discussed, with no room for prevarication. Moreover, the almost exclusively male and adult milieu of traditional hospitality contradicts some of the main ideas voiced by civil society, such as gender equality, or the empowerment of younger generations (see Chapter 4).

The problematic relationship between hospitality and civil society is also apparent in the way hospitality generates long-lasting ties between people on the basis of reciprocity. Traditional forms of hospitality hardly fit the categories of inclusiveness, tolerance and accountability, which are listed as the pivotal features of civil society (Kubik 2005). In its ambivalence, hospitality does not display inclusiveness without exclusion, tolerance without discrimination, accountability without arbitrariness. The authoritarian nature of traditional hospitality practices accounts for what Gellner (1994) calls "networks of cousins", which, together with the state as the paradigmatic form of centralised power, are civil society's "rivals". Civil society substantially differs from "the segmentary community which avoids central tyranny by firmly turning the individual into an integral part of the social sub-unit" (8). Civil society excludes both "stifling communalism" – that is "segmentary communities, cousin-ridden and ritual-ridden" – and "centralised authoritarianism" (12).

Personal links built up through hospitality practices clash with inclusive relationships which tie private citizens to each other in pursuing their common interests in compliance with public norms. The social, political and economic

freedoms that individuals seek to obtain by counterbalancing state authority are annihilated by submission to hospitality norms, which regulate access to the community. What are the implications of these dynamics for the relationship between hospitality and civil society? First, if we consider civil society as the expression of “pro-democratic” tendencies within a society, hospitality exchanges, resting on rigid norms and a hierarchical structure, belong rather to the realm of “uncivil society” (Kopecký & Mudde 2005, 2003).<sup>25</sup>

Second, while civil society is meant to be a social device to counterbalance the state, the relationships between the two entities is supposed to rest on a transparent dialogue. Hospitality practices, creating a system of connections which is bestowed with higher legitimacy than the state, may foster alienation towards official institutions, ultimately undermining civil participation (Aliyev 2014b). Mistrust of the state and public life in general may lead to behaviours which, while not being illegal *per se*, are socially harmful – such as the drunkenness, overeating, loudness and aggressiveness entailed in traditional hospitality events. In addition, the exclusiveness underpinning hospitality exchanges may be conducive to corrupt connections, whose reciprocal character favours personal ties at the expense of the wider community (Manning 2003, Chatwin 1997).

The problematic relation between the grey zones of hospitality and civil society seemed to have been overcome with the Rose Revolution. Since the public and the private were supposed to work separately, the ambivalent social role of hospitality practices was expected to fade away in favour of an inclusive and transparent civil society based on Western models. The initial enthusiasm for the Rose Revolution was cooled by the social, political and economic insecurity caused by both internal and external factors, among which were some government reforms, the 2008 war with Russia and the global financial crisis. Yet, the image of Georgia as a rapidly modernising country meant that citizens were expected to express their dissatisfaction in democratic ways by congregating in civil society. In the following section, I discuss the extent to which these expectations were fulfilled, and the implications this had for the social role of hospitality in post-revolutionary Georgia.

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<sup>25</sup> “Uncivil society” is described as an “ill-defined concept” (Kopecký & Mudde 2003: 3), encapsulating a variety of movements which share an anti-liberal and anti-democratic ideology, which can be (but is not necessarily) put forward through extremist rhetoric and violent means (Kopecký & Mudde 2005, 2003).

Highlighting the main flaws in the application of Western models of civil society to the Georgian context, I explore hospitality as an ambivalent practice, which, largely articulated and performed as tradition, is a potential source of civility *vis-à-vis* the disillusionment brought about by the moral, social, political and economic failure of the post-revolutionary modernisation project.

#### **2.4.2 Does hospitality compensate for the failures of civil society? An introduction to hospitality as civility**

Some analysts and observers have investigated the potentials of the Rose Revolution as an historic turning point from which a Western-style civil society could develop in the country (Frederiksen 2014, Dunn 2012, Jones 2006, Broers 2005, King 2004). The dissatisfaction which had made people indifferent, turned citizens against each other and increased corruption and crime was finally expected to result in a collective demand for democracy and transparency. Saak'ashvili's government, consisting of young, Western-educated people, pledged to get rid of the social, political and economic chaos which had dominated the Shevardnadze era and which was widely seen as a legacy of Soviet rule. In the process of modernisation undertaken by the country, a viable public space, coupled with and separated from protected private property, was the framework within which a vibrant civil society could pursue collective claims while monitoring state action. Demands for equality, openness and accountability were voiced by free associations of citizens, which, partly in the form of local and foreign NGOs, had already taken a pivotal role in the 2003 ousting of the Shevardnadze regime (Frederiksen 2014, Jones 2012, 2006, Dunn 2012, Muehlfried 2005).

Starting from a position of relative marginality, criticisms of the authoritarian structure of *supra* as opposed to a liberal civil society gained a central position across political and intellectual debates (Muehlfried 2014b). Muehlfried and Manning (2005, 2003) point out that the tension between post-revolutionary modernisation narratives and the still prominent resonance of practices articulated as tradition was mirrored by divisions among the educated urban population. The socialist intelligentsia embodied the traditionalist discourse, while liberal perspectives were associated with young, mostly Western-educated professional and third-sectors



workers, widely employed by foreign NGOs. The rivals called each other by the derogatory terms “red intelligentsia” (*ts’iteli int’eligentsia*) and “grant-eaters” (*grant’is mch’amlebi*) respectively (the latter referring to the third sector’s dependence on foreign funding, Muehlfried 2014b, 2005). Although the – sometimes harsh – debate opposing *supra* to modern democracy was still ongoing at the end of Saak’ashvili’s rule (2012), the consolidation of narratives brought about by the Rose Revolution marginalised the traditionalist stance as an outdated position with no future prospects.

Post-revolutionary civil society was framed on Western parameters, which, following a general definition, refer to “a diversity of legally registered groups and organisations, including, but not limited to political, environmental, educational, cultural, professional, charitable, humanitarian and rights groups” (Aliyev 2014b: 279). A narrower segment of civil society associations is constituted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which have had a pivotal role in some crucial events in Georgia since late Soviet times.<sup>26</sup> Due to their activism, NGOs often became a metonym for Georgian civil society as a whole in academic analyses, political debates, and public opinion (Jones 2006, Broers 2005; see also Hann 2003, 1996, Allen 1997). For three main reasons, the structure that Georgian civil society assumed under Saak’ashvili’s rule was problematic with respect to images of an inclusive social arena in which citizens’ organisations act in autonomous but also complementary ways *vis-à-vis* the state.

Firstly, some analysts, while recognising indigenous pre-Soviet traditions of civil society,<sup>27</sup> highlight the disconnection between “professionalised NGOs”, mostly funded and directed from abroad, and “their impoverished clients in Georgian society” (Jones 2006: 42, see also Frederiksen 2014, Dunn 2012). Secondly, civil

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<sup>26</sup> NGOs’ support for regime change in 2003 is overwhelmingly acknowledged, although the scope and strength of foreign influence is still debated (Manning 2007, Jones 2006, Broers 2005). Also, NGOs, along with intergovernmental agencies, provided a fundamental contribution during the humanitarian crisis following the 2008 war with Russia, in which more than twenty-eight thousand people were displaced from South-Ossetia and relocated in settlements around Tbilisi and Gori (Frederiksen 2014, Dunn 2012, Rekhviashvili 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Jones identifies the political figure, writer, poet and publisher Ilia Ch’avch’avadze (1837-1907) and the *tergdaleuli*, a group of young radicals active from the 1860s to the 1880s, as the “first conscious nation-builders in 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgia”. Advocating reforms in education, cultural freedom and self-government for Georgians within the Russian empire, this group spread European ideas across society through “newspapers, election campaigns, business associations, and charitable organisations” (2006: 37; see also Manning 2012).

society's autonomy from the state was partially undermined in the aftermath of the Rose Revolution, when several prominent activists in the 2003 events took positions in the government, weakening civil society's potential to criticise and provide political pluralism (Broers 2005). Thirdly, the over-emphasis on civil society as the advocate of democracy, justice, and equality may entail the simultaneous disengagement of the state as the guarantor of citizens' rights. The idea of a civil society that flourishes in combination with a state "which is limited, non-interventionary, and which furthers the 'freedoms' of individual citizens, notably their market freedoms" (Allen 1997: 335) was endorsed by Saak'ashvili's administration as a key point of the neoliberal doctrine. However, civil society has limited capability to tackle the social issues from which the minimal state withdraws (Frederiksen 2014, Rekhviashvili L. 2010; see also Muehlbach 2012).

The vibrant civil society which was expected as a major consequence of the Rose Revolution failed to flourish as an inclusive sphere where citizens' concerns could be voiced. Dependence on Western models and funding, together with partial incorporation into political elites, hampered civil society's capability to address major social, political and economic issues autonomously. The state's reliance on this model of civil society was consistent with Saak'ashvili's neoliberal project, which envisaged the non-intervention of the state in social and economic matters. Yet, the state did not withdraw when dissent was voiced outside of this well-controlled framework. The government either denounced opposition figures as Russian agents or resorted to violent police crackdowns on street demonstrations – as the repression of protests in 2007, 2009 and 2011 indicates (De Waal 2011, Jones 2012; see also Chapter 5).<sup>28</sup>

The indiscriminate application of Western models from the top down as the post-revolutionary government's strategy for swift modernisation of the country failed to improve life conditions for a large part of the population, while also undermining democratic freedoms. In this context, civil society, intended as an open and independent arena through which ordinary citizens could "check and balance"

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<sup>28</sup> See also Harding, L. (2007). "State of Emergency in Georgia as Street Protests Turn Violent". *The Guardian*, 8 November. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/nov/08/russia.georgia>; Kramer, A. (2011). "Riot Police Break Down Opposition Protest in Georgia". *The New York Times*, 26 May. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/27/world/europe/27georgia.html>.

state action, did not flourish. I propose to understand hospitality as a source of civility, as opposed to the Western-centric model of civil society which hardly helped improve social equality and political participation across the post-revolutionary Georgian population. I define civility as the “public use of private good”, by that highlighting the potentials of hospitality ties, which stem from the private realm of everyday practices within the family and the neighbourhood, to spread across the public sphere through mechanisms of reciprocity and mutual solidarity.

In this regard, I refer to Robert Putnam’s distinction between “bonding” and “bridging” social capital (2000; see also Aliyev 2014b, Howard 2003). The first refers to those ties that cements intra-group solidarity, such as in networks of kin, close relatives, small circles of friends and neighbours, and so on. The second indicates the capability of social ties to spread beyond close circles, linking different groups, associations and organisations together. In the following chapters, I discuss the findings from my fieldwork in order to investigate people’s everyday articulations and performances of hospitality as potential sources of civility *vis-à-vis* the social, political and economic disintegration brought about by the post-revolutionary modernisation project.

The following chapters focus on three dimensions across which hospitality practices unfold: public narratives and private attitudes towards changing figure of guests-strangers; the re-appropriation of hospitality practices by those who are excluded on the basis of their ascribed identities - notably women and the young; and the tension around conflicting notions of hospitability in urban public spaces. In each chapter, I investigate the ambivalence of articulations and performances of hospitality, pointing out that the official institutions’ obliviousness of this ambivalence generated moral, cultural, social, political and economic cleavages across the population, highlighting deep inconsistencies inherent to the political leadership’s modernisation project. Instead, I put forward ambivalent practices of hospitality as sources of civility which connects the moralities underpinning people’s everyday private practices to the public culture of a society.

Thereby, I draw upon the argument that this connection affects the quality of political institutions operating in a given society (Putnam et al. 1994). I highlight that the post-revolutionary government’s modernisation project assumed that Georgian

people's hospitality practices, unfolding along ambivalent boundaries between the public and the private, were a token of incivility and therefore an obstacle to the country's development. Political elites dealt with the ambivalence of hospitality through moral, cultural, and social stigmatisation, as well as political repression, in order to marginalise people and practices which did not fit the image of Georgia as a Western country.

I argue that the post-revolutionary modernisation project did not make Georgia more "civil" – a "civil" community being one which develops distinctive patterns of "civic involvement and social solidarity" (Putnam et al. 1994: 83; see Chapter 6). On the contrary, an increasingly fragmented social, political and economic environment ultimately undermined the political leadership's legitimacy (as the electoral defeat of Saakashvili and the UNM in 2012 indicates). I explore hospitality as a source of civility which positively informs relationships between people, as well as between private citizens and the public sphere, creating a basis for improving the quality of public institutions. Rather than dismissing traditions of hospitality as being opposed to modernity, I maintain that hospitality needs to be caught in its ambivalence. By expanding social relationships beyond the family to the larger community, hospitality practices blur the boundaries between the public and the private, putting people's private resources at the service of the "public good".

### 3

## **STRANGERS BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE: HOSPITALITY IN A FRAGMENTED SOCIETY**

### **3.1 Who is a stranger in the context of hospitality?**

The display of welcoming and generous attitudes towards guests, even more if the latter are people hardly known to the host and their family, is a foundational feature of hospitality in general, and Georgian hospitality in particular. This feature is connected to theoretical perspectives from the social sciences, political philosophy and psychology, which investigate the role of otherness in the way people perceive, define and behave with their fellow human beings. From these perspectives, the stranger is identified as the most powerful figure in identifying the Self. At both the individual and collective levels, we know what we are by defining what we are not, that is by bestowing attributes of alterity upon the “stranger” in order to draw boundaries between the Self and the Other (Mole 2007, Mead 1934). In hospitality theory, the stranger is the object of abstractions which ascribe great value to an attitude of respect for visitors, and which resonate in the way in which Georgian tradition frames the host/guest relationship. These abstractions are consistent with what Derrida defines as “unconditional hospitality”, which entails openness to a universalised guest, whose identity, origin and destination must not affect the host’s approach (Friese 2009, Derrida 2000, 1998). “Unconditional hospitality” informs ethical perspectives on hospitality, which are widespread in the Christian tradition (Ahn 2010, O’Gorman 2007; see also Chapter 1).

Similar perspectives were often voiced by my participants. When asked directly to talk about hospitality, some participants provided a somewhat stereotyped version of what was articulated as their “tradition”. Teona (42, teacher), implicitly hinting at Vazha Pshavela’s poem *The Guest and the Host* (see 1.1), told me that in Georgia guests are “everybody: friends, foreigners, even enemies”. When asked if the dynamics of hospitality change depending on the kind of guest, Teona said that “extra-positive” feelings can increase the provision of hospitality, which, however, applies to all guests unconditionally:

Love maybe is an addition when you invite someone close to you. You do it not only with pleasure, but also with love. But for the rest, all you have to do is to become a servant of your guest, to do everything you can to create warmth and happiness. You must do it this way not because you are Georgian and otherwise nobody else would do that, but because this makes you naturally happy.

The guest-stranger is envisaged as an ambivalent figure, to be welcomed but also feared (Candea 2012, Beller-Hann 2008, Shyrock 2004, Herzfeld 1987, Bauman 1990, Pitt-Rivers 1968). Bauman (1990) frames the stranger as the very essence of the ambivalence of modernity. The friend/enemy dichotomy opposes “two forms in which the other may be recognised as another subject, construed as a ‘subject like the self’” (144). On the contrary, the stranger rests upon the incongruity “between his presence and other presences; his simultaneous assault on several crucial oppositions [is] instrumental in the incessant effort of ordering” (150). The guest-stranger is the archetype of hospitality’s ambivalence, which is framed along with the tension between welcome and trespass, openness and suspicion, inclusion and exclusion. Such oppositions dissolve within the figure of the stranger, as he is *neither* friend *nor* enemy, and therefore may be *either* (Bauman 1990: 146, see also Ledeneva 2014, and Chapter 1).

Ethnographic research on hospitality embeds the disruptive figure of the guest-stranger in everyday power relations. Rather than stemming from human good-heartedness, hospitality is framed as a “sociological necessity” (Pitt-Rivers 1968: 27), a strategy to overcome the danger brought about by the guest’s alterity. For this reason, guests are constantly kept “in abeyance”. Visitors are welcomed into the hosting community without being accorded full integration, and are therefore prevented from becoming their hosts’ equals (Herzfeld 1987).

Norms of hospitality are framed with the purpose of minimising the threat caused by the guest’s otherness. Moral concerns which draw boundaries between the Self and the Other translate into the rules which establish who are strangers and how insiders should relate to them, within the framework of what Derrida defines as

“conditional hospitality”. The latter is a matter of the rights and duties of guests and hosts, which span the private and public spheres. Guests are welcomed under certain conditions, related to their identity, nationality and socio-economic status, and according to their compliance with the host’s rules – whether the host is a person, a social group or a country (Friese 2009, Rosello 2001, Derrida 2000). Highlighting the limits of “unconditional hospitality” in its pragmatic impossibility, conditional hospitality recognises that “to be hospitable, hospitality requires a guest to be greeted, addressed, named as a singular individual” (Barnett 2005: 12). The guest is welcomed “as a Somebody, not as a serialised nobody” (Naas quoted in Barnett 2005: 12).

Even though several of my participants depicted hospitality in Georgia as “unconditionally” offered to a universal Guest (see Teona’s quote above), everyday hospitality practices cross the fluid boundaries which define insiders *vis-à-vis* outsiders along with shifting moral, cultural, social, political and economic contingencies, including and excluding certain individuals and groups. Mainstream narratives define a “public stranger”, who embodies otherness with respect to the inner community. This “us/them” rhetoric generates divisions between those who are perceived and defined as either “insiders” or “outsiders”. When strangers are portrayed as guests, people’s articulations of images of the “public stranger” shift private hospitality practices between welcoming and trespass, generosity and calculation, engagement and individualism.

This chapter investigates the ambivalence of the guest-stranger, as well as of the relationship between different types of guests-stranger and their hosts. I highlight the way in which such ambivalent ties define the tension between openness and closure, camaraderie and hierarchy, which underpin connections within and across different communities. The different ways in which guests-strangers are framed, welcomed or rejected reveal the potential of hospitality as a source of civility, in the form of social inclusion and horizontal solidarity, but also of incivility, as a way for highlighting and reinforcing inequality and exclusion. As a person who is highly respected but, at the same time, alienated from the community of insiders, the guest-stranger is suspended between inclusion and exclusion. In popular narratives, hospitality is bestowed with the power of making friends out of strangers, or even enemies (Goldstein 1999, Pitt-Rivers 1968), connecting individuals, families, villages, and, symbolically, national communities. In this sense, hospitality practices

between strangers increase the social capital of both the host and the guests, bridging people and groups which were previously not linked to one another.

However, while opening up their houses and share their food and drinks with guests-strangers, hosts at the same time reinforce the boundaries between they and their own circle (kin, close friends, neighbours) and those who do not belong to their in-group (Sorge 2009, Heatherington 2001, Herzfeld 1987, Pitt-Rivers 1968). Rather than connecting different communities through horizontal ties of reciprocity and mutual obligation, hospitality becomes a way to strengthen networks of insiders and confine outsiders, that is, guests, in a position of helpless inferiority.

Focusing on the ambivalence underpinning hospitable attitudes towards guests-strangers, it is fundamental to investigate who strangers are in a given community at a given time, and how strangeness is framed both at the level of public narratives and private articulations and performances. I analyse the way in which people's everyday practices of hospitality interact with images of the "public stranger" found in post-revolutionary modernisation narratives. I point out the tension between division and unity which underpins these narratives as well as the way they are assimilated, reproduced and subverted in everyday hospitality practices. . Discussing empirical studies of Georgian hospitality, analysis of press and films, and data from my fieldwork, this chapter depicts the shifting lines between insiders and outsiders which have been drawn on changing images of otherness attached to figure of the guest-stranger across recent Georgian history.

Before investigating images of "public strangers" *vis-à-vis* hospitality practices in post-revolutionary Georgia, I focus on hospitality as a marker of Georgian distinctiveness in a system of supposed moral, cultural, social, political and economic homogeneity such as Soviet society. Analysis of public representations of Georgian hospitality provided by Soviet films and magazines highlights the ambivalence of images which depicted hospitality as an enjoyable practice, but also as an expression of principles at odds with socialist values. Outsiders' representations of hospitality as a unifying bond of national identity reproduced Georgians' articulations of hospitality as an essential feature of Georgianness. Yet, such images were made ambivalent by the use of irony, which conveyed how official institutions disapproved of these unorthodox practices.



The public representation of hospitality as a unifying bond is in tension with the private articulations and performances of hospitality which developed alongside increasing social inequalities following the end of the Soviet Union. Behind the façade of hospitality as an all-national practice which disregards the status of citizens, hospitality was a framework in which moral, cultural, social, political and economic differences were given shape. In the 1990s, extravagant hospitality events marked the emergence of a class of “new rich” amid socio-economic deprivation. The image of hospitality as an all-Georgian bond regained momentum in the narratives of national unity which accompanied Saakashvili’s rise to power. Particularly in the aftermath of the 2008 war with Russia, the Georgian people assertively differentiated itself from its powerful neighbour, the “public stranger” and undesired guest *par excellence*.

Yet, despite post-revolutionary narratives of unity, Saakashvili’s Georgia stood out as an increasingly fragmented society. The image of the “public stranger” was attached to the part of the population which was linked to the past. Reliance on traditional forms of hospitality was regarded as a mark of backwardness, identifying those members of society who did not fit into the government’s modernisation project. The clear-cut separation between the public and the private envisaged by post-revolutionary narratives defined hospitality as a practice of private consumption, which was available on the market according to one’s financial means. Yet, at the same time hospitality practices were assessed on public ground, which worked as a legitimising framework for the social and economic inequality brought about by the government’s neoliberal reforms. The tension between mainstream images of the “public stranger” and the way in which people reframed such images in their hospitality practices highlights the ambivalent status of hospitality as a unifying *and* divisive paradigm in both public narratives and private practices.

## 3.2 Georgians as “public strangers”? National distinctiveness in the Soviet system

### 3.2.1 Between stigmatisation and irony: Soviet representations of Georgian hospitality

Georgia’s distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* foreign domination has been largely predicated on hospitality as a specific feature of the national community. In the Soviet Union, the depiction of Georgians as renowned hosts with a penchant for (often excessive) feasting was a familiar image, cultivated not only by Georgians themselves, but also by Russians and other Soviet nationalities. These images were indicative of an ambivalent attitude towards the “inherently” hospitable nature of Georgians. Soviet films and magazines stereotyped Georgians in a relatively benevolent way, as warm and spontaneous yet somehow bizarrely antiquated people in their relentless commitment to traditional hospitality practices. Georgia was considered the most “exotic” part of the Soviet Union, a country with beautiful nature, a pleasant climate, good food and a friendly population, which was chosen as a holiday destination by many members of the Party’s *nomenklatura*. However, the orientalisation of the country and its traditions was connected to a more negative attitude to Georgians’ habits. Practices of hospitality clashed with Soviet principles from various moral, cultural, social, political and economic perspectives. In this section, I use Soviet films and humorous magazines as examples of the tension between stigmatisation and irony which underpinned public images of Georgians as “strangers” in the supposedly homogenous Soviet landscape.

An ironic yet benevolent attitude towards Georgians’ natural good-heartedness is found in the 1977 film *Mimino* (Georgian for “sparrowhawk”). The film’s plot focuses on a Georgian pilot who leaves his village in the mountains, where he flies helicopters for a small local company, and moves to Moscow to fulfil his dream of piloting large aircraft for international airlines. An important scene features the protagonist in a Moscow hotel restaurant, toasting and dancing in the Georgian traditional way, to the delight and amusement of other non-Georgian guests. However, life in the capital city is hostile to the genuine mountain man, who eventually decides to give up his career and return to his native village, where social relations are more authentic.

Another successful film from 1966, *Kavkazskaya Plennitsa, ili Novye Priklyucheniya Shurika* (literally: “A female prisoner of the Caucasus, or Shurik’s new adventures”, released in the West as *Kidnapping, Caucasian style*), parodies Georgian (and Caucasian) traditions, which are depicted as being employed for the sly deception of outsiders. The protagonist, Shurik, is a kind yet naïve Russian ethnography student, who travels to the Caucasus to study local customs, including hospitality traditions. In an early scene, locals get Shurik drunk, teaching him traditional toasts and pushing him to drink a large amount of wine from a horn (*q’antsi*), leading to him eventually being taken away by the police. The core plot sees a trio of local men, portrayed with the stereotypical features of Caucasian mountaineers, such as moustaches, traditional hats, furry coats and daggers, persuading Shurik that bride kidnapping is a widespread local habit. The three men want the Russian ethnographer to kidnap Nina, a young student with whom he has fallen in love, and take her to a powerful local man who wants to marry her. The Caucasian men rely on Shurik’s eagerness to comply with local customs in order to realise their plan, which is eventually disrupted.

Soviet magazines also portrayed excessive conviviality and double-dealing attitudes to visitors as specific features of Georgians. Anthropologist Paul Manning provides a thorough analysis of cartoons from the Soviet humour magazine *Niangi* which embody this trend (2003). The cartoons depict the specifics of traditional Georgian hospitality along two main lines. First, the exaggerations of *supra* and *tamadoba* are approached with irony. A cartoon parodies the well-consolidated habit of welcoming guests with “three-to-four storey *supras*” (Manning 2003: 8), portraying the *tamada* as saying: “Remove these plates and suckling pigs so the guest can see me!” (8-9)<sup>29</sup>. Irony also applies to the often irrational primacy which Georgians bestow upon hospitality norms – in this case, those related to who is allowed to leave the *supra*, and when. A doctor called to the aid of a dying man is held by the *tamada*, who will not let him go until he has one more drink, fulfilling his primary duty as a Georgian man (10).

Second, hospitality practices are depicted as a mirror of Georgian society *vis-à-vis* the socialist state. Certain cartoons highlight the character of *supra* as a wasteful

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<sup>29</sup> This and the following quotes are Manning’s translation of the Georgian text in the cartoons.

form of consumption in contrast with the socialist emphasis on production, which also feeds the stereotype of Georgians as lazy party lovers with no concern about working for the collective good. In one example, Georgian men sit under a tree drinking, while in the background other people are working. In the caption, the men complain: “We stay up all night long (feasting, *author’s note*) and in the *kolkhoz* they still call us lazy!” (18). Furthermore, hospitality is depicted as a practice which fosters connections through which favours are exchanged, deals are arranged and privileged channels are accessed. A cartoon entitled “Toast” (in Georgian *Sadghegrdzelo*) features a man raising a horn and pronouncing the following toast: “[...] To the good ole boy networks (in Georgian, *dzma-bich’oba*, from *dzma*, “brother”, and *bich’o*, “boy”, *author’s note*), skill, and the power of hospitality!” The personal (material and non-material) gains that one can attain by organising or attending a *supra* are openly stated (21).

Soviet representations of Georgian hospitality in films and magazines indicate that the tradition of hospitality, widely depicted by Georgians as a distinctive feature of their national identity, was defined in a similar way by Soviet institutions. Their alleged fascination with traditional practices was approached by outsiders with curiosity mixed with irony. Non-Georgian Soviet citizens regarded the distinctiveness attached to Georgians and their hospitality practices in an ambivalent way. Georgians’ hosting skills were admired by Soviet people, who enjoyed taking part in *supra* and being treated to the delicious food and wine from the Caucasian republic. At the same time, the stereotype of Georgians as exotically different people implied that the moral, cultural and social features in which hospitality practices were embedded were regarded as something alien, and possibly hostile to Soviet principles. In the supposedly homogenous socialist system, hospitality conveyed alternative moral, cultural, social, political and economic values, which contested legitimacy with the Soviet state. For this reason, behind the more or less benevolent humour directed at the distinct nature of Georgian hospitality practices, Soviet authorities considered this otherness to be a threat to their hegemonic rule.

### 3.2.2 Affirming national identity or endangering the system?

The hostility of the Soviet state to the disruptive effects of hospitality practices on socialist principles went beyond the ironic representation of such practices in films and magazines. The suspicion, and often even open stigmatisation, with which the authorities met manifestations of hospitality indicates that such practices were perceived as more harmful to the Soviet order than merely slightly excessive folkloric representations. *Supra* and *tamadoba* contradicted the socialist state's image as a flawless system, as the symbols of lavish consumption conveyed by traditional hospitality were at odds with Soviet ideology, but this was not the only matter of concern. Hospitality also penetrated the political and economic relations between the state and its citizens.

In line with the humorous depictions analysed above, the socialist state regarded the Georgian feast as “a misuse of Soviet property, [which absorbed] energy that should be put to more socially – that is officially – approved ends” (Mars & Altman 1987: 270). To an external observer, in the late Soviet years “the *supra* seemed all the more grandiose because it contrasted so dramatically with the ‘Soviet way of life’ as it was represented at the time of Gorbachev and Reagan: the drinking (despite Gorbachev’s dry laws), the expenditure (despite Soviet salaries), the seeming absence of politics [...]” (Tuite 2005: 9). Such descriptions, emphasising images of conspicuous consumption and depoliticised leisure *vis-à-vis* socialist principles, framed *supra* as opposed to the Soviet system on moral and cultural, but also political and economic, grounds. Hospitality, rather than being an exotic practice largely confined to the private sphere, provided Soviet Georgians with a public role other than that envisaged by the official system.

The mobilisation of resources involved in hospitality practices circumvented the rigid system of planned economy, enabling the redistribution of goods and services through unofficial channels (Ledeneva 1998). Relationships of reciprocity, mutual obligation, inclusion and exclusion generated through hospitality exchanges linked individuals “through trust-based honour commitments” (Mars & Altman 1983: 557). Several observers have pointed out that these connections were able to challenge the fundamental mechanisms of socialist politics and economics (Tuite 2005, Suny 1988, Mars & Altman 1987, 1983). Personal connections stemming from

reciprocal exchanges formed the core of the Georgian second economy, a phenomenon of a “nepotistic, highly personalised entrepreneurial nature”, very different from “the formal, bureaucratic model of the Soviet economy” (Mars & Altman 1983: 557). Indeed, through the “manipulation of such ego-focused networks [...] Georgians can and do influence and manipulate the organisation of the state” (Mars & Altman 1987: 276).

The historian Ronald Gregory Suny has pointed out that, although unofficial activities took place in all Soviet republics, in Georgia they were carried out “on an unparalleled scale and with unrivalled scope and daring” (1988: 306). Official institutions regarded hospitality practices as clashing with the idea of an overarching socialist identity. Firm disapproval of traditional hospitality practices was expressed in a 1975 resolution, in which the Georgian Communist Party pledged to “increase the fight against harmful traditions and customs” (Muehlfried 2007: page no. not available). Similarly, in the last years of the Soviet regime, Georgian historians were warned by Soviet authorities to “beware of ‘a certain infatuation with antiquity’” (Suny 1988: 378), in essence meaning the celebration of Georgian history and identity through hospitality practices.

The Soviet authorities’ stigmatisation of hospitality practices was taken by Georgian hosts and guests as a further confirmation of their uniqueness *vis-à-vis* the alleged homogeneity and regimentation of Soviet moral, cultural and social norms, as well as a sign of their cunning for circumventing official rules imposed by the Soviet system (Nodia 2014, Tuite 2005, Goldstein 1999). Beside standing out as a cultural and social bond which united the Georgian people, hospitable exchanges were considered forms of “equality and mannered social interaction” shared by co-nationals – particularly city dwellers (Manning 2009b: 944). For Georgian citizens, in an ambivalent relationship of support and subversion with socialist principles (see 1.3.2), the circulation of goods and services through hospitality events was the paradigm of a culture of camaraderie, considered a pivotal feature of shared identity. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the social, political and economic disaster which followed, hospitality gradually lost its meaning as a unifying bond regulating social interactions across the national community.

Hospitality as a “coping strategy” (Giordano & Hayoz 2013, Round & Williams 2010) to overcome the shortcomings of official institutions became increasingly essential amid widespread poverty. Yet, at the same time hospitality practices began to express emerging social hierarchies. Rather than sociability being regulated by practices of equitable exchange in the public sphere, the elites who had risen from the murky political and economic context of the 1990s engaged in ostentatious yet vulgar displays of hospitality as a way of showing off their recently acquired private wealth (Manning 2009a, 2009b, Muehlfried 2005). While making up for an unjust system, hospitality also became a mark of the widening socio-economic divides which the same system was largely responsible for. The Other in Soviet times was predominantly collocated in the outer world – in this case Georgians *vis-à-vis* the Soviet system. In the 1990s, images of the “public stranger”, predicated on rising inequality, emerged from within the national community.

### **3.3 From sociability to ostentation: Hospitality as a mark of socio-economic differences**

#### **3.3.1 Reciprocal support or onerous obligation? The dilemma of hospitality amid poverty**

The demise of the Soviet Union was generally welcomed in Georgia as liberation from an oppressive power. Yet, many citizens struggled to adapt to a changing situation in which the state, which people still expected to provide jobs and services (Dudwick 2002), was unable or unwilling to carry out its basic functions – such as organising an efficient police force, transport or schools. While in Soviet times the “official public” (Oswald & Voronkov: 106, see Chapter 1) was considered an alien entity whose constraints could be circumvented, in the 1990s public authorities were resented for their “indifference, dishonesty, lack of professionalism, and passivity” (Dudwick 2002: 219). Public institutions were to blame for their inability to provide workplaces and security, if not for the deliberate greed with which they plundered public resources (Manning 2009b, Shelley et al. 2007, Dudwick 2002).

A widespread sense of deterioration, not only economic and political, but also social and moral, is reported by various sources which focus on the initial years of

the post-Soviet era (Manning 2009, Shelley et al. 2007, Dudwick 2002). The country and its people seemed to have fallen into a spiral of selfishness and brutality. The honesty and integrity which traditional social norms emphasised as essential values of respectable citizens had been displaced by an unscrupulous daily fight for material wealth, generating a deep cynicism. Nodar, a character in the 2005 film *Tbilisi Tbilisi*, powerfully portrays the helplessness of people facing the bleakness of those years. Talking to Otari, a former academic working at a market stall – himself a symbol of the perversity of times in which “professors sell margarine and salesmen have become ministers” – Nodar cries out:

*Bat’ono* (Mister) Otari, you are an educated man, a professor. Is that what we call Georgians? Have we always been like that? How did we survive for so many centuries? Either that history is all bluff, or I understood nothing. I can understand everything: Abkhazia, refugees, hardships. But not the way people have lost their conscience! All is being sold! (*Tbilisi Tbilisi* 2005)

Since the public sphere was ravaged by poverty and violence, people’s public life moved into the private domestic realm. The house became the gathering point for the collective distribution of resources, mostly acquired through unofficial channels. With a state barely capable of providing basic assistance to citizens, personal connections were vital to make ends meet in everyday life. Responsibility to one’s community, along with the “duty” of hospitality, fostered solidarity amid poverty and instability. Gurami (62, retired, see 1.2.2) proudly recalled his munificence at the time. Thanks to connections in his native village, his family enjoyed scarce goods:

Every month, I got a bucket of fresh *sulguni* [renowned Georgian cheese, *author’s note*]. Nobody had *sulguni* in those days! All the neighbours used to hang around in my house, because they know I am a generous man, they know I wouldn’t keep everything for myself.



Similarly, Lela (53, social worker, see 1.2.1) recounted that friends and neighbours would gather at her place to keep warm in the cold season: “We had a small oil heater, and that was quite a luxury! We were happy to have the neighbours’ families around, my children played with their children, it was cheerful”. Both these cases indicate “how hunger illuminated the social”, specifically attributing to neighbours (*mezobeli*) an “almost-family status” (Chatwin 1997: 72). Sharing food with those hardest hit by poverty was the norm, especially with regard to those living close, who were object of special concern (for a more detailed analysis of neighbours’ ambivalence as intrusive yet supportive figures, see 1.2.2).

Yet, the various hardships severely curtailed people’s ability to get involved in the kind of hospitality acts envisaged by tradition (Shelley et al. 2007). Lavish rituals of *supra* and *tamadoba* were crucial elements in maintaining a respectable position in the community. People felt “deeply humiliated” for being unable to afford to celebrate hospitality events in the traditional way on occasions such as weddings or funerals, or even to exchange hospitality on a more mundane basis (Dudwick 2002: 218). Hospitality was caught in the tension between the desire to maintain social ties through reciprocal exchanges in an increasingly hostile outer world and the imperative to preserve the few available resources for one’s own family (see Gilmore 1975).

. The desire to open one’s place to guests was thwarted by the fear of jeopardising the family’s reputation by exposing the house’s miserable conditions. Since “Georgians consider their home to be a visible sign of their wellbeing”, hospitality events taking place in “poor, deteriorating, or temporary housing” would defeat a key purpose of hospitality, the lavish display of the host’s wealth (Dudwick 2002: 216).

The perspective of my participant Elik’o (62, retired engineer) is a paradigmatic example of frustration exacerbated by concerns about one’s own reputation. Elik’o lived with her adoptive daughter in a three bedroom flat. The two women occupied one small bedroom, while the other rooms were rented out to foreign students. Recalling the times when she and her family had been able to provide conspicuous hospitality to their guests, Elik’o affirmed that her social and

financial position had steadily worsened since the end of the Soviet Union. It is worth noting that this perspective was shared by several other participants, who, while emphasising the dire social, political, and economic context of the 1990s – especially compared with the Soviet era – also stressed their disappointment with Saakashvili’s government, which had allegedly failed to improve their life conditions. Elik’o belonged to the group of people to whom Caroline Humphrey refers as “the dispossessed” (2002: 21), that is, people who had been deprived of their social and economic status during the post-Soviet political and economic “transition”. Lacking both the money and the space to offer what she regarded as appropriate hospitality, Elik’o explained:

I really love guests, but I no longer have the ability to host them as before. I think that if people value you and come as guests, you must receive them properly, and set up at least a small *supra*. If a guest comes to my house, I cannot offer just a coffee. So I have had less and less guests around in the last twenty years or so. When I really miss somebody, I have a chat on the phone [which somehow helps maintain social relationships in a less committing way, without putting one’s reputation at stake – *author’s note*].

The tension between the desire to engage in hospitality practices and the reluctance to risk one’s reputation is also illustrated in a scene from *In Bloom*, a 2014 Georgian film (originally titled *Grdzeli nateli dgheebi*) featuring two fourteen year old girls, Ek’a and Natia, growing up in the shattered context of early 1990s Tbilisi (see Chapter 4). Ek’a visits Natia, her best friend, who has married a young neighbour and lives with her husband’s family. Natia looks unhappy, life with her in-laws is hard. She particularly suffers from the fact that she cannot celebrate her birthday at her husband’s place. Her mother-in-law has ruled out the possibility of paying for such an event because the family is still drowning in debt from the recent wedding. Natia would be happy with just a few schoolmates coming over and contributing some food and drinks to the party, but the mother-in-law sees this arrangement as a

“disgrace to the family”, since it would violate traditional hospitality rules which decree that the generous offering must come exclusively from the host’s side.

The dramatic decline in many citizens’ life conditions, which thwarted people’s ability to provide hospitality in the way expected of proper Georgians, was accompanied by the simultaneous quick enrichment of part of the population. The few people who had benefited more or less directly from the chaotic process of privatisation following the fall of the Soviet Union were regarded with suspicion, if not contempt, by many Georgians. The wealth accumulated by these “new rich” was considered illegitimate and even obscene, both for the dubious ways in which such resources had allegedly been acquired and for the huge disparity between these people’s luxurious lifestyle and the struggles of the majority of the population to make ends meet. Moreover, the “new rich” were despised by a large part of the former Soviet intelligentsia for being uncultured, which their ostentatious display of tasteless material wealth made apparent (Manning 2009b, Tuite 2005, Muehlfried 2005).

Pretentious hospitality events amid misery were part and parcel of the way in which the “new rich” were identified as a detestable “public stranger”. Conversely, the theatrical exhibition of recently acquired wealth, often taking the form of lavish feasts, was seen by the emerging elites as a sign of positive distinction from their impoverished fellow country people, who could not afford any manifestation of hospitality. Once a bond which unified the Georgian nation *vis-à-vis* the alterity of the Soviet regime, in the 1990s hospitality became a yardstick to define the deepening social and economic divisions.

### **3.3.2 Ostentatious hosts: Hospitality as lack of culturedness**

The frustration generated by the inability to provide hospitality was exacerbated by an emerging social hierarchy, which was largely seen not as a mirror of specific merits, but as a result of unjust privilege, possibly attained through illicit means. The “new Georgians” who emerged from the breakup of the Soviet system were mostly identified with selfish consumption and showing-off, corruption and violence (Manning 2009b). There are two words in Georgian slang which define members of these emerging categories of citizens (and which were still widespread in post-revolutionary Georgia at the time of my fieldwork): *goimi* and *mariazhi*.

*Goimi*, translatable into English as “hick”, indicates people who moved to Tbilisi and other urban areas from the countryside. The noun *goimoba*, referring to the attitudes of such people, encompasses “a wide range of behaviours, linguistic, and other semiotic phenomena”, “a broadband broadcast of unculturedness” (Manning 2009a: 17). Recklessly driving big black cars, usually parked on the pavement or in the middle of the street; spending a lot of money on ostentatious items like mobile phones, sunglasses and trainers; ignoring good table manners: all these are examples of *goimoba*. My friends and acquaintances used the term on a regular basis, together with a more neutral word, *sopleli*, “villager, countryman” (from *sopeli*, “village”). Unlike *goimi*, the latter term does not necessarily mock a countryman who pretends to be a cultured urban dweller, but just denotes someone with provincial manners. Yet, the word is rarely used in a positive sense. In my participants’ view, *sopleli* (or *goimi*) were people who, among other things, were exceedingly keen on *supra* and *tamadoba*, enforcing hospitality norms upon visitors in intrusive ways and showing off to guests by gorging on food, drinking a lot and pronouncing long and loud toasts.

The meaning of *mariazhi* (and *mariazhoba*) overlaps with *goimi* as far as uncultured behaviour is concerned. However, the former term has a stronger socio-economic connotation, since *mariazhi* is the *parvenu* who holds economic and often political power in post-socialist Georgia. An epitome of *mariazhi* who was pointed out to me was a neighbour of some of my participants. This man, like many others, had made a lot of money in the chaotic aftermath of the Soviet Union’s collapse, and in the late 2000s was running a successful business selling expensive foreign-branded spectacles. He had built himself a pretentious house in an otherwise relatively modest neighbourhood. His swimming pool, hidden behind a conspicuous gate, was the object of my friends’ scorn, and they asserted that the neighbour never used this luxury because he had no clue how to maintain it properly. The neighbour was also well known for his propensity for excess. I was told that he would throw large parties at which people became very drunk and sometimes celebrated by firing guns in the air from the balcony.

In a context of widespread deprivation such as 1990s Georgia, *mariazhoba* entailed “theatricalised displays of wealth, implying exteriorised consumption without interior *kultura*, as well as excess beyond the norms of *kultura*, but also the subterfuge of putting on a public show of wealth when private means are lacking”

(Manning 2009a: 18). For the newly emerging economic and political elites (which were frequently connected to the criminal world to various extents) offering lavish hospitality was a way to assert social differences rather than being an act of generosity. Hospitable events were vulgar displays which emphasised social differences in a world where “the space outside the front door is no longer a sphere of cultured public comportment, or indeed of culture at all” (Manning 2009b: 944).

In a time when things were “falling apart” (Dudwick et al. 2002), hospitality acted as an exchange of horizontal solidarity amid harsh life conditions. However, at the same time, practices of conspicuous hospitality, while being out of reach for a large part of the population, marked the emergence of new economic and political elites whose fortune, often built on dubious means, was shown off amid poverty. The unifying bond (in both a positive and a negative sense) which hospitality represented *vis-à-vis* the Soviet system was overturned. Hospitality became a divisive sign of emerging social differences, which were largely perceived as illegitimate. The identification of “public strangers” within Georgian society – whether the uncultured *parvenu* or the miserable people with no means to enjoy the good things in life – deepened the moral, cultural, social, and economic cleavages across the population.

The new narratives brought by the Rose Revolution allegedly envisaged the effacement of such divisions. The Georgian people was depicted as working cohesively to achieve a unitary goal: rapid modernisation and radical detachment from the Soviet and post-Soviet past. The promotion of a powerful image of the “public stranger” was conducive to cementing national unity in support of the new government’s endeavours. Largely considered an imperialistic power, Russia was the epitome of this otherness, which represented what Georgia never was and never wanted to be. In the next section, I analyse the way in which anti-Russian feelings, which depict Russia and Russians as the paradigm of the “public stranger”, intermingle with hospitality, both in mainstream political narrative and at the level of everyday practices.

### 3.4 Hospitality as a tool to counteract guests' hostility?

#### 3.4.1 An intrusive neighbour: Rejecting or welcoming the Russian "guest"?

The image of Russia as the illegitimate occupier of Georgia, as found in both national and international scholarship as well as in popular narratives, developed during the Soviet era from its roots in tsarist times (Rayfield 2013, Magarotto 2004, Lang 1975, 1957). There was a significant re-emergence of such attitudes following the Rose Revolution, peaking with the short but devastating war in August 2008 which confirmed the loss of the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia was framed as an aggressive power, determined to keep Georgia in the backyard of its "Asiatic" empire and prevent the country from pursuing its Western aspirations – notably to join NATO and the EU (Tsygankov & Tarver-Wahlquist 2009). The hospitable nature of the Georgian people found itself at odds with an uninvited guest who, turning the main hospitality laws upside down, behaved like the master in the host's home. An inflamed political rhetoric resonated across the population, demanding that Russia and Russians "go home".

My first visit to Georgia took place between March 2008 and June 2009 (with a two-month interruption between July and September 2008), so I was able to gain first-hand insight into the way narratives which framed Russia as an increasingly dreadful "public stranger" interacted with people's everyday articulations and performances of hospitality. Russia and Russians were framed by some of my participants as the "absolute evil", the "public stranger" *par excellence* with respect to Georgia and Georgians. The use, and even knowledge, of the Russian language was rejected, regardless of the role that Russian had in many Georgians' everyday interactions. Rumours of people being verbally (and sometimes even physically) assaulted for speaking Russian in the street or in a shop circulated widely. Indeed, I met a few people who denied being able to speak Russian or refused to do so, declaring that they were trying to forget a language that had been forcibly imposed upon them.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Such extreme views were shared by a Russian counterpart. During a workshop in Moscow in 2014, a Russian fellow academic expressed sorrow at the fact that, unlike me, people from her country were barred from visiting Georgia. In her view, which she presented as widespread among her co-nationals, the local population's supposed hostility made such a trip dangerous for Russians.

The image of Russia and Russians as unwelcome visitors, who not only came to stay in open violation of the appropriate behaviour for guests, but also enforced themselves on their hosts, developed over more than two centuries. However, Georgian history is underpinned by an ambivalent attitude towards outsiders, predicated on the tension between resistance to invasion and assimilation and peaceful reception of other cultures (Persians, Turks, Russians; Rayfield 2013, Chatwin 1997). This tension is embodied in *Kartlis deda*, “the Mother of Georgia”, a huge statue representing a woman, which rises from on the hills around old Tbilisi. The statue holds a sword in one hand to protect the country from enemies, while the other hand offers a bowl of wine to welcome guests.

Multifaceted attitudes towards Russia and Russians were reflected in other participants’ views. These were mostly people who had lived under the Soviet regime for a significant amount of time (and therefore were over 40 year old at the time of my 2008-2009 fieldwork). In these participants’ perspectives, relations between the two countries were understood as unavoidably difficult, even to the point of war. However, it was also acknowledged that Georgians and Russians had a long history of historical and cultural ties, which on an everyday level had often translated into peaceful co-existence and fruitful exchange. For much of this generation, living and working with Russians, speaking Russian, reading Russian literature and watching Russian films was part of their everyday life and did not necessarily conflict with their Georgian identity.

Most importantly, Russians were habitual short or long-term guests in Georgia. Like all visitors, Russia and Russians were subject to the Georgian hospitality code, which rests on a tension between welcoming and suspicion, conviviality and competitiveness. In a country like Georgia, which is vulnerable to penetration from outside, hospitality is an essential practice for maintaining a strong local identity (Chatwin 1997, Parsons 1982). In his analysis of Greek hospitality (with specific reference to people from the highlands) Herzfeld analyses the way in which, through the offer of material and non-material items representing Georgian cultural and social specifics, guests are “englobed” in the hosts’ value system ( 1987, 1985). By englobing outsiders, hosts assert their superiority over their guests’ moral and social system (Sorge 2009, Heatherington 2001). Hospitality becomes a way of “substituting moral advantage for political subordination”, of overturning patterns of

domination “at one and the same time” (Herzfeld 1987: 77; see also Bakhtin 1984 [1965]).<sup>31</sup>

Recalling the past, my respondent Gurami (63, retired, see 1.2.3) recounted:

In communist times there were so many Russians here. Some of them came on holiday, some of them stayed longer for work or even got married to Georgians. All of them loved Georgia so much, and I bet they did! We have everything here, sun, good water, good food, good wine, they have none of those things in that frozen country of theirs!

Russians were ridiculed by Gurami for lacking, and possibly craving, the beauty, prosperity and warmth of the Georgian land and its people. This attitude acquires specific relevance, as the political, economic and military power of Russia (in this case Soviet Russia, but the argument applies beyond the socialist era) was enforced on the Georgian population. Yet, even the most powerful guests are helpless when they have to abide by the rigid hospitality norms imposed by their hosts, who overturn their subordinated position and manage to dominate the dominators.

### **3.4.2 Neither Russians nor Westerners: Overturning power relations through hospitality**

The discomfort generated by the encounter with the stranger (whether sought or not, and however much prolonged) is managed through overwhelming and often

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<sup>31</sup> In spite of a number of similarities, the reversal of power relationships through hospitality practices differs substantially from Bakhtin’s “world upside down” created through the carnival (1984 [1965]). While the “englobing” of the powerful in hospitality practices entails the submission of official authority to the moral, cultural and social world of the dominated, the hierarchical and exclusive structure of hospitality, embodied first and foremost by the figure of the *tamada*, is in contrast with the freedom of interaction and expression which underpins manifestations of the carnivalesque. For the same reasons, I do not venture into a comparison between hospitality practices and Turner’s *communitas* (1969). Although I am aware of some analogies that can be established between the two phenomena, I believe that hospitality practices, especially in the traditional form of *supra*, do not conform to Turner’s model of “anti-structure”, understood as an egalitarian experience of liberty which reverses hegemonic power relationships. As an ambivalent practice, hospitality is both subversive and supportive of the status quo.



aggressive hosting practices. Guests are caught by the awkward need to preserve themselves from excessive hospitality (often expressed through the huge amount of food and alcoholic drink they are expected to consume) while they must also avoid offending their hosts by refusing to become (sufficiently) involved in hospitality rituals. Working at a propeller factory in Soviet times, Gurami had been in touch with visiting Russian co-workers:

I had Russians over to this house so many times, I gave them wine, *sashliki* (meat skewers, *mts'vadi* in Georgian) and so on. You know, Russians boast they are the best drinkers in the world, but I tell you, we Georgians are far better! Whether we drank vodka, wine or *ch'ach'a*, they got drunk and gave up much earlier than me, they couldn't believe that a non-Russian could handle alcohol the way I did, but they also respected me because of that.

Russians' political, economic and military superiority is subverted at the Georgian table. What may sound like the superficial ostentation of one's feasting skills has broad moral, social and political implications. While it unfolds at the domestic level (as in the case of Gurami and the Russian guests in his house), the process of englobing outsiders means that "the stance the host takes towards the guest reproduces collective attitudes to the social or cultural group that the latter represents" (Herzfeld 1987: 77). Subjugating Russian guests through hospitality practices, in which Georgian hosts excel "by default", is a statement about the whole nation's superiority over its powerful neighbour – in terms of history, culture, moral and intellectual probity, manliness, bravery, resilience and so on.

Englobing outsiders is a strategy to overcome the threat posed by the stranger. Instead of being demonised, otherness is neutralised through the strict structure of hospitality events. Unlike participants who disavowed any link at all between Georgians and Russians other than cruel domination, Gurami, despite mocking Russians for being "less" than Georgians, displayed no specific acrimony against the neighbouring people, their language or their culture. He gladly spoke excellent Russian when he needed to, had sent his children to a Russian kindergarten and had

bookshelves full of Russian books. He also recalled his Russian friends nostalgically, as well as trips to Russia in his youth.

The dynamics of englobing strangers to reverse patterns of domination applied not only to Russian outsiders, but also to visitors coming from the widely celebrated “West”. Post-revolutionary narratives of dichotomies, which depicted the Russian “absolute evil” as being opposed to Western models of democracy and well-being which all Georgians were (or should be) following, had a problematic reception among the population. Guests from Western countries were seen as embodiments of what people were constantly told was the most developed and desirable socio-political system. Western visitors were particularly appreciated, since they brought news from a part of the world to which Georgians generally, yet vaguely, aimed to belong. This attitude was mostly visible among young people, for whom the “Western lifestyle” – conceived more in terms of entertainment and consumption choices than of social and political issues – was a source of fascination (see Chapter 4).

However, similarly to Gurami’s attitudes to his Russian guests, the perceived superiority of Western guests was subverted by mocking visitors for being less of “tough guys” (*magari*) than Georgians. The alleged sophistication attributed to Westerners, rather than being a model to admire, was often associated with weakness and flavourlessness by my participants. The insistent offer of food and alcoholic beverages is a case in point (see Chapter 1). Apparently considered by hosts to be endlessly hungry, guests are virtually forbidden to prevent their plates being continually filled up (Zanca 2010, Polese 2010). Reluctance to accept food is met by more or less explicit jokes about foreigners’ delicate stomachs and dull taste. The type of food offered may be an equally serious challenge for outsiders. Georgian traditional food is usually very savoury, fatty and spicy. Unaccustomed Western palates may find sheep entrails, *ts’its’aka* (hot chilli sauce) and *tq’emali* (sour plum sauce) odd. My status as an Italian (therefore someone supposedly akin to Georgians in terms of propensity to feast, see Introduction) partly spared me from such mocking. Yet, when I tried to decline extra food or drink, my hosts often pointed out that even my fellow country people could not compete with Georgians’ eating and drinking skills.

Englobing strangers through hospitality is a way to mitigate or even subvert imbalances generated by relations of domination. Hospitality works in an ambivalent way, reaching out to people coming from other countries but at the same time reinforcing in-group ties by reaffirming hosts' moral and cultural superiority over their visitors. Among my respondents, this dynamic informs the relation between hosts and foreign guests, not only with respect to Russia and Russians, largely framed as the main embodiment of otherness, but also *vis-à-vis* Western visitors. Westerners, while usually being met with more curiosity than their Russian counterparts (whom, for historical and cultural reasons, are regarded as an already familiar kind of outsider) were nevertheless kept in a position of externality and subdued to local norms. Narratives spread by Saakashvili's government, which pictured the whole nation as assertively rejecting Russian influence while enthusiastically framing its identity within the Western paradigm, proved to be largely inconsistent with people's everyday articulations and performances of hospitality. Images of Georgianness were constructed as radically distinct from both the category of "Russian" and the category of "European"/"Western", which similarly embodied ideas of "public strangeness".

Yet, the emphasis of mainstream narratives on irreconcilable divisions between the systems underpinning "Russia" and the "West" was reflected in deepening divisions across post-revolutionary Georgian society. The doubly negative association between Russia and the past emphasised in post-revolutionary narratives framed a certain category of citizens as attached to the old Soviet and post-Soviet orders, and therefore unsuitable to the radical renovation of the country. Instead, people with a Western-oriented spirit were depicted as the "good" part of the population, who would lead the country to a future of democracy and prosperity (see Chapter 2). This "new" kind of citizen would show contempt for those who were regarded as reminders of a despised past, who had been left behind in the "transition" from socialism, and who therefore were incapable of adapting to Georgia's transformation into a "modern" society. In this context, hospitality practices worked as a divisive means which distinguished "modern/good" from "backward/bad" citizens, upholding images of "strangeness" which penetrated public narratives and private practices across Georgian society.

## 3.5 From public exchange to private commodity: Tensions of modern hospitality

### 3.5.1 Irrational spending or reciprocal solidarity?

The Rose Revolution pledged to reunify the country under the banner of modernisation and efface the deep divisions generated during the chaotic 1990s. The fervent nationalistic rhetoric which the post-revolutionary government engaged in was meant to be the cement which would solidify national unity *vis-à-vis* the Russian “public stranger”.<sup>32</sup> The way in which people related to mainstream images of Russia’s “otherness” in their everyday articulations and performances of hospitality varied at both an individual and collective level. Yet, different attitudes towards Russia and Russians, beside reflecting people’s own perspectives on national and international politics, were manipulated in post-revolutionary narratives to represent the division between the past and the future within Georgian society itself (Gotfredsen 2014, Frederiksen 2013, Manning 2009a, 2009b; see also Chapter 2).

The past/future opposition, predicated on moral and cultural grounds by these narratives, was mirrored by widening gaps between the socio-economic status of citizens. The post-revolutionary government meant to use radical reforms to reverse the social, political and economic disaster which had unfolded in the 1990s. Political and economic models brought to Georgia from the West rested on the assumption that good public institutions and economic freedom bring development, which ultimately trickles down to the benefit of all citizens (Gugushvili 2014). However, to a large extent these expectations were disappointed. While between 2004 and 2012, GDP grew at a higher average than in neighbouring countries (Gugushvili 2014: 8), the data shows that poverty in Georgia is deeper than in other Eastern European or Central Asian states (World Bank 2012). A GINI coefficient of around also 42% indicates that the inequality rate exceeds the regional average.<sup>33</sup>

The growing inequality in citizens’ private wealth had a strong impact on articulations and performances of hospitality. According to tradition, hospitality was

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<sup>32</sup> Rayfield, D. (2008).

<sup>33</sup> Rekhviashvili, L. (2015). “Exporting Georgia’s Anti-corruption reforms to Ukraine: What makes them worth replicating?” LeftEast, 3 April. Available at: <http://www.criticatac.ro/lefteast/exporting-georgias-anti-corruption-reforms-to-ukraine-what-makes-them-worth-replicating/>

to be exchanged regardless of the social status and economic capacity of hosts and guests. The ability to provide “hospitality on a scale often in excess of what they can properly afford” (Lang 1966: 28) – to one’s family and friends, but also to unknown visitors – is a recurrent image in both local narratives and observers’ accounts (Shelley et al. 2007, Chatwin 1997). This holds true for the Soviet era and the 1990s, when people engaged in hospitality practices as a form of horizontal solidarity and as a channel to circulate goods and services amid endemic shortages. Resources invested in hospitality came from the intermingling of the public and the private: borrowing from friends and acquaintances, running into debt or pawning goods, but also siphoning off public resources through unofficial or openly illegal practices (patron-client relations, bribery, cheating at work and so on, Aliyev 2014a, Mars & Altman 1987, 1983).

In contrast, in free market conditions hospitality was supposed to be bought with money like any other commodity (see 2.3.2). In post-revolutionary Georgia, people with more money would be able to provide better hospitality to their guests. However, the moral perspective through which social and economic success was evaluated, along with the ambivalent attitude to “traditional” practices, makes the relationship between offering hospitality and private wealth problematic. The amount of money available to an individual or household, and the frequency and quality of hospitality that the individual or household offers to others, are not necessarily in a straightforward correlation with one another.

Spending time and money to treat guests generously on a regular basis appears to be in contrast with what Swader defines as the “capitalist personality” (2013). Economically successful people emerging from post-socialist societies are depicted as being driven by values such as individualism, ambition, work and materialism. While being pivotal to post-socialist citizens’ – real or perceived – social and economic success, the prominence of these values in everyday relationships would ultimately weaken kinship and friendship ties. The excessive expenditure of time and money demanded by traditional hospitality events would not match the profile of the Georgian “capitalist person”. The latter, emerging from either the breakdown of the Soviet Union or the massive deregulation taking place under Saakashvili, was morally grounded in the neoliberal ethos. The provision of hospitality, in its more or less lavish forms, would be based on a rational balance between maximising one’s

wealth and indulging in leisure activities. Individualism would be at odds with practices entailing the unconditional opening of houses and the sharing of intimacy with strangers. Conversely, less well-off people would make cautious use of their limited resources, which would not allow large expenditure on hospitality events.

However, such hypotheses, assuming too much about the all-pervasiveness of capitalism while leaving little agency to social actors, do not account accurately for the Georgian context. Referring to my experience in the field, money seemed to be a non-issue when it came to treating guests. People's ability to mobilise substantial resources in little time when it comes to engaging in hospitality practices is impressive (see also Chatwin 1997). My friend Levani (30, working occasionally as a builder or welder), was married to a younger girl, with whom he had had two children. Their financial situation was dire, since neither Levani nor his wife had a decent and stable income to support the household. However, their home, a small flat in the outskirts of Tbilisi which they shared with other relatives (also unemployed or underemployed), was always open to visitors.

On some occasions, when invited as guests, our friends brought basic goods, such as sugar and coffee, since Levani's family had run out of nearly everything. Sometimes such invitations were also the occasion to hand Levani money to pay the house bills or outstanding debts. But in other instances, a whole *supra* was laid out for visitors. Regardless of the way in which money had been found – a one-off payment from one of Levani's occasional jobs, a loan from friends – nobody, first and foremost our host and his family, seemed to think that saving these resources for essential necessities in such a precarious situation would be wiser than spending everything on a few hours of feasting.

Despite the emphasis on hard work, individual reward and rational maximisation of one's resources which informed the neoliberal ethos of post-revolutionary narratives, exchanges of hospitality in Saakashvili's Georgia endured as a fundamental form of solidarity for a large part of the population (Aliyev 2014a). Attachment to traditional norms of hospitality, which envisage trust, reciprocity and generosity as pivotal features of the host-guest relationship, enabled many citizens (such as Levani and his family) to receive support from their social ties *vis-à-vis* the

nearly total retreat of state aid (Gugushvili 2014, Rekhviashvili L. 2013; see Chapter 2).

As *supras* at Levani's house indicate, even poor people involved in these circles of exchanges were not only recipients but also donors of hospitality. This observation disproves the straightforward relation between private wealth and the provision of hospitality, and the opposite might turn out to be the case. This point was noted by several of my participants. Lik'a (27, PhD student and activist) highlighted that "quite often, families with more money are also in a way more 'Westernised', with all that this implies for hospitality practices". What are such implications? How did economically successful people in Saakashvili's Georgia approach hospitality from the perspective of their private wealth and their social position? How did Western-minded citizens articulate and perform practices of hospitality belonging to Georgian "tradition"?

### **3.5.2 Western-style hospitality: Purchasing modernity through private wealth**

People enjoying a (more or less) solid socio-economic condition who I met during my fieldwork can be generally gathered into two main groups. . One group were part of an emerging middle class, with relatively stable although not necessarily well-paid jobs (possibly with charities or NGOs) and a high level of education, often with knowledge of a foreign language and experience studying or working abroad. The other group were a class of far wealthier people connected with the economic and political elites, who could afford a lifestyle barred to the vast majority of the population. Yet, these extremely wealthy citizens differed from the uncultured new rich, the *mariazhi* who emerged in the Georgian urban landscape in the 1990s (see 3.3.2). My participants from post-revolutionary elites generally showed contempt for the vulgar displays of wealth associated with these *parvenu* people, often referring to ostentatiousness as a "specifically Georgian" attitude (see chapters 1 and 6). Instead, while by no means disdaining the spending of money on luxurious goods and leisure, most of these people cultivated what they articulated as "European taste", in terms of lifestyle, cultural interests and social and political awareness (see also Schimpfoss 2014).

Post-revolutionary elites were not restrained by individualistic calculation in their provision of hospitality as the abovementioned points on “capitalist personality” would suggest. On the contrary, I was met with friendliness and generosity at all times. Yet, usually the large amount of money available to these participants was not used to lay out gigantic *supras* with dozens of guests attending and endless food and drink provided. According to many of my participants from this socio-economic background, lavish banquets would amount to loutish pretentiousness. As Mariami (62, teacher) put it, “I believe that many Georgians do not really care about hospitality and guests. They just throw big *supra* to show off”.

Rather, money was spent to offer (particularly Western) guests expressions of hospitality which were articulated as more refined and therefore modern (see Chapter 2). When I was invited for dinner at her luxurious flat, my host Nana (38, housewife) explained that, apart from the ubiquitous *khach'ap'uri* (see 1.1.3), she had prepared only “European food” (soufflé, roasted vegetables and apple crumble) because she thought it was more appropriate for me. In a similar fashion, other participants from the same milieu praised what they articulated as “more European” expressions of hospitality – among which were *alapurshet'i* (*à la fourchette*) standing receptions (Tuite 2005, Manning 2003; see also 2.4.1) – which are the opposite of *supra* in both ritual form and symbolic content. Moderate forms of hospitality contrasted with *supra* inasmuch as the latter was seen as an antiquated and authoritarian practice (see Chapter 2), still enjoyed only by very traditional people who abide by a patriarchal social structure, or by heavy drinkers who have nothing else to do.

Although the critical re-elaboration of traditional hospitality amounts to a search for more inclusive practices (see chapters 2, 4 and 6), the contempt with which some members of post-revolutionary elites referred to *supra* and people involved in it is indicative of deep cleavages across the population. While proud of the reputation of the nation as a whole as great hosts, from the perspective of these “new” citizens of Saakashvili’s Georgia traditional practices such as *supra* were a potential hindrance of the country’s full development into a Western society. For this reason, these people aimed to detach themselves from such practices. Hospitable attitudes were to be expressed in more “progressive” ways, while at the same time those involved in traditional hospitality practices were stigmatised for their lack of moderation and their fascination with obsolete practices.



Socio-economic differences did matter in this regard. My participant Tak'o (45, housewife) is a rich woman who describes herself as "a very liberal person", intolerant of what she regards as Georgia's backward social norms. Tak'o expressed disapproval of "those Georgians who throw one *supra* after another, spending money they don't have and getting into debt or God knows what! I would rather look for a job if I was in their place". Besides conveying a straightforward judgement on what she considers silly or even harmful habits which ignore serious issues such as unemployment and lack of resources, Tak'o's words are revealing of the status of hospitality in Saakashvili's Georgia. When not promoted in stereotyped ways to boost tourism from abroad and nationalism at home, hospitality was voided of its public meaning as a practice entailing both competition and solidarity (see 2.3). Circles of exchange stemming from social relationships, which made lavish hospitality possible also in conditions of economic shortage hardship (as in Levani's case mentioned above), had no place in post-revolutionary Georgia. In fact, these exchanges were seen as harmful habits which prevented people from taking responsibility for their own lives and dedicating themselves to sounder and more productive activities.

. Money enabled certain people to engage in "modern" forms of hospitality, translating social and economic inequalities into moral and cultural differences. In post-revolutionary narratives which stigmatised *supra*, "Georgians" themselves were the "public stranger" (see 2.2.1) This term took on a derogatory meaning when used to define people who did not fit the modernisation project pursued by the government and the Western-oriented part of the population (see also Chapter 6). As an expression of national distinctiveness (particularly *vis-à-vis* Russia), but also of backwardness, hospitality stood out as a divisive paradigm defined on social, political, and economic, but also moral and cultural grounds.

The articulation in public narratives of a guest-stranger who is welcomed, rejected, stigmatised or englobed interacts with the ways in which people practice hospitality on an everyday basis. As a bond of national unity which marked Georgian distinctiveness and resisted assimilation within the Soviet state, in the 1990s hospitality became expression of increasing socio-economic differences between a large impoverished part of the population and a few people who ostentatiously displayed their newly acquired wealth. The Rose Revolution aimed to restore the image of a nation united under a common project of Westernisation, which entailed

the definition of Russia and Russians as the embodiment of negative otherness. The englobing of strangers through hospitality to overturn visitors' political and economic superiority, which in people's everyday practices applied to Russian as well as Western guests, highlights the ambivalence of hospitality ties. Hospitality brought together people from different countries, but, at the same time, reinforced in-group bonds by enforcing Georgians' moral, cultural and social norms upon their guests. .

However, the ambivalence of hospitality practices between inclusion and exclusion did not concern only the relationship between Georgians and foreign guests, but also the way in which different individuals and groups within Georgian society perceived, defined and interacted with one another. . Participants who enjoyed economic and shared the Saakashvili's government's political and social views articulated and performed hospitality as a commodity which could be purchased by private wealth in its most progressive forms. In these people's narratives, those who still relied on the reciprocal exchange of goods and services perceived as traditional hospitality were often stigmatised for their attachment to practices which were regarded as threats to the country's modernisation.

Articulations and performances of hospitality which, to a large extent, came from members of the post-revolutionary political, economic and intellectual elites indicate a clear-cut stigmatisation of traditional practices, which were regarded as backward and socially harmful. In much of post-revolutionary narratives, the persistence of traditional hospitality practices accounted for a lack of civility across Georgian society, specifically with regard to those people who were still attached to these practices and dynamics and were therefore framed as alien to the post-revolutionary modernisation project. However, my participants' reception and reproduction of tradition in hospitality practices unfolded in multifaceted ways. Tradition was not just dismissed as an overwhelmingly negative burden which was preventing the country and its people from modernising. The relationship between tradition and people's practices of hospitality was constantly negotiated along the tension between attachment to the past and projection towards the future. The search for more inclusive and horizontal hospitality practices involved people from all social groups, but in particular those who had a subaltern position *vis-à-vis* the hierarchies and norms which made up hospitality tradition: women and young people. The next chapter explores the way in which Georgian women and youth dealt with the gender

and generational barriers underpinning traditional hospitality, along with the dramatic changes which were supposedly taking place in post-revolutionary Georgia. Far from taking an overwhelmingly negative stance towards traditional features of hospitality, women's and young people's articulations and performances of hospitality unfold along the tension between internalisation and exposure, continuation and rupture, conservation and change.

## 4

# NEGOTIATING EXCLUSION: HOSPITALITY OF WOMEN AND YOUTH

## 4.1 “*Supra* is not for women”: Gender and social change through patterns of hospitality

### 4.1.1 Gender identity at the Georgian table

The protagonists of the 2014 film *In Bloom* are two fourteen-year-old girls, Ek’a and Natia, growing up in the shattered context of early 1990s Georgia (see 3.3.1). One scene shows the *supra* for Natia’s wedding. Persistently courted by K’ote, a guy from her neighbourhood, Natia resists him until she is “kidnapped” by the young man and his gang and left with no choice but to marry him. The wedding *supra* is set in a small overcrowded flat, with women rushing busily between the kitchen and the table, which is laden with food. The men drink wine from horns, making several sentimental toasts, including, “To our women! What would our life be without them?”

The toast, “To women!” (“*Kalebis gaumarjos!*” – of which there is an old-fashioned but possibly more popular version using the term *mandilosani* – “ladies”, literally “those who wear headgear”), is pivotal to the *tamadoba* drinking structure. In traditional *supra*, only men take part in this (and other) toasts. Most of the time women stay in the kitchen, emerging to bring out food. When a toast is said in their honour, women are sometimes invited to have a glass and sit down for a bit. Even when they take part in *supra*, sitting and eating with the men, women are largely excluded from traditional toasting. When the most solemn toasts are made (including the toast to women), men stand up and women sit. Lasha (28, chef) once told me that this is a sign of respect for women, so that they do not get tired. This explanation sounded absurd to me, given that most demanding tasks at a *supra* are overwhelmingly performed by women without this raising much concern in men. However, Lasha’s words expressed the ambivalence underpinning not only men’s perspective on women, but also the way women think of themselves and their role in the family and society.

Georgian tradition is permeated by a cult of women, who are seen as the embodiment of the nation. Women are “the potential source and bearers of life, it is thought that all essential female characteristics derive from that” (Dragadze 1988: 159). Also, “Georgia itself, as a nation, culture, ethnic entity is invariably symbolised by a woman. Your country is referred to as your *deda-mits’a*, ‘mother-ground’ [...]. The Georgian language is *deda-ena*, ‘mother-tongue’ [...]. The capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, is *deda-kalaki*, ‘mother-city’” (Dragadze 1988: 158). Certain positive qualities, which are considered to be weaker in men, are attributed to women, such as stability, reliability, bashfulness and pragmatism (Lundkvist-Houndoumadi 2010). Far from being regarded as lower beings *per se*, women are fundamental parts of the historical and cultural imagery of the national community. However, women are valued as Georgians – and even as “proper” human beings (Dragadze 1998) – only to the extent to which they fit what are regarded as their natural roles and identities. As a consequence, womanhood and motherhood are largely considered inseparable issues, while male and female behaviour concerning pre-marital sex, adultery, divorce and re-marriage are judged by different standards (Buckley 2005, Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi 2006).

Traditional gender divides are made apparent in the structure of hospitality events. It is misleading to look at hospitality as a practice which forces women to toil against their will for men’s enjoyment. Traditional *supra* have a rigid division of roles which supposedly fit men’s and women’s respective natural attributes. Assigning women to the cleaning and cooking is not necessarily meant to excuse men from tiring tasks. Rather, women are regarded as the revered guardians of housekeeping traditions passed down the female generations (Chatwin 1997). Certain chores in the organisation of *supra* are also allocated to men, especially the provision of food and drink in general and meat in particular (see 1.1.1).

However, the main feeling expressed by most of my female friends and acquaintances was estrangement from *supra*. The way in which hospitality events unfold does not envisage women as autonomous actors in hospitality performances. Although it is unthinkable to display a *supra* without the contribution of women, the female role is that of a passive presence in the otherwise male-dominated plot of the event. Women’s participation in a *supra* is desirable for men, and not only for practical reasons. Yet, women are denied agency over hospitality events, as if

hospitality practices belong to a parallel yet unattainable male world. Practices of consumption of food and, especially, wine at a *supra* reinforce bonds of affection and even intimacy between men, while at the same time excluding women by the making and strengthening of these social ties.

The recurring division between public and private as respective male and female worlds (Landes 2003, Slater 1998, Weintraub 1997, Pateman 1987) is relevant here. Even when celebrated in private households, *supra* are public events which act as a stage to display the host's worldview. Since in the national imagery the active producers of social narratives are male, the stage of hospitality is managed by men. Women are a fundamental part of the plot, but only to the extent to which they fit the narrative ascribed to the event. The only link between the private and the public is represented by thoughts, words and objects – such as food, or toasts, as the example from *In Bloom* indicates – which embody the traditional ideas of womanhood to be made public on the stage. My female participants related in different ways to their exclusion from the male world of hospitality. The competence needed to behave appropriately between the private and the public realms entails women's internalisation of ascribed gender identities. However, gender roles in hospitality can also be approached from a detached perspective, which enables women to criticise the discrimination of which they are the object.

#### **4.1.2 Internalisation vs. exposure**

Normative ideas of womanhood are hardly questionable, inasmuch they are framed as timeless tradition, or even as biological attributes. Widely popular institutions, first and foremost the Georgian Orthodox Church, assertively promote traditional gender norms, influencing both public policy and private beliefs and practices (Rekhviashvili A. 2010). As a result, moral standards of female behaviour appear to be largely internalised by Georgian women.

To use Bourdieu's concepts, women's internalisation of gender roles amounts to symbolic violence, which takes the form of *habitus* and is expressed through misrecognition (Bourdieu 1990, 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant 2004). Some of my participants "misrecognised" gender discrimination, denying that hospitality practices demand a lot from women while actually excluding them. In a conversation

with Teona (42, teacher), I pointed out that in one of the families with whom I used to live, *supra* were very formalised in terms of gender divides. While men feasted in the garden with wine and meat, women (when they were not busy cooking and serving) would sit in the house looking after the children, drinking coffee or sweet liqueurs and eating cake. Teona made clear that this was not “tradition”, but my host family’s distortion of norms. She also told me that, when the separation of genders happens, it is not an enforced rule, but women’s choice. In Teona’s view, men’s conversation topics are of little interest to female tablemates, who prefer to sit next to their female friends and relatives and discuss other things.

However, in my experience these divisions were neither unusual nor spontaneous. I often witnessed the separation of genders around the table, which, if not enforced upon women, was at least passively accepted. Rather than engaging in their own conversations, the female part of the table listened silently to the speech of the *tamada* and the other men without actually being involved. This lack of participation in table talk, rather than expressing women’s freedom of choice, highlights female exclusion from the active making of *supra*.

A similar downplaying of the “discriminatory” character of hospitality came from Ia (48, housewife). At a big *supra*, men and women sat at opposite ends of the table. The men followed the hectic pace of toasting and drinking set by the *tamada*, while the women sat quietly, ate moderately and drank no wine. Ia reassured me that these divisions were not compulsory. Of course women were free to drink if they wished. As for the separation at the table, men congregated at the same end simply in order to follow the *tamada*, but it was no problem for men and women to mix. In these examples, women’s misrecognition of symbolic violence – defined as “violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 2004: 272) – is expressed through a discourse of self-empowerment by women, who frame gender divisions either as occasional deviations from otherwise “good” traditions or as a matter of free choice.

The female *habitus* of hospitality (see 1.1.3) takes a similar form, as passive but also uncomfortable compliance. In the abovementioned scene from the film *In Bloom*, the two female protagonists feel awkward in the male-dominated public realm of the wedding *supra*. To recreate a comfortable environment, they shut themselves

in the bathroom, which becomes a private sphere where they can behave spontaneously and open up to one another. I observed this shift between public and private when I visited the home village of Tamazi (56, engineer), the husband of my host Lela, in the mountains of western Georgia (see 1.2.2). I initially found myself in a relaxed all-female environment, with Lela, her niece and some female in-laws. Women were not under pressure to cook meals for their men or keep the house spotless at all times. We prepared and consumed food and wine together, with little distinction between hosts and guests and with no specific attention paid to *supra* conventions, which were often mocked.

However, when Tamazi and other male relatives arrived from Tbilisi for the *ormotsi* (a celebration held forty days after a person's death, see 1.1) of Tamazi's mother, the context shifted from private to public. My female hosts' attitudes became awkwardly formal, not only towards the men, but also between one another. The domestic space split along gender lines. Men congregated in "public" areas, such as the living room and the balcony. Women took over the kitchen and started hectically cooking all day, both to feed the men and for the forthcoming *supra*. Interaction between public and private spaces was minimised. The women's automatic yet radical change of attitudes is revealing of the *habitus* of shifting between public and private, embodying behaviours appropriate to each case.

Some of the women I met in the field also expressed increasing awareness and criticism of gender discrimination in hospitality. In some of my participants' thoughts, words and actions, symbolic violence was exposed and rejected. The alienation and even hostility which meets women at the Georgian *supra* was efficiently phrased by my friend Lik'a (27, PhD student and activist). We were returning from a village where Lik'a's family had organised a traditional *supra*. During the celebration, my friend barely sat at the table, and left soon saying that she wanted to visit some childhood friends in the village. Later, she apologised to me for her absence, explaining that she could barely tolerate attending a *supra*. I confessed that, after an initial fascination with these events, I had realised that some *supra* are boring for many of the participants. Lik'a was surprised at what for her was an obvious observation: "Come on!" she exclaimed. "*Supra* is not for women!"



Marina (25, student) had the same opinion. Living between Georgia and London, she told me that when she is abroad she enjoys meeting her co-nationals for food and drink. However, she felt relieved that on these occasions the traditional structures of hospitality are not necessarily followed. “In Georgia women are not allowed to toast traditionally” – she explained – “They are supposed just to sit and eat and listen”. Women’s exclusion from *supra* is also detrimental to the good outcome of hospitality events: “Because women can only talk to each other, what happens is that they do so even when someone is toasting. So it gets really loud and men try to shush women. Women are excluded, you bet they don’t respect *supra*!”

In Marina’s view, hospitality is not a discriminatory practice *per se*. It is the crystallisation of traditional gender identities into such practices which prevents hospitality from being enjoyed in an inclusive way. Similarly, Lik’a maintained that “traditions” are taken for granted to the extent that people do not question whether they are right or wrong:

When I was a child I used to help my mum set up the *supra*, serve food and so on. Once my dad had guests, all men, and I said I wanted to sit with them because I wanted to enjoy what I had helped prepare. They were very happy with that, and everyone was nice and flattering to me!

The male-dominated *supra* is accepted and reproduced passively, without reflection on alternative models of hospitality. However, these alternatives can disclose ways in which hospitality is enjoyable for everyone.

Gendered norms of hospitality are internalised by women as a form of symbolic violence. Internalisation is expressed in two main ways: first, through the misrecognition of gender discrimination, with women attributing an empowered role to themselves in hospitality practices; and second, through a passive and often unconscious adaptation to gender norms, in the form of a female *habitus* which entails the shifting of social competence between private and public roles. However, women also criticise the gender divides in hospitality. Opposition to women’s alienation

creates room to envisage inclusive expressions of hospitality. I identify two main ways in which women implement these alternative models, framing hospitality from their own perspectives: the reproduction of traditional hospitality features in the private sphere and the public reappropriation of hospitality practices.

#### **4.1.3 Private reproduction vs. public reappropriation**

Another scene in *In Bloom* features the celebration of Natia's birthday. Since the wedding, the girl has moved in with K'ote's family and is being suffocated by a bully of a husband and an intrusive mother-in-law. For Natia, her birthday is an opportunity to escape this everyday reality and, with her best friend Ek'a, enjoy a small *supra* prepared by her grandmother. The girls sit on the balcony of Natia's flat, surrounded by a gloomy landscape of concrete blocks. However, the atmosphere is merry as they enjoy hospitality without social pressure, free to eat, talk, drink and joke as they wish. In this relaxed context, the girls reproduce traditional models of hospitality. They toast in the *tamadoba* way, to "all the grandmothers of the world", and then "to us" (*chven gagvimarjos!*), emptying their glasses in imitation of male behaviour mixed with pride and mockery.

This representation of hospitality contrasts with Natia's wedding *supra*, where the girls were denied agency (see 4.1.1). Appropriating traditional hospitality models, from which they are usually excluded, the women enjoy conviviality without the anxiety entailed in rigid social rules. A similar scene occurs at Ek'a's place, when Ek'a's older sister and her female friends gather with Ek'a and Natia in the living room to drink small glasses of liqueur, smoke cigarettes, play the piano and sing love songs. As soon as they notice that Ek'a's mother is returning home, the girls tidy up hastily and sit quietly around the table pretending to study.

These scenarios recall my experiences. Living in a house with women for a while, as the men worked out of town and only came home at weekends, I observed how my female hosts sometimes did not just want to feed me (and themselves), but meant to create a hospitality event. This was usually marked by the preparation of some "special" food, such as *khink'ali* (dumplings) or *khach'ap'uri* (cheesy bread), and most importantly the consumption of wine. My hosts sometimes asked us to sit around the table and drink "a glass each". Regardless of the improvisation of the

event, toasts were made properly and the glasses (of which we usually drank more than one) emptied and refilled, reproducing the *tamadoba* structure.

These examples show women approaching hospitality by reframing the usually male-dominated traditional models. Echoing Lik'a's and Marina's points (see 4.1.2), rather than being discriminatory *per se*, hospitality practices can be recreated in a spontaneous fashion, even following traditional patterns. Yet, recreation takes place in the private realm of the house, within an exclusively female circle. Both in *In Bloom* and with my female hosts, it is challenging for women to translate the sense of relaxation experienced in their privately reproduced hospitality moments into public claims against the way traditional norms work. Women's reproduction of hospitality practices in the private domestic sphere reinforces ties of solidarity and empathy between female relatives, friends and neighbours. However, reproducing home hospitality among female tablemates does not make traditional hospitality practices such as *supra* more inclusive. The traditional male-dominated, hierarchical structure of hospitality is hardly challenged, leaving the public stage of hospitality largely inaccessible to women.

In my fieldwork I came across several cases in which women appropriated hospitality traditions in ironic, critical or even subversive ways, exposing gender discrimination to the public. A friend of mine who works at an LGBT rights organisation in Tbilisi told me that some activists had reproduced *supra* with the *tamadoba* structure in a feminist fashion. Similarly, in 2014, galleries in Tbilisi and other Georgian cities hosted an exhibition called “*Supra of her own*” (“*Sak'utari supra*”), organised by a Georgian artist, a Polish anthropologist and a Georgian NGO. The exhibition, drawing upon in-depth interviews with women victims of gender-based violence, was “about the invisibility of women's painful experiences and about novel ways of making these public”.<sup>34</sup>

Another exhilarating example of the public exposure by women of the male-dominated hospitality tradition is artist Sophia T'abat'adze's 2006 work “Georgian Toasting Traditions”.<sup>35</sup> In a video called “Let's Drink to Love”, a Georgian man

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<sup>34</sup> Chabashvili, T. & Dudrak, A. (2014). *Sak'utari supra – A supra of her own*. Available at: <https://supraofherown.wordpress.com>

<sup>35</sup> T'abat'adze, S. (2006). *Georgian toasting traditions*. Available at: <http://www.sophia.tabatadze.com/2006toasting.php?p=14>

(recalling the large dark-haired *supra* figures in Nik'o Pirosmiani's paintings)<sup>36</sup> sits in a barber shop being shaved while holding a glass of wine. The man, covered in shaving foam, begins a toast "to love" – *Siq'varuls gaumarjos!* – and continues to declaim odes to love for several minutes. When the barber warns "Careful, I might cut you!" the man solemnly declares: "What is a knife wound next to love?? Cut me, my brother, cut me!" At the end of the shave, the man terminates his toast and drinks the wine. Text accompanying the video provides excerpts from an "Introduction to the Georgian Toasting Traditions" from a "*tamadaonline*" website: "Do you want to know where the Georgian man reveals himself in his entire splendour? This is the Georgian Table! [...] High-flown and magic words seem to help him (the *tamada*) to establish contact with Heaven..." At the end of a series of "unwritten rules" for *tamada*, regarding sense of humour, hierarchy and timing, it is recommended to: "Never forget the women in the kitchen [...]. Make sure the granny, aunties, moms and sisters are invited into the presence of the guests and toasted. [...] Praise the meal [and conclude the toast with] the traditional saying: 'May we never lack your guidance and care' or 'May your hands and arms always be healthy'".

The reproduction of hospitality among women follows traditional patterns, remaining largely confined to the private domestic sphere within a circle of female relatives or friends. However, criticism and subversion of male-dominated hospitality are also expressed in a public way, as indicated by certain artistic performances. Ties of female hospitality developing in the house can spread to the public realm of art, education, and social and political activism, demanding more inclusive practices of hospitality accessible to all members of society. Who are the women who internalise, reproduce or subvert hospitality practices? What are the dividing lines between women along which the passive internalisation, private reproduction and public reappropriation of hospitality unfold?

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<sup>36</sup> Nik'oloz Pirosmiani (1862-1918) was a Georgian painter whose fame, attained posthumously, mainly derives from works depicting Georgian food and wine culture in general, and convivial consumption at *supra* in particular (Söderlind 2012). Stereotyped images of Georgian men and women, with traditional clothes, headgear and haircuts (and long moustaches in the case of men), depicted in their allotted roles at hospitality events, are a recurrent feature of many of Pirosmiani's paintings.

#### **4.1.4 Past vs. future women: Hospitality as a lens on gendered social cleavages**

Different attitudes to hospitality can be investigated along with divides between women on the basis of age, social class, education and life experience. Generally, among my female respondents, women with deeply internalised gender roles belong to an older generation with respect to women who have a more critical approach to gender divides. This is a fairly expected feature, since intolerance of tradition and drive for change are usually prominent in younger generations (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi 2006, 2003).<sup>37</sup>

The Georgian habit of early marriage (for women earlier than for men) contributes to this generational divide. Most of my participants in their fifties had been wives and mothers for more than thirty years, with limited experience of other sides of womanhood. Although early marriage habits have far from disappeared, people are gradually getting married at a later stage (Roberts, Pollock, Rustamova, Mammadova & Tholend 2009). As a consequence, young women are “dispensed” for a longer time from child-rearing and house-keeping, spending more time with their peers in schools, universities or workplaces.

Women’s marriage age and level of education, which are positively correlated, are in turn linked to class, intended both in its economic and social senses (Roberts & Pollock 2009). Women (and young people in general) with lower socio-economic status tend to follow the dominant sequence of family formation – (early) marriage, becoming parents, remaining married. This pattern is largely due to the impossibility of young people purchasing their own place. Moreover, many households, including those of young adults, are viable only due to multiple incomes (Roberts, Pollock, Rustamova, Mammadova & Tholend 2009, Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi 2006, 2003). Living with older generations is sometimes the only chance for young women to have a job outside the house. The loss of free nurseries and kindergartens after the end of communism, alongside the reluctance of private sector

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<sup>37</sup> The two researchers first published their survey on Georgian youth’s transition to adulthood in 2003 in a paper for the Policy Documentation Centre at the Central European University. The survey was re-published with additional new data in an edited volume in 2006. I report both versions of the survey as certain details which appear in the first were omitted from the second and vice-versa.

employers to finance maternity leave, makes the help of older women in child-rearing indispensable (Roberts & Pollock 2009).

The likelihood of attending university is also related to the socio-economic status of one's family. A 2007 survey conducted in the South Caucasus, dividing families into lower, intermediate and higher socio-economic groups according to their parents' degree of education and occupation, showed that young people progressing to higher education made up 21, 40, and 69 per cent of each group respectively (Roberts & Pollock 2009: 586). The overwhelming majority of my female participants with an openly critical stance towards hospitality traditions were young unmarried women (usually under 30), most likely with experience living abroad, which was usually linked to attendance at higher education institutions.

These divides among women are reflected by a gap separating private reproduction of hospitality in the female domestic sphere from public reappropriation and criticism. I could observe a lack of connection between women's gatherings which "domesticate" male-dominated hospitality (Smith & Rochovská 2007) and public expressions which denounce gender discrimination at *supra*. These instances, exemplified by the artistic performances mentioned in the previous section, are fundamental manifestations of rising awareness and changing attitudes among women, which should certainly be cultivated. However, these critical practices need to be connected to women's everyday lives, otherwise they risk becoming not much more than an artistic or intellectual exercise within an enclosed circle of (often middle and upper-class) women.

The past/future opposition which pervaded post-revolutionary narratives had a large impact on ideas of womanhood. Western models of sophisticated and independent women – epitomised by Sandra Roelofs, Saak'ashvili's Dutch wife (see Chapter 6) – contrast with images of "traditional" Georgian women, oppressed and dependent on their men, resilient yet physically and psychologically demeaned by the hardships of everyday life. Some of my participants who defined themselves as liberated from this condition – feeling independent of their husbands, with the possibility of travelling, living and working outside Georgia, and possibly in a comfortable economic situation - sympathised with their co-nationals who were still brutalised by a patriarchal system.

However, this solidarity was sometimes expressed in a vertical way. My participant Tako (45, see 3.5), who had lived abroad and who openly criticised the patriarchal structure of Georgian society, referred to her fellow countrywomen in the following terms: “Of course, these women see nothing beyond being a good wife, mother and daughter-in-law! They have never left Georgia, and do not have a life outside their houses”. This kind of statement reflects the depth of the cleavages brought into society by modernisation narratives. Georgian men and women were essentialised in opposition to Western models: the former as despotic masters and/or brutal alcoholics, the latter as passive victims of men as well as of their own narrow perspectives. Post-revolutionary narratives depicted the marginalisation of women as a product of moral and cultural backwardness associated with the past, rather than as an attachment of the social, political and economic cleavages brought by the government’s reforms.

Criticism and reappropriation of hospitality practices create divides between women which follow differences in age, class, level of education and so on. The potential of women’s hospitality practices to spread beyond the private domestic sphere and generate more inclusive expressions of conviviality and feasting is partially jeopardised by the clear-cut oppositions between “old” and “new”, “Westernised” women which post-revolutionary narratives emphasised. However, at the same time divides emerging from different approaches to hospitality may foster debate between different groups of women, which not only take the form of conflict but also of enriching exchange. In one of my host families, three different generations of women lived together. In the summer evenings we would sit on the porch having lively discussions, which often focused on the appropriate behaviour for women in the context of hospitality and beyond. In these debates, everyone was open to learning from other people’s differences. Women from older generations, aged between 50 and 60, were usually more conservative and reluctant to accept younger women’s non-conformist attitudes, emphasising their own deeper experience of the way certain things work in Georgia. However, mothers and grandmothers were also keen to listen to their daughters, recognising that this exchange with the younger generations had a significant impact on their own way of seeing the world. One evening, for example, these three generations of women and I spent hours talking openly about sex – in my

hosts' view an unusual event in Georgia. Although certain perspectives were irreconcilable, opinions were freely expressed.

Women's ambivalent attitudes towards hospitality tradition - as a dimension from which they are excluded and which therefore needs to be challenged, but also as a set of norms and dynamics playing an important role in women's everyday life – may create divisions, but also common ground for the exchange of opinions and experiences. This kind of interaction can bridge the gap between the private reframing of women's identities and the public exposure of gender divides. In this way, hospitality practices become a way through which to channel civility in the shape of inclusiveness, solidarity and mutual respect across different social groups - men and women, but also women from different socio-economic milieus, with different life experiences, and from different generations. In particular, inter-generational relationships, underpinned by conflict and exchange, conformism and subversion, play a fundamental role in the making of hospitality. In the next section, I will explore the specifics of these relationships, focusing on the role that Georgian youth has in negotiating between conservation and change through hospitality practices.

## **4.2 “*Akhalgazrdebi gaumarjos!*” (“To the young!”): Hospitality as a source of tension between change and continuity across generations**

### **4.2.1 A mirror of generational divides?**

The celebration of young lives is a fundamental theme of *supra*. Almost compulsory in the basic *tamadoba* structure is the toast “*bashvebis gaumarjos!*” (“to children”), while less common is “*akhalgazrdebis (or akhalgazrdoba) gaumarjos!*” (“to young people!” or “to the youth!” – the term contains the word *akhal*, “new”). In political discourses, as well as in everyday narratives, Georgian youth is ideally constructed as the renovator of the nation, the part of the population in which all social and political actors, from families to the government, should invest (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi 2006, 2003). However, young people's practices escape straightforward categorisation. Cross-generational conflicts are experienced by the



young through the tension between public respect for tradition and private detachment from traditional beliefs. Yet, at the same time young people negotiate their identities between public conformity to the role of innovators which social narratives assign to them and private conservation of values and practices endangered by fast modernisation.

In communist times, young people's lives were closely monitored by the state through institutions such as the Komsomol' or the Young Pioneers (see Chapter 5). After the end of the Soviet Union, state control loosened, enabling younger generations to take responsibility for their own lives, at least in theory. However, the social, political and economic troubles brought about by the demise of the socialist system severely limited opportunities for the young, while simultaneously exposing them to risks from which the state had previously partially cushioned them (Walker & Stephenson 2012, Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi 2006, 2003). Throughout the 1990s, when public institutions were unable to offer appropriate services, young people's lives were mainly articulated within the family and the neighbourhood (Zakharova 2010, Dudwick 2002).

The narratives underpinning the Rose Revolution and its aftermath stressed the role of youth as an important agent of change (Polese & Ó Beacháin 2012, Manning 2007). The post-revolutionary government substantially invested in the generation of "new Georgians", who were expected to be patriotic, respectful of institutions, independent and ambitious. However, in the years following the Rose Revolution many young people remained highly dependent on their older relatives, both materially and psychologically (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi 2006, 2003). In several instances, values and practices widely considered traditional (such as early marriage, condemnation of pre-marital sex and obedience to one's parents' will regarding one's educational and professional path) appeared to be transmitted from older to younger generations in an unquestioned way. Yet, the relationship between young people and tradition within smaller and larger communities (from the household to the nation) was marked by a tension between continuity and rupture. Hospitality practices are a powerful lens through which to observe intergenerational conflicts predicated on blurred boundaries between conservation and change. This section focuses on young people's ambivalent articulations and performances of hospitality along the tension between reproduction and rejection of tradition, calling

into question post-revolutionary narratives which depicted youth as being overwhelmingly intolerant to traditional practices in their search for a more modern society. Similarly to women's relation to hospitality, I point out that young people desire for more inclusive and less constrictive hospitality practices may create and reinforce bridging ties of solidarity and reciprocity, but also generate and deepen divisions between different social groups.

Young Georgians are made familiar with the hospitality code in childhood. Boys are expected to join their fathers at *supra* from their early teenage years, if not before. Observers report five to eight year old children being occasionally asked by their fathers to pronounce a toast and drink a glass of wine following the *tamadoba* rules (Tuite 2005). The same applies to girls, who are supposed to help their mothers to organise and manage hospitality events (serving food, clearing the table and so on). To use a Georgian scholar's words, although baptisms take place in churches, "we [Georgian people] are baptised as Georgians specifically at the *supra*" (Gurgenidze 2000, quoted in Tuite 2005: 30). The transmission of moral, cultural and social norms through hospitality practices creates a sense of community as the basis of national identity.

Since the public face of traditional hospitality is predominantly masculine, generational divides at *supra* become more explicit between fathers and their male children. It would be difficult for my young participants<sup>38</sup> to extricate themselves from attending a *supra* taking place at their houses or at a relatives' or friends' place (see also Nodia 2014). Young men were forced to participate by their fathers and mothers, the latter arguably keen not to make their husbands angry. If a *supra* was relatively informal (as, for example, in the case of the birthday of a female member of the family), parents expected limited participation from their children, as a form of politeness towards guests. In contrast, on the occasion of a more "official" *supra*, deep involvement was demanded of young men, entailing their prolonged attendance at the table and their compliance with *supra* rules in terms of drinking, eating, speaking, singing and so on. For my young respondents' parents (especially their fathers), their sons' failure to perform traditional hospitality norms appropriately was

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<sup>38</sup>The participants to whom I refer in this section are young men and women aged 18 to 27.

a cause of embarrassment in front of visitors, which was met with bitter scolding and resentment.

While I also met young people who were enthusiastic about *supra* and considered involvement in these practices to be an honour, my young participants generally reacted to their parents' pressing demands to participate in hospitality with various expressions of irritation. Although some young people met their families' expectations with more or less passive acceptance, the majority found the situation constricting. However, framing the attitude of youth towards hospitality tradition as a "rebellion" against the imposition of obsolete models is simplistic. Compliance with the tradition represented by parents goes hand in hand with the creation of alternative practices of hospitality to be shared with peers. Young people's relationship with *supra* norms, which are often seen as meaningless and oppressive, unfolds alongside positive attitudes towards the personalised reworking of hospitality practices.

#### **4.2.2 Youth vs. traditional hospitality: rupture...**

What are the specifics of the articulations and performances of hospitality which differentiate young Georgians from older generations? What is contested and subverted? What is endorsed and reproduced? How do these differences mirror the generational divides within Georgian society? What does analysis of these divides add to understanding of the tensions crosscutting post-revolutionary Georgia?

I was impressed by the way in which, although they sounded like a repeated cliché, *supra* rituals were always taken seriously, in particular by the older male generations (from 40-50 years and up). Features such as the sequence of toasts, the choice of food and beverages and the stories told to foreign visitors about Georgia, its people and traditions were reproduced in an almost identical fashion every time a *supra* took place. The solemnity with which speeches and gestures were renewed indicates that hosts and guests were involved in such practices more deeply than through mere automatic repetition.

Among young people, this solemnity was usually met by attitudes ranging from benevolent irony to open criticism. My young friends would joke about the image of the "Georgian man", with a long moustache and a big belly, occasionally

dressed in national costume and eternally engaged in feasting, gulping down piles of traditional food and drinking wine from horns. This image is widely represented in the visual arts, media and literature (see Pirosmiani's paintings - 3.2.1), and when it came to large *supra* attended by adult men, my young participants liked to joke about the similarities between the stereotype and "real" people's look and behaviour.

Elements of *supra* such as singing and dancing were targeted in a similar way. Traditional Georgian practices of dance and polyphonic music have a cultural and social relevance that goes beyond folkloric expressions performed by *aficionados* or offered to foreigners as entertainment (Tsitsishvili 2006). National music is common knowledge among people of different ages and from various socio-economic backgrounds (with important specifics at the regional level). Traditional dances are taught to children in after-school classes, which are more popular than many other recreational activities. Dance performances are usually limited to big hospitality events, such as wedding celebrations, while even at small everyday gatherings people often sing traditional songs. However, many of my young participants found the enthusiastic repetition of almost identical performances risible or even embarrassing, and they reiterated their disapproval in my presence as an apologetic detachment from their elder relatives' odd behaviour.

The ubiquitous and repetitive sequence of *tamadoba* toasts was the object of even harsher irony mixed with intolerance. Vakho (26, see 1.2.3) told me that he did not understand

why here in Georgia, even today, we make all these long and boring toasts, standing up, drinking from horns and so on. I don't enjoy big *supra*, it's all about stuffing your face with lots of food and wine, sitting down for hours and listening to all this "blablabla" from the *tamada* and other older men.

In this sense, young men's position in the context of *supra* is akin to that of women (see 4.1), as young men are similarly excluded from the active making of hospitality events. Unlike women, who have clearly separated roles, which in certain

cases entail spatial exclusion, young men's inclusion at *supra* is almost mandatory. Yet, participation is subordinated to total compliance with traditional rules embodied in older people. These rules envisage a passive position for young men, who, following the example of more experienced people, learn how to become good hosts.

The *tamadoba* ritual is dominated by older men. When I had the chance to be present at the election of a *tamada* before the start of a *supra*, young people had no say in the decision, let alone any chance of being chosen as toastmasters. Anyone who failed to sit silently while the *tamada* was making a toast was scolded by older people. Young men were expected to simply comply with the traditional structure of toasting and drinking – particularly in the most solemn toasts, when everyone would stand up in turn, holding a specific wine container such as a horn or a clay pot, and say a few words. The choice of *tamada* was accompanied by the excited involvement of the older participants, with extensive negotiations over who deserved the honour. The same applied to the sequence of toasts, which were treated solemnly by the older tablemates. On the contrary, my young friends often appeared bored and irritated. Murmuring complaints about the pointlessness of *supra*, they waited for the first appropriate opportunity to leave.

Generational divides also emerged in drinking habits, both at the hospitality table and beyond. My young participants' generation seemed to drink less than their fathers. Since social drinking contexts are mostly hospitality events, differences in drinking habits are partly related to different generational attitudes to traditional hospitality. "Occasional heavy drinking" is widespread across generations (being markedly less common among women, Pomerleau et al. 2008). Young males appear to become familiar with drinking alcohol in their early teens (around 13 years old, Sturua et al. 2010).

However, fathers and sons displayed divergent attitudes when they drank together, especially at "official" hospitality events. Getting drunk at a *supra* (as long as one's self-control is maintained) is not just the result of conviviality, but an institutionalised outcome, which does not take into account participants' actual enjoyment. Even those of my young friends who had a weakness for alcohol tended to restrain themselves when drinking was not a spontaneous activity but a structured ritual required by tradition. At formal *supra*, the discipline enforced by the *tamada*

over the table is detrimental to the creation of a relaxed atmosphere, with people getting drunk without necessarily having a good time. Moreover, the fact that older relatives sometimes drank far too much discouraged young people from enjoying being inebriated. On more than one occasion, my young friends had to carry their drunk fathers home and face the upset reactions of mothers and wives.

More or less deep divergences underpin the relation between younger and older generations in their articulation and performances of hospitality, especially when it comes to young men and their fathers. Intolerance of traditional hospitality practices was expressed by my young respondents through manifest indifference, irony or open criticism. However, younger generations did not dismiss hospitality as a practice *per se*. On the contrary, my young participants were engaged in constant negotiations between conserving and changing a tradition to which they were linked by ambivalent ties.

#### **4.2.3 ...or preservation?**

Notwithstanding the above criticism, traditional forms of hospitality are resilient in the way in which young Georgians articulate and perform the roles of host and guest. Hospitality as such is positively valued not only in attitudes to foreign visitors, but also in young people's everyday interpersonal relations. Far from being abandoned, hospitality practices are constantly recreated.

On a general basis, when reframed by young people, hospitality practices unfold in a more horizontal way than events which follow traditional norms. While traditional *supra* entail a rigid hierarchy between hosts and guests, in everyday gatherings improvised by young people these divisions are far less visible. This is largely due to the fact that any place can become the stage for a spontaneous hospitality event, with little formality about who is inviting and who is invited. Young people can gather at a friend's place at almost no notice (see 6.2.2). In such cases, the group is fed (more or less reluctantly) by the host's mothers and sisters, who, if they have not had the opportunity to prepare something for the occasion, offer whatever is left in the fridge. In other instances, when young people have some money available, gatherings take place in the street or other open spaces, where drinks and

snacks are shared, partly following the traditional pattern of *supra* and *tamadoba* (see 5.2).

As a further example of the more inclusive environment in which young people's hospitality practices unfold, gender divides are to some extent loosened. Due to the persistence of early marriage and parenthood, groups of young people may be fairly homogeneous in terms of gender. Young women are busy raising children and taking care of the house (usually together with their mothers-in-law), while young men work and/or hang out with their male peers. However, this division is becoming increasingly flexible, with young couples (with or without children) gathering together with their male and female peers, chatting, eating and drinking, at least partly free from the rigid gender norms implemented at *supra*.

The re-elaboration of tradition in more egalitarian ways was apparent in the collective cooking of Georgian food at some participants' place, usually when their older relatives were not present (Figures 4 and 5). Although my friends and acquaintances were scrupulous in following traditional recipes for *khach'ap'uri*, *khink'ali*, and other dishes, gender divides did not emerge, with young male participants often more involved in the preparation of food than their female counterparts. Such a scenario is in stark contrast with official *supras*, in which men and women are assigned strictly separated roles and space which must not be trespassed.

In a similar way, young people do not usually approach hospitality rituals as solemnly as their older relatives. Young people's hospitality events are not organised on specific occasions requiring a certain etiquette, but are set up spontaneously. This lack of solemnity does not mean that young people regard hospitality events as a pastime as carefree as any other. Rather, even at spontaneously organised gatherings, they use hospitality practices as a way to express thoughts and feelings which are not necessarily cheerful. For example, in the aftermath of the August 2008 war with Russia, solemn and even mournful attitudes were displayed at even the most improvised hospitality encounters, through toasts to the victims of the war or wishes for the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity.

Music is another contested feature in the re-elaboration of hospitality. In my young participants' circle, Western music was very popular. At spontaneous

meetings, music played from a computer, stereo or mobile phone was rarely lacking. Occasionally, someone would play the guitar or piano (a common feature of Georgian living rooms), and there would often be teasing performances on the traditional *chonguri* (a plucked string instrument which is seldom missing from a house's furnishings). On certain occasions, music was the reason for the hospitality taking place. Some of my young participants (in their early to mid-twenties) were in a rock-metal band which occasionally performed at small local festivals. My friends thought of themselves as a sort of avant-garde on the otherwise conservative national musical scene. For this reason, they perceived hostility from older generations, as their music was associated with a non-conventional lifestyle. At the band's rehearsals, which were usually attended by an audience, large bottles of beer were shared. Although at such events people simply spent time together with beer and music, a spirit of conviviality and the reproduction of ritual gestures and speech – such as filling up someone's empty glass or making random toasts – were not dissimilar from more structured hospitality encounters. Yet, similarly to other hospitality events performed by young people, gatherings at the band's rehearsals lacked a clear distinction between hosts and guests. Hospitality was created by collective enjoyment, rather than by implementing hierarchies between insiders and outsiders.

However, the reproduction of features of traditional music was not completely ruled out. Particularly when a few drinks had made the atmosphere more emotional, it was not unusual for my young participants to start playing rearrangements of traditional songs. In such cases, the circle of my friends and acquaintances was divided between those who met such performances with irony or even irritation and those who thought that traditional singing was appropriate to the event.

The ways in which my young participants performed *tamadoba* epitomise negotiations between continuation and rupture, in which tradition, although mocked, criticised and subverted, retains a prominent role. *Tamadoba* was persistent in young people's hospitality practices, even at spontaneous everyday gatherings. However, ambivalent approaches to tradition affected the expression of drinking rituals. The loosening of traditional host-guest hierarchies entailed more egalitarian dynamics of *tamadoba* than those displayed at "official" *supra* (see also Manning 2003). First, the *tamada* was not formally nominated. Toasts were made by whoever felt like it, although usually some people were keener than others on leading the group. Second,



people drank in the way they wanted and the amount they wanted, relatively free from pressure. Although the “*bolo-bolo*”, “down in one” way of drinking was widespread (especially when drinking wine, vodka, or *ch’ach’a*) this pattern was not compulsory. Inability or unwillingness to empty glasses in one go was not met with embarrassment or disapproval. Any capability and drinking pace was accepted, with women usually being more moderate than their male peers.

Both the content and form of toasts were re-elaborated in a creative and sometimes provocative way. Toasting to heavy metal, Harley Davidson motorbikes or Bob Marley was my young participants’ attempt to adapt traditional toasting to the celebration of their hobbies and passions. This manipulation of tradition would be unacceptable in public displays of hospitality such as *supra*, when the consolidated structure must be faithfully followed. However, even at small private gatherings of young people, the bases of traditional toasting constantly re-emerged. Drinking to friendship, love, the guest’s house and family, our countries, our families: these formulae accompanied everyday convivial encounters among my young friends. Yet, in contrast to the formality underpinning *tamadoba*, these toasts were made in a more spontaneous way, with the genuine intention of involving all participants.

The coexistence of tradition and change epitomised by young people’s drinking practices indicates that the tension between continuation and rupture, rather than being a zero-sum game, is an everyday negotiation entailing compromises between past and future (see also Geertz 1957). This negotiation emerges in all elements of collective drinking, from the people with whom one drinks to the beverages consumed. As mentioned above, young people may feel awkward about drinking with their fathers. First, this is part and parcel of the intergenerational power relations displayed at *supra*. Second, the occasional over-drinking of fathers may dissuade sons from following the same path. Nevertheless, most of my young male friends did drink, and often aplenty. Yet, their ambivalent relationship with traditional practices affected young people’s choices of what to drink. If wine has an exclusive meaning in Georgian national narratives (see Chapter 1), the consumption of beer (both Georgian and imported) has also become increasingly popular since the end of the Soviet regime (Manning & Uplisashvili 2007). Still, in the collective imagery, beer lacks the specific status of other beverages. Especially in formal contexts, toasting with beer is forbidden. Such toasts reverse their own purposes: toasting to

Shevardnadze with beer translates to bad wishes for the former president (see also Manning 2003).

Beer consumption was widespread among my young friends and acquaintances. Beer was available at a reasonable price in all shops, so young people purchased it relatively easily, and out of their parents' control. Instead, wine, which is usually made and stored at home, was kept for special celebrations, or at least for occasions on which fathers and sons drank together with friends and neighbours. My young friends perceived wine as tightly intertwined with those rituals which see youth as subordinated to older people's will and the demands of tradition. When I asked why, in a country with delicious wine available for free, young people seemed keener on drinking average-quality beer, Tato (26, salesman) explained: "When I feel like just drinking with my friends or colleagues, I drink beer or vodka.<sup>39</sup> It's easier: when you drink wine, all this *tamadoba* stuff needs to be arranged, and frankly most times I cannot be bothered".

The choice of beer as their main drink was part and parcel of young people's more horizontal approaches to hospitality. Yet, here tradition and change are again intermingled. Toasting with beer has become increasingly accepted, although toasting patterns, rather than sticking to the *tamadoba* model, entail shorter formulae – sometimes just the basic *gagvimarjos!*, "To us!". Also, the ritual gestures of *tamadoba* may be applied to informal gatherings involving beer consumption: for example, drinking pints of beer in one go or drinking beer while crossing arms with a friend, a typical feature of certain stages of *supra*.

Young people express uneasiness at the strict norms which inform traditional hospitality practices. Yet, in my young participants' articulations and performances of hospitality two main related elements indicate that ties with tradition are far from being completely dismissed. First, the affective dimension of hospitality was by no means diminished in young people's hospitality practices. Whether in mournful occasions, such as the commemoration of the victims of the 2008 Russian-Georgian war or of some deceased friend or relative, or in more festive celebrations, the

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<sup>39</sup> Vodka, although it lacks the symbolic value of wine, is for collective consumption, to be accompanied by toasts (although in a less structured way than *tamadoba*). Gatherings with vodka may be small (two to five people), and entail the consumption of rye bread, pickles and smoked fish. Vodka, along with beer, is also associated with *khink'ali*, which are usually not consumed with wine.

emotional side of hospitality practices not only was prominent in youth's practices, but also linked young people's articulations and performances to those of the older generations. Especially in smaller and less formal *supras*, it was not rare to see sons gradually abandoning their intolerance for being forced to sit and feast with their fathers. Fathers and sons became emotional together, and often even cried by toasting to beauty, love, the good people who are no longer here, and all sorts of "sweet memories", *t'k'bili mogoneba*.

Second, improvisation, which includes the ability of throwing some kind of feast with no previous preparation and with limited resources, rather than being a way to challenge the complex structure of *supra*, is a fundamental skill for those who like to depict themselves as good hosts (see 1. 1; see also Herzfeld 1985). My young participants were keener on small, spontaneous gatherings at some friend's place or in the street than on big *supra* organised by their parents. Yet, such everyday gatherings were largely perceived and defined by young people involved as a token of their endless penchant for conviviality and their ability to create hospitality moments in spite of adverse circumstances. This attitude was largely shared with their elder relatives, which, in a similar way, took pride and pleasure in displaying their improvisation skills to outsiders.

My young participants' re-elaborated hospitality practices had a more horizontal structure than that underpinning the formal *supra*. Yet, tradition, although mocked, criticised and subverted, maintains a meaningful role in young people's practices, which unfold alongside the tension between rupture and continuation *vis-à-vis* the values of older generations. The reworking of hospitality practices by young people, who make traditional rituals meaningful for themselves and their peers, casts light on the multifaceted dimensions behind the monolithic façade of hospitality as tradition. Yet, young people do not create "new" practices of hospitality from scratch. Rather, like Levi-Strauss's *bricoleurs* (1966), the young reproduce hospitality on the basis of the symbols and items "at hand". The set of tools and materials used by young Georgians for the everyday remaking of hospitality is "always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains [...] is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions" (Levi-Strauss 1966: 11). The tension between construction and destruction which underpins generational divides

in hospitality practices informs wider moral, social, political and economic conflicts in post-revolutionary Georgia, which are predicated on the everyday negotiation of the past *vis-à-vis* the future.

#### **4.2.4 Between “Westernisation” and “Georgianness”: Young people’s reception of modernisation narratives**

The tension between continuation and rupture underpinning young Georgians’ approaches to hospitality highlights how problematic the transmission of values and practices between and across generations is. The relation between conservation and change is not caught by a straightforward opposition which sees parents as the embodiment of tradition while children endorse anti-conformist innovation. On the contrary, as young people’s ambivalent attitudes to traditions of hospitality highlight, generational divides are underpinned by parents’ and children’s negotiation of articulations and performances along the tension between past and future.

The social, political and economic changes which Georgian society has undergone since the final years of the Soviet Union have impacted on the cultural and moral models which inform people’s values and practices. Georgia’s progressive orientation towards the West meant that ideas of what “being European” meant took root among the population, particularly among young people, who were addressed as the main agents of change.<sup>40</sup> Europeaness is related to issues such as geographical and economic mobility, psychological and financial independence and freedom of choice regarding one’s personal and professional path. Values associated with these dynamics are the spirit of initiative, personal liberty, ambition and individualism. Opposed to these, what people perceive and define as traditional values envisage “close emotional relationships within extended families, the importance of kinship, parent-child interdependency, and a certain modesty in sexual relations” (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi 2003: 27).

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<sup>40</sup> With regard to diplomatic relations, as well as to the social, political and economic models it followed, Saak’ashvili’s Georgia was more strongly oriented towards the US than the EU. However, in their appropriation and re-articulation of modernisation narratives, my participants referred to the West in general, with its moral and cultural attachments, as “Europe”. “Being European” was a category which some of my participants used to differentiate themselves from backward Asia (which in some cases was associated with Russia).

Through analysis of literature and fieldwork data I have highlighted young people's intolerance, not only of traditional hospitality norms, but also of the power relations that these norms epitomise. The recreation of hospitality events free from older relatives' psychological and material control expresses young people's desire to take control of their own lives. When I was in the field, parents' willingness to allow more independence to their children was slow to develop. I was impressed by the insistence with which mothers kept on calling their children when they were out of the home, questioning my young participants about where they were and what they were doing or just ordering them to get home as soon as possible. By the same token, it was awkward to see how many lies my young friends, who were already in their mid to late twenties, told to deceive their parents (even when there was nothing bad to hide).

These patterns could be interpreted as a clear sign of irreconcilable conflict between older generations, who want to keep their offspring tied to traditional hierarchies, and young people, who struggle to free themselves from this burden. However, the tensions between conservation and change analysed in this chapter indicate that the relationship between youth and tradition is ambivalent. Surveys conducted among young people (and, in certain cases, their parents) in the years following the Rose Revolution (Roberts, Pollock, Rustamova, Mammadova & Tholend 2009, Roberts & Pollock 2009, Sumbadze & Tarkhan Mouravi 2006, 2003) show that young people generally have more liberal attitudes than their parents, for example with regard to sexual orientation and gender equality. Still, the continuity of certain values among younger generations is remarkable. Personal relations (family and friends) are defined as the most important issues (ahead of "income", "work" and "politics") by both parents and children, in almost the same proportion (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi 2006: 242).

Interestingly, "feasting" is counted alongside kinship and friendship ties as one of the "three traditional areas of social interactions". Due to the male-dominated structure of hospitality, mothers and daughters are unenthusiastic about certain practices (see 4.1). In contrast, feasting is significant for both fathers and (to a lesser extent) sons, with over 80 percent and over 60 percent of interviewees respectively assessing hospitality practices as an important aspect of their social lives (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi 2006: 242; 2003: 18). Feasting is also the traditional pattern

whose loss is most strongly feared (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi 2003: 18). Regardless of the conflicting relationship with traditional norms, hospitality is resilient in informing people's articulations and performances across generations.

In certain instances, traditional values appear more persistent among the young generation than with their older relatives, indicating a "re-traditionalisation" of the youth. This pattern is in contrast with the "constant 'pursuit of the new'" which young people are supposed to endorse in "consumer markets and other systems of late modernity" (Walker & Stevenson 2012: 3; see also Roberts, Pollock, Rustamova, Mammadova & Tholend 2009, Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi 2006, 2003). Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this trend is the religious revival, which has emerged more strongly among young people. Several of my young participants followed more conventional forms of religiosity than their parents, including going to church on a regular basis and observing prescriptions such as fasting for religious celebrations (see also Zigon 2011, Roberts, Pollock, Tohlen & Tarkhnishvili 2009).

Traditional values prove more persistent in rural and small-town communities and among the urban poor (Tarkhnishvili et al. 2005). In such social and economic contexts, the kinship system and reliance on personal relationships maintain a fundamental role in people's everyday lives. Young people who have less chance of enjoying geographical and social mobility are also less likely to diversify their experiences and therefore develop alternative value systems (Roberts, Pollock, Rustamova, Mammadova & Tholend 2009). However, the resilience of tradition is not a sign of backwardness which can be ascribed to rural youth and underprivileged urban classes. On the contrary, young people's attachment to traditional values reveals the tension between the aspiration to be "European" on the one hand and the proud defence of essential features of Georgianness on the other. Tradition with regard to hospitality practices and beyond also persists among the well-educated, liberal and internationalised strata of the population. Young people's ambivalent articulations and performances not only concern being Georgian, which is framed within a mixture of feeling exceptional and awkwardly inappropriate. "Europeanness" is also a controversial object of admiration, alterity and scorn (see 3.4).

The tension between tradition and change, between “Georgianness” and “Europeanness”, is placed within the past/future opposition which underpins post-revolutionary narratives. The post-revolutionary leadership celebrated young people as the embodiment of the national future. This generation of “new Georgians” was expected to be patriotic, while at same time being oriented towards the West. The government’s commitment to raising this kind of youth translated into energetic interventions into young people’s education and socialisation (Zakharova 2010, see also Chapter 5).

However, the institutions’ ideas of how this youth should look did not necessarily match what young people in fact were, could be or wanted to be. The stigmatisation of what was regarded as belonging to the past was oblivious of the role that that past played in young people’s articulations and performances. The *bricolage* of hospitality between tradition and innovation is a practice of recuperation and repair. Practices of repair manifest the need to create (or recreate) meaning through the (re-)organisation of apparently heterogeneous items (Levi-Strauss 1966). Repair also expresses care about objects that people do not want to lose. Young people’s *bricolage* of hospitality, in its ambivalent relationship with what belongs to the past, is a way of recovering and preserving tradition from irremediable loss entailed by the dramatic changes taking place in post-revolutionary Georgia. Focusing on the kind of ties – bridging or bonding - that hospitality may generate, the ambivalence of hospitality practices between rupture and conservation entailed by *bricolage* lies the foundation for practices which, envisaging a freer and more active role for the youth, at the same time connects different generations through links of a mostly affectional kind. The – however problematic - negotiation and connection between past and future, rather than the clear-cut dismissal of the past as a hindrance of modernity, is an essential condition for civility to develop.

The discrepancy between the government’s expectations and many young people’s opportunities, desires and lifestyles was met with a repressive stance by political institutions, aimed to keep young people who did not fit the government’s idealised picture of a modernising country out of public sight. Policies of exclusion and repression targeted specific parts of urban public space where young people lived and socialised. In the next chapter, I investigate the phenomenon of *birzha*, a form of street socialisation among teenagers and young men. *Birzha* has a twofold

meaningfulness with regard to the analysis of hospitality. First, the specifics of this form of socialisation reproduce the patterns which unfold at hospitality events – in the form of social relationships, the circulation of items, shared norms and so on. Second, the form of “street hospitality” epitomised by *birzha* is placed in the wider context of public space as hospitable space. The notion of the hospitability of space envisaged by Saakashvili’s government clashed with the practices through which young people made public space hospitable for themselves and their peers. The government’s management of this conflict resulted in an exclusive stance towards public space and a certain part of society which inhabited it.



## 5

# HOSPITALITY VS. HOSPITABILITY: THE CONTESTED PUBLIC SPACE

## 5.1 Hospitable spaces? Disputing the meaning of hospitality

The term “hospitality” is not of common usage in the English language. The *Oxford English Dictionary* does not even list the word, while the noun “hospitableness” is mentioned under the adjective “hospitable” as “hospitable quality or character” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989). Yet, I avoid using the term “hospitableness”, since it has a specific meaning in hospitality studies. “Hospitableness” is the quality of “good” hosts, who provide appropriate services to their guest while being fundamentally driven by the genuine desire to please others, with no expectation whatsoever of getting something in return (Telfer 2000). In my view, this approach overlooks the ambivalence of hospitality as a practice in which people become involved out of generosity but also calculation. Hosts and guests are driven by solidarity but also competitiveness; private attitudes and public display are intertwined. Therefore, I do not find the term “hospitableness” in this sense useful for investigating hospitality from the perspective of ambivalence, which – I argue - is what makes hospitality an organising device within a given society.

Online sources that refer to the term define “hospitality” plainly as “the quality of being hospitable”.<sup>41</sup> Yet, the notion of “hospitality” (similarly to “hospitableness”) has a specific value in theoretical approaches to hospitality. In particular, Derrida’s writings (Derrida 2000, 1998, Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000, see chapters 1 and 3) question the meaning of “true” hospitality, speculating on conditional versus unconditional hospitality. As tautological as it may sound, the definition of “hospitality” as “being hospitable” is insightful for discussing Georgian hospitality. Forms of “hospitality” and “hospitality” do not necessarily correspond, and may even conflict. As I have pointed out in chapters 1 and 3, expressions of hospitality such as “as in your house” (Herzfeld 1987) or definitions

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<sup>41</sup> “Hospitality”, *Your Dictionary*. Available at: <http://www.yourdictionary.com/hospitality>

of the guest as “a gift from God” do not guarantee a welcoming environment for visitors. On the contrary, traditional ways of “being hospitable” follow norms which generate tension between hosts and guests.

The contested nature of public space (Rekhviashvili L. 2015, Orum & Neal 2010, Smith & Low 2006, Harvey 2006, Mitchell 2003, Purcell 2002, Lefebvre 1991) highlights the tension between hospitality and hospitability. In this chapter, I refer specifically to public space as all urban areas which are supposed to be of public use, and therefore have (in theory or in practice) a public access and a public function. Understandings of what makes a space hospitable, and for whom, are a field of conflict. Ideally, public space is defined as “all areas that are open and accessible to all members of the public in a society” (Orum & Neal 2010). However, questions arise over how “openness” and “accessibility” are to be understood, as well as over *who* are – and who are *not* – members of the public in a specific society. Indeed, this definition of public space may clash with exclusive policies which make space increasingly inhospitable.

Public spaces as open and inclusive places in which practices of solidarity and reciprocity unfold are fundamental for the development of civility within a society. Yet, people’s understandings of what it means to make a space hospitable, and therefore civil, are often in contrast with one another. In this chapter, I analyse *birzha*, a form of male street socialisation which has been prominent in Georgia since Soviet times. *Birzha* is regulated by shared moral and social norms which establish a vital link with the physical and social urban landscape (in this chapter, I specifically analyse *birzha* in Tbilisi). Since relationships within *birzha* are underpinned by reciprocal exchanges, I look at this phenomenon as an embodiment of hospitality practices in the context of public space. Through the reproduction of hospitality practices in the street, *birzha* articulates forms of hospitability within public spaces which clash with the views of official institutions regarding access to such spaces. The nature and meaning of hospitable public spaces is contested over the ambivalence of individuals, groups and practices inhabiting these spaces.

*Birzha* is a fundamental institution for young Georgian men to create intimate relationships with their peers across their neighbourhoods. These relationships are based on mutual trust, total dedication and honesty towards street communities, and

a willing to share goods, feelings and experiences with other *birzha* members. Streets and squares of Georgian cities and towns become the stage for equitable exchanges of material and non-material items, through which young people come of age on the basis of shared moral, cultural and social values. However, the exclusive and often hierarchical structure of *birzha* establishes strong ties within street communities, while cutting out other members of society. Furthermore, the more or less apparent links between *birzha* and organised crime throughout recent Georgian history have contributed to create an image of street communities - variously emphasised by political authorities and partially resonating across the population - as idle and lost youths who encroach on public space for their murky and selfish business.

In Soviet and post-Soviet times, *birzha* occupied the grey zones between public and private social and physical spaces (Harboe Knudsen & Frederiksen 2015). *Birzha* populated points in urban public space with narratives and practices which were opposed to those promoted by the official system. The Rose Revolution pledged to revitalise political and economic institutions, a process which had to go hand in hand with the (re)construction of major cities such as Tbilisi and Batumi. The government's renovation of cityscapes aimed to build a Western-style – that is a modern, clean and safe – urban public space. Hospitality had a fundamental role in this process, as new buildings and infrastructure were largely meant to make urban spaces appealing to visitors (especially foreigners, see Chapter 2). This approach clashed with *birzha*, which made informal uses of public spaces, uses which the political leadership associated with disorder and illegality. Practices of exchange predicated on trust and honour were forms of street hospitality which post-revolutionary narratives linked to negative phenomena such as petty crime, corruption and patron-client relations.

Conflicting approaches to images of public space were informed by the opposition between the past and the future which was pervasive of post-revolutionary narratives. Practices articulated and performed in urban open spaces by participants in *birzha* were stigmatised as detrimental to the political leadership's modernising efforts. As a result, the restyling of cityscapes (in Tbilisi and elsewhere) following the Rose Revolution went hand in hand with the government's exclusive stance towards certain social phenomena. The narratives of transparency which informed the political leadership's reforming fervour translated to specific architectural

approaches towards urban spaces. Yet, urban renovation implemented from above entailed the creation of opaque zones where power was arbitrarily enforced. The government's interventions aimed at building hospitable public spaces made these spaces increasingly hostile to a certain part of the population.

To investigate the conflict between *birzha* and the state over public spaces, I shall first point out the specifics of *birzha* as a form of socialisation. I focus specifically on the urban dimension of *birzha*, which is caught in the expression of practices which conflict with the dominant narratives about the city and its spaces. Secondly, I present *birzha* as an expression of hospitality in the street, which at the same time makes urban neighbourhoods hospitable spaces for people involved in street life. Thirdly, I analyse the conflict over the hospitability of urban public spaces in Soviet times and during the 1990s. I point out that *birzha*, embodying images of public space which opposed what was envisaged by the system, was regarded by its participants (and to a certain extent by neighbourhood communities at large) as an alternative and more legitimate source of authority than official institutions.

Highlighting the impact that the changes brought about by the Rose Revolution had on public spaces, this chapter investigates the post-revolutionary government's attempt to re-establish control over space by eliminating social practices which jeopardised the modernisation of the cityscape and made public spaces places of uncivil practices perpetrated by uncivil people. I point out that behind the façade of transparency which informed the government's renovation of urban spaces, the streets of Tbilisi were made inhospitable in fairly opaque ways. Yet, the opaqueness with which the government dealt with practices of hospitality which they considered hindrances to modernisation – whether in the form of *supra*, targeted by stigmatisation, or as *birzha*, annihilated by police repression – undermined the political leadership's legitimacy for the population. In such a troubled context of social inequality and political authoritarianism, I focus on the potentials of practices and spaces of hospitality as local sources of civility *vis-à-vis* the inconsistencies of the post-revolutionary modernisation project.

## 5.2 Hospitality in the urban neighbourhood: How is the street made hospitable?

### 5.2.1 Criminal groups or socialisation in public spaces?

*Birzha* refers to groups of male teenagers or young men who meet regularly in urban open spaces such as squares, courtyards and playgrounds. A Russian word literally meaning “stock exchange”, in Georgian *birzha* is a colloquial term. In the *Dictionary of Georgian Slang* (Bregadze 2005), the term is defined as an “open-pit gathering of idle youth”. The reference to the financial world may sound ironic, since as a norm participants are economically inactive (students or unemployed). However, valuable exchange of social capital takes place in *birzha*.

Another dimension of *birzha*'s meaning, from nineteenth century Russian slang, is a place where people wait for a temporary job (Dal' 1955, in Zakharova 2010). Similarly, ethnographies of the post-Soviet space (in this case Lithuania) indicate that a group of men waiting in the street for informal short-term employment is called a “*darbo birzha*”, the formal Lithuanian term for “unemployment agency” (Harboe Knudsen 2015). The little literature available on the topic describes *birzha* as a pervasive phenomenon among urban male youth, a pivotal stage in the process of identification within local communities, as well as a potential initial step in a criminal career (Curro 2015, Zakharova 2015, 2010, Frederiksen 2013, 2012, Koehler 1999a, 1999b).

Yet, understandings of *birzha* are disputed. In the perspectives of several of my participants, *birzha* is a wider social phenomenon which is neither exclusively male and juvenile nor peculiarly urban. While discussing my research, Manana (55, anthropologist) and her students Tea and Givi (both in their late twenties) suggested that *birzha* refers to regular gatherings of friends, neighbours or colleagues in open public spaces, at school or in the workplace. They defined “our *birzha*” as the group of lecturers and students, both male and female, who met at university every day for coffee or lunch. Similarly, when I visited Tamazi's native village in the mountains (see Chapter 4), my hosts showed me “the village's *birzha*”, made up of villagers of various ages, who gathered around the local spring playing cards or *nardi* (backgammon), chatting, smoking or simply watching passers-by. In further conversations on the matter, it emerged that *birzha* is widely considered to be a

phenomenon with rural origins, which has survived urbanisation by adapting to temporal and spatial transformations.

Literary sources suggest that *birzha* refers to pre-Soviet phenomena which extended beyond Georgian cities. The institution of adoptive brotherhood (*modzmeoba*), in which spiritual kinship serves as the basis for social and political allegiances between Caucasian highlanders (Bardavelidze 1984), is reminiscent of contemporary *birzha*. Keeping in mind the various features which define *birzha*, this chapter investigates conflicts over the hospitability of public spaces in the urban context of Tbilisi. I focus on the unrestrained renovation pursued by the post-revolutionary government *vis-à-vis* everyday practices of socialisation inhabiting urban public spaces.

The heart of *birzha* is the urban neighbourhood, *ubani* or *kvartali* in Georgian. During my fieldwork in 2008-2009, teenagers and young men hanging out in the streets were a permanent feature of many areas of Tbilisi. Residents referred to such gatherings, which seemed inseparable from the neighbourhood's physical and social landscape, as *birzha*. Regardless of people's various degrees of involvement in street life, knowledge of street norms was widespread among the neighbourhood's inhabitants (Frederiksen 2013, 2012, Zakharova 2010). Ordinary residents' acquaintance with *birzha* was essential for the outcomes of my research. "Second-hand" information was provided by people detached from *birzha* in time and space, such as older men recalling their youth experiences or mothers and wives worried about men wasting time in the street. Thanks to these respondents, I could partly counterbalance the limits imposed by the almost exclusively male access to *birzha*. Female exclusion was colourfully expressed in the words of my respondent Giorgi (42, salesman): "of course there are also women in *birzha*! They show up when it's time to take their drunk men home!"

Studies of the subject portray *birzha* as consisting of teenagers and young males (Zakharova 2015, 2010, Koehler 1999a, 1999b). It is defined as the principal school for masculinity, an essential stage in the transition from teenager to manhood, engaged in by youths until they leave school (Zakharova 2010). However, the *birzha* participants I came across were older than this on average. Firstly, young men who struggle to find an occupation may extend their "membership" of *birzha* after they

terminate their compulsory studies. Secondly, the neighbourhood's elderly, although not directly involved in *birzha* activities, are highly respected by younger residents, not least if they were part of *birzha* in their youth. Older men (over 40) occasionally hang out in the street with youngsters, who seek their elders' company as a source of prestige and advice. Finally, the popularity of *birzha* among the young dropped in the second half of the 2000s, as highlighted in Zakharova's research, and this trend accelerated in the following years due to changes in people's social and geographical mobility (Friederiksen 2013, Zakharova 2010, Roberts & Pollock 2009). As a result, younger generations may follow patterns which diverge from involvement in street communities, while their older relatives and friends are more likely to be tied to neighbourhood life.

The right to be part of *birzha* is given at birth to all Georgian males, regardless of ethnicity, religion or socio-economic status (Zakharova 2010). Inclusion is conditional on compliance with street norms, whose pivotal points are honour, honesty, manly attitudes and respect for the elderly and which are predicated on a rigid hierarchy of identities and roles. The top figure is the *dzveli bich'i* ("old boy"), who is the fundamental authority in *birzha*. A *dzveli bich'i* is a young man aiming for a career in the criminal world (Finckenauer & Kelly 1992). Key features of the *dzveli bich'i* are: utter disregard for official rules and authorities, mastery of street norms, proneness to using violence to solve conflicts, and prison experience. *Dzveli bich'i* status is regarded as the first level of a criminal hierarchy which culminates in the figure of the "thief-in-law", *k'anonieri kurdi* (in Russian *vor v zakone*, Slade 2014, 2007, Frederiksen 2013, Zakharova 2010, K'up'at'adze 2009, Frisby 1998).

Criminal organisations such as the "thieves-in-law" have been a powerful model for *birzha*'s young men. The "thieves-in-law" are defined as "networking criminal leaders who engage collectively in mafia activities" (Slade 2013: 17). Members of these networks are tied to one another by a code, which is often referred to as *gageba* ("understanding") and is made up by "a set of preserved, ritualised practices and status markers guided by a well-articulated, codified yet fluctuating body of rules" (Slade 2013: 17; see also K'up'at'adze 2017, Zakharova 2010).

While arguably originating in pre-Soviet Georgia, the "thieves" emerged as influencing figures in Soviet gulags, where they were used by the authorities to

control other inmates (Shelley et al. 2007). The strong influence on Georgian politics and economics that the “thieves” had throughout the 1990s has progressively faded away since the Rose Revolution (Frederiksen 2015, Slade 2013, K’up’at’adze 2009). However, the romanticised figure of the *k’anonieri kurdi*, as a man of honour who prioritises respect and duty towards his in-group over everything else, has had a long-lasting impact on young Georgians’ imagination and aspirations, embodying a model of bravery and manliness to be emulated (Zakharova 2010, 2007).

Notwithstanding the undeniable fascination exercised by organised crime on street communities, *birzha* had a relatively flexible meaning among my friends and acquaintances, transcending the narrow reference to semi-criminal street gangs. To a certain extent, *birzha* overlapped with *dzmak’atsoba* (Frederiksen 2013, 2012). *Dzmak’atsoba* is a stronger and manlier relationship than the neutral “friendship”, *megobroba*, and refers to the link with a *dzmak’atsi* – from *dzma* (“brother”) and *k’atsi* (“man”). In the words of Giorgi (42), a *dzmak’atsi* is “more than a friend, more than a brother”. The strongest kind of *dzmak’atsoba* is with your “friend from childhood” (*bashvobis dzmak’atsi*), and according to Giorgi, “it’s a friendship that should last forever, and it’s really sad if you lose this mate”. A *dzmak’atsi* is someone to whom “you can entrust your mother, your sister and your wife”. But if the mutual loyalty is betrayed, even such an important friend can become the most despised foe. In Giorgi’s view, “when a *dzmak’atsi* lets you down and betrays your trust, he ought to be killed. In my life I have learned that almost nobody is worthy of being called *dzmak’atsi*”.

As Giorgi’s words indicate, trust is pivotal to personal ties within *birzha*, and to relationships between *dzmak’atsi* in general. These relationships oblige one to be totally honest with other *birzha* members, take responsibility for oneself and face the consequences of breaking street laws. Severe violations include deceiving or betraying *birzha* members, especially collaborating with the police or other state institutions; verbally offending or physically attacking another *birzha* member or somebody close to him (particularly a female member of his family), letting down a *dzmak’atsi*, and failing to respect older residents of the neighbourhood (whether or not affiliated to *birzha*). Yet, solidarity between *dzmak’atsi* is intertwined with (sometimes physical) competitiveness between both *birzhas* from different neighbourhoods and members of the same *birzha*. Success in enhancing one’s



position among peers is linked to cunning behaviour, proneness to risks, mastery of street laws and strong ties with influential *dzveli bichi* or the neighbourhood's elderly.

*Birzha* is a form of socialisation which pervades public spaces in Georgian cities. Tying men to each other through mutual responsibility, *birzha* follows a hierarchy based on people's honour. As potential first step in a criminal career, *birzha* bestows superior authority on people who show a daredevil attitude, disregarding the rules imposed by official institutions. Conversely, the norms regulating street life are held in high regard, while infringements entail severe moral and social sanctions. What does the structure of *birzha* have to do with hospitality? What similarities and differences are observed in these two practices? Can we analyse *birzha* as an expression of hospitality in the street? If so, in what ways does this analysis enhance our understanding of the contested hospitability of public spaces.

### **5.2.2 An expression of street hospitality?**

The norms regulating interpersonal relationships within *birzha* highlight some similarities between street socialisation and hospitality. Social ties grounded on mutual trust, the pivotal role of honour, a hierarchy structured on prestige and life experience, the tension between solidarity and competitiveness and between inclusion and exclusion: these elements inform the interaction of young men in the street while also being the core of traditional hospitality practices. On the basis of these common features, can *birzha* be investigated as a practice of hospitality, rather than just as a way to hang out?

*Birzha* rests on a sense of belonging, honour and commitment which transcends people's search for mere company and fun. Ties predicated on trust and respect entail a deep sense of identification with one's group, which translates into specific expectations of community members. From a positive or a negative perspective, *birzha* is understood by members of street communities and residents of the neighbourhood as a more serious business than simply hanging out and engaging in various deals with peers (Frederiksen 2012, Garot 2007, Anderson 1999, Whyte 1943).

In conversations with my participants, I rarely came across explicit associations between *birzha* and hospitality. This is partly ascribable to my status as a foreigner, which led several of my participants to depict hospitality in the positive

light of national tradition while denigrating *birzha* as a despicable phenomenon. When asked to define *birzha* and recount how it works and what it means to be part of it, my friends and acquaintances (from variously internal or external perspectives) focused on both the privilege and the responsibility entailed in being a *birzha* member; the rewarding feeling of brotherhood; the annoyance of having young men hanging out in the street; the waste of time represented by street life; and the despicable link between *birzha* and the criminal world. None of these perspectives implied a clear link between *birzha* and hospitality. However, what was disguised in explicit articulations of *birzha* emerged from people's practices in a twofold way. First, my observations in the field suggested theoretical connections between hospitality and *birzha*, while second, practices of hospitality informed the way in which *birzha* members interacted with one another and with their physical and social surroundings.

Relationships within *birzha* are regulated by the principle of reciprocity. Just like hospitality practices, *birzha* is informed by ongoing exchanges of material and non-material items. The term itself indicates multi-directional giving and taking, and business deals, both small and large, take place in the street. Sharing is a common feature: members of the street community are expected to circulate cigarettes, clothes and other belongings within the circle of peers. Since *birzha* is mostly made up of young people, who usually do not own much, sharing is given high consideration. Those who are temporarily better off than others (because they have found a short-term job or have taken a loan or received a gift from friends or family) make their resources available to the group.

Money can be used to purchase drinks and food, to pay for a taxi for a trip out of town, to feast in a restaurant or to go out to clubs or bars. In Tbilisi, a widespread way of spending money within *birzha* is to buy fresh beer, usually accompanied by dry smoked fish and rye bread, directly from the local *Kazbegi* brewery on the banks of the river Mt'k'vari (*sanap'iro*).<sup>42</sup> Groups of men drink beer on the brewery's premises, sitting on the pavement or on the parapet by the riverside, or they take large

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<sup>42</sup> *Kazbegi* (in Georgian *Qazbegi*) is a brand of Georgian beer which takes its name from Mount Kazbek in the North Caucasus, and from a small village (currently known as Stepants'minda) in the eponymous mountain region.

plastic bottles full of beer back to their neighbourhoods and consume it in the street with friends.

When there is no money available, a usual strategy is to leave someone's belongings (commonly mobile phones) at a pawnshop (*lombardi*) to get a loan (see also Frederiksen 2013: 41). Despite the general lack of money, in the majority of cases belongings are redeemed from the pawnshop thanks to solidarity between peers, who figure out strategies to pay the debt. Those who benefit from other people's goods are expected to share their belongings whenever possible. People who attempt to keep things for themselves are deplored.

The narrow understanding of *birzha* as a semi-criminal group implies that proper *birzha* members, especially if aspiring to the status of *dzveli bichi*, should not have a job. Labour relations contradict the street life principles of freedom from official hierarchies. Moreover, accumulating private wealth in officially recognised ways such as paid work is incompatible with the "traditional" means through which criminal and semi-criminal figures enhance their status, first and foremost by spending a large part of their life in jail (Friederiksen 2015, Slade 2014, 2007, K'up'at'adze 2009). However, due to the transformations of *birzha* mentioned above, employment (which in most cases is informal and temporary) and membership in street communities are no longer mutually exclusive. Street communities are a fruitful environment for the exchange of "favours of access" (Ledeneva 1998). Occasional jobs, especially in the field of construction, are negotiated in the neighbourhood's spaces (Harboe Knudsen 2015). *Birzha* members act as mediators between their friends and potentially useful individuals who can provide access to work and good deals.

Mutual exchanges stemming from ties of trust and (conditional) solidarity make a case for understanding *birzha* from the angle of hospitality. Besides the speculative comparisons which I have elaborated from fieldwork observations, my research detected core elements of hospitality practices, such as speech and gestures, as being constitutive of the life of street communities. As a foreign woman, I did not have direct access to "fully-fledged" *birzha*. Yet, the pervasiveness of *birzha* in the neighbourhood allowed me to observe the way in which young men gathered in the street. Moreover, stories and gossip from the neighbourhood's residents, who were

more or less acquainted with *birzha*, enhanced my knowledge of street communities from outside.

Gatherings of young men in streets, courtyards, playgrounds and stairways are often accompanied by the consumption of food and (usually alcoholic) drinks, notably beer and vodka. In late summer to early autumn, people also drink fresh homemade wine with friends and neighbours in the street or in the shared basements of apartment blocks. The food (if any) which accompanies street drinking is basic: sunflower seeds and dried salted fish to soften the effects of alcohol. Similarly to what I noted in Chapter 4 about improvised meetings of youth, the structure of these encounters follows the patterns of *supra*. With the partial exception of beer (see 4.2), alcohol is poured and drunk in ritualised ways, reproducing *tamadoba*. Toasts are simplified – except in cases of specific inspiration and/or remarkable drunkenness – yet ubiquitous. The act of emptying glasses in one go is normally followed by immediate nibbling of some food, to avoid getting drunk too quickly. This structure is faithfully reproduced at social gatherings across public spaces at large. For this reason, I was able to attend meetings not considered “official” *birzha* deals, which would be otherwise off-limits to women and other outsiders. My friends and acquaintances were eager to point out that for them these improvised events amounted to expressions of hospitality. As K’akha (22, student) put it:

Forget about *supra*! For me and my *dzmak’atsi* hospitality is putting together the little money we have, buying a bottle of beer or vodka, and pickles, bread, ketchup if we can afford it, and then sitting somewhere in the neighbourhood, toasting and drinking.

The comparison between *birzha* and practices of hospitality unfolds on multiple levels. Firstly, I have tracked correspondences between the respective norms underpinning *birzha* and hospitality. Relationships of trust between honourable men, predicated on solidarity and reciprocity, but also grounded in competitiveness and obligation; circulation of material and non-material goods and services, from various items and accessories to “favours of access”; unwritten rules which work as shared knowledge within the community, enforced through a hierarchy based on people’s

trustworthiness: practices of *birzha* and hospitality stem from the same patterns which regulate interpersonal relationships and mutual exchanges. Secondly, practices of sharing and collective consumption among *birzha* members are informed by speech and gestures which follow the pattern of traditional hospitality events. Drinks and food are consumed in the neighbourhood's open spaces, more or less faithfully reproducing the structure of *supra* and *tamadoba*. Finally, the affinity of these street activities with hospitality events emerges more or less explicitly in participants' own articulations.

In the next section, I move from the internal patterns of *birzha* as an expression of hospitality to the relationship between *birzha* and the hospitability of public spaces. I investigate the conflicts between official images of public spaces and everyday practices of space appropriation. These conflicts developed during the Soviet years and through the 1990s, becoming particularly severe following the Rose Revolution, which shifted moral, social, political and economic understandings of public spaces. The clash between post-revolutionary narratives and *birzha* practices led to a top-down reconfiguration of public space as a hospitable space by the political leadership. The implementation of hospitability as envisaged by modernisation narratives entailed an exclusive and repressive stance by the state towards certain parts of the country's physical and social landscape.

### **5.3 Struggle over public spaces: Hospitability from the Soviet era to the Rose Revolution**

#### **5.3.1 Hospitability of liminal spaces: *Birzha* in Soviet times and the 1990s**

*Birzha* is deeply rooted in the social life of the urban neighbourhood. Although the core location for street socialisation is usually a substantial element of the cityscape, such as a street or square, *birzha* spreads across the urban space, penetrating liminal areas. In the urban landscape, liminal spaces or "interstices" (Brighenti 2013: xv) are zones that "are essentially away from a 'public gaze' [sic] whilst simultaneously situated within a public space" (Parkin & Coomber 2011: 717). Speaking of these in-between spaces means "to go beyond the centre/periphery dichotomy, the

core/margin dichotomy, or even the city/suburb pseudo-dichotomy” (Brighenti 2013: xvi). Liminal spaces are allocated a “minoritarian” position with respect to other spaces that are “either more institutionalized, and therefore economically and legally powerful, or endowed with a stronger identity, and therefore more recognizable or typical” (Brighenti 2013: xvi; see also Turner 1969 on liminality in rituals). Yet, liminality produces identities, practices, norms and power relations in its own right.

I consider liminal spaces to be territorial grey zones. In the neighbourhoods of Tbilisi, groups of men of various size populate the thresholds between house and street, between family and state: street corners, playgrounds, stairways, courtyards, block gates, cellars and basements. The ambivalence of *birzha* as a practice emerging from social and physical grey zones is a further link between street socialisation and hospitality. As a phenomenon pervasive of spaces which are neither public nor private, *birzha* stems from the tension between the private realm of domesticity and intimate relationships and the public sphere of the state and other official institutions. The moral, cultural, social, political and economic structure of *birzha* has generated practices that have represented an alternative, and often an opposition, to the official system at various stages of Georgia’s recent history.

Understandings of what is a public space and to whom it belongs are particularly contested in socialist systems, in which the relationship between private and public is specifically ambivalent (Ledeneva 2014, 2011, Zhelnina 2012; see also 1.3.2). The stigmatisation of private property in socialist societies might suggest that the “publicness” of space was developed to an extent unknown in the capitalist world. However, since the public represented the state, only activities controlled by the authorities were allowed in official public space (Zhelnina 2012). In this context, *birzha* was located at the blurred boundaries between public and private, as a niche relatively free of the system’s regimentation.

*Birzha* was an alternative form of youth association to those promoted by Soviet authorities, such as the Young Pioneers and the Komsomol’ (Walker & Stephenson 2012, Zakharova 2010). In contrast to socialist images of youth as the most active part of the population in realising the collective goals of Soviet society, *birzha* valued loyalty to personal ties more highly than loyalty to the state. Images of hard-working and healthy Soviet youth clashed with the perceived inactivity and

debauchery of *birzha* members. The oppressive nature of the Soviet state meant that “open ‘public’ spaces (were) perceived as something alien and belonging to the state, not to the inhabitants”, turning an ideal “everyone’s space” into “no one’s space” (Zheltnina 2013). *Birzha* catered for a different kind of collective interaction in urban spaces, as a way in which “ordinary residents appropriated public places beyond the mainstream paradigms and master narratives of the city image” (Darieva & Kashuba 2011: 9). By carving out social and physical grey zones partially spared from state control, *birzha* created hospitable spaces for those young men to whom socialist symbolic and material power was alien (Kubik 1994).

The fall of Soviet authoritarianism fostered expectations for the development of viable public spaces. However, a balance between secured private property and transparent management of the public domain did not emerge. Instead, social, political and economic turmoil ravaged the cityscape, and by 2002 Tbilisi was offering the following scenario: “concrete was falling off the huge apartment blocks in chunks, the roads were so potholed that in many places the concept of traffic lanes had been abandoned, and the power grid was so decayed that some Georgians had not had electricity in over a decade” (Dunn 2008: 248). In this context, the domestic sphere and its premises took over from public space the role as the place where people built reciprocal ties by circulating material and non-material items (see 1.3.2 and 3.3.1).

In a neighbourhood life of struggle and sharing, *birzha* had a prominent role for two main reasons. Firstly, as a cluster of personal relations of trust and reciprocity it facilitated access to goods and services which the shortcomings of official institutions otherwise made unattainable. *Birzha* moved easily within and across blurred boundaries, merging the public with the private. In a context in which everyday practices which circumvented official rules had ambivalent links with corrupt politics and economics, *birzha* stood out as a fully-fledged petty criminal phenomenon (Frederiksen 2013, Zakharova 2010). Yet, in the 1990s *birzha* members were still referring to it as a form of protest against the system (Zakharova 2010), despite the more or less close connections between street communities and the criminal world which paralysed institutions. In this sense, *birzha* was ambivalent as both a cause of and a reaction to institutional inefficiency, political unaccountability, economic stagnation and social inequality (Ledeneva 1998).

Secondly, in such a desolate context, the ideas of honourable camaraderie embodied by *birzha* were essential if men were to recover a sense of masculinity that was poorly reflected in reality (Frederiksen 2013, 2012). Traditional images of Georgian manhood were challenged by social, political and economic hardship. Men, who were expected to provide for their families, treat guests lavishly and be respected personalities within the community, were impoverished figures, often brought low by alcohol and drug problems. In this context, “manly love”, *k’atsuris siq’varuli*, meaning strong masculine ties of affection and solidarity, was fundamental for men to revive positive ideas of themselves. Giorgi (42), who was 19 when the Soviet Union disintegrated, recalled the ties between the *birzha* mates of his youth with this metaphor:

True friends are sparrows, *beghura*, because they don’t leave Georgia even when it gets cold. We don’t like swallows, *mertskhali*, which are around when the weather is good and go away in winter.

The relevance of *birzha* in the lives of post-Soviet youth was also related to this generation’s lack of anything to do (Friederiksen 2013, 2012; see also Blank 2004). The impossibility of working or studying (given the seriously corrupt education sector, Polese 2008) gave young men little alternative to hanging around in the streets. More or less illicit activities, including fights with *birzha* from other neighbourhoods, provided opportunities for adventures which alleviated this tedious routine. Interestingly, this inactivity was recalled by some respondents as a carefree time. Ia (48, housewife) warned me that, while in the 2010s *birzha* was barely noticeable, “in Shevardnadze’s times *birzha* was everywhere! People did not have jobs, so everybody could hang around all the time”.

In Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia, the hospitability of public spaces was undermined by specific social, political and economic conditions. The Soviet state controlled social activities throughout the cityscape. As a phenomenon embodying values at odds with socialist principles, *birzha* created hospitable spaces for alternative practices of socialisation within the liminal zones of urban



neighbourhoods. In the 1990s, public spaces were made inhospitable by the collapse of the state, which brought poverty, crime and conflict. *Birzha* connections were essential for the circulation of goods and services, which conveyed horizontal solidarity between relatives, friends and neighbours faced by social fragmentation, political alienation and economic disaster (Frederiksen 2015, 2013, Manning 2009b). Yet, being linked to the organised crime which was paralysing state institutions, *birzha* was at the same time responsible for the hardships of citizens. Nevertheless, as expression of masculine brotherhood in miserable times, belonging to *birzha* was a way for “true” Georgian men to protest against the system and separate themselves from the corrupt world of politics and business.

Along with promises to (re)build a functioning state, the Rose Revolution brought high expectations for the creation of hospitable public spaces. The images of hospitality promoted by modernisation narratives were informed by the political leadership’s proneness to Western models. Saakashvili’s government put the notion of transparency as a fundamental attribute of a modern society in opposition to the murkiness, chaos and lack of safety they attributed to urban public space prior to the Rose Revolution. Yet, the political leadership had to face the discrepancy between its own ideas about the hospitality of space and the everyday space reappropriation of street communities. Official institutions used exclusion and repression to pursue the conflict with *birzha* over the hospitality of urban public spaces. As a result, the cityscape was made inhospitable for that part of the population which did not fit the government’s project of radical renovation.

### **5.3.2 Restyling the urban space: Hospitality as transparency**

The Rose Revolution expressed the new leadership’s firm intention (ostensibly shared by the majority of the population) to break abruptly with the past. The push to modernisation concerned the symbols and aesthetics of hospitality. Calling traditional hospitality practices into question went hand in hand with the conceptualisation of a new kind of hospitality, while modernisation narratives focused on spaces of hospitality, changing understandings of what a hospitable place was. In Chapter 2, I defined the political leadership’s efforts to modernise the symbols and aesthetics of hospitality as the making of a monolithic “public

hospitality”. Partly referring to private companies and commercial venues (hotels, bars, and clubs), public hospitality was also the face through which the country meant to present itself and its impressive transformation to the outside world. While it entailed the privatisation of spaces to develop commercial hospitality venues, public hospitality simultaneously concerned understandings of what public spaces should look like, how they should be used and by whom. These understandings transcended material spaces of hospitality, affecting the urban landscape, not only in its physical structure, but also in its social expressions.

The government’s project of radical renovation aimed to transform Georgian citizens’ moralities and practices. Following Lefebvre’s concept of space as a social product (1991), social relationships attain a concrete form only when they are placed in a material and symbolic space. In this way, “the use of space serves to shape thought and action —as well as provide a means of social control via the re/production of accepted practice within place *per se*” (Parkin & Coomber 2011: 718; see also Gabunia 2011, Mitchell 2003). Shaping citizens’ “thought and action” implied shaping the physical and social space that people inhabited. By the same token, in order to be modern, urban space needed to be populated by modern citizens.

Transparency was the banner under which the modernisation of Georgian society was carried out, at both the social and spatial levels. As a synonym of good governance, transparency has become a key concept in the democratisation process in post-authoritarian systems (Frederiksen 2015). In Saak’ashvili’s Georgia, the commitment to transparency, epitomised first and foremost by the government’s anti-corruption reforms, was a vital step in moving away from undesired Soviet and post-Soviet legacies (K’up’at’adze 2009, K’ukhianidze 2009, King 2004).<sup>43</sup> In post-revolutionary narratives, transparency was a fundamental attribute of hospitable physical and social spaces. Building transparent spaces entailed restyling the urban landscape to make the city look “Western”, that is, tidier, cleaner and safer. The push to renovate the cityscape aimed first of all to eradicate negative images of the pre-revolutionary past. Run-down buildings, refugees living in derelict hotels,

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<sup>43</sup> The main targets of these reforms were bribery in the public services and rampant corruption in the police. The latter was purged and rebuilt from scratch through strict monitoring and improved salaries for new recruits. According to Transparency International, as a result of these efforts, in under a decade Georgia rose from 124<sup>th</sup> of 133 countries in terms of perceived corruption on the eve of Rose Revolution to 51<sup>st</sup> of 176, ahead of several EU members (Transparency International 2012).

underpasses and train stations, potholed roads, ruins on every street corner, a lack of electricity and running water: all were physical reminders of war, poverty, corruption and crime, and all were considered legacies of Soviet times rather than by-products of “transition”

Subsequently, the emphasis on transparency as the main attribute of a hospitable space was embodied in a new architectural fervour. Glass buildings were meant to make the centres of political power, public services and finance visible and accessible to citizens.<sup>44</sup> The new Georgian parliament in Kutaisi, the Tbilisi Public Service Hall, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (also in Tbilisi) and the glass police stations around the country embody this trend (Curro 2015, Frederiksen 2015).

A transparent public space was also the outcome of the government’s commitment to putting an end to chaos and restoring the rule of law (Frederiksen 2015, Gotfredsen 2014, Slade 2007).<sup>45</sup>

The government sought to regulate unofficial access to and use of public spaces, establishing rules (and related sanctions) which defined which practices would be allowed and which prohibited in public spaces. For example, unlicensed street vendors were targeted as a potential hindrance to the process of public land commodification, as well as an expression of backwardness to be removed from the cityscape (Rekhviashvili L. 2015). Young *birzha* men hanging around streets and squares were a similarly unwelcome presence in post-revolutionary urban space. *Birzha* conveyed images of a disorderly and unsafe space, which contradicted the political leadership’s idea of transparency as a fundamental attribute of hospitality.

Regulations against drinking in public spaces, a widespread practice in *birzha* (see 5.2), are a paradigmatic example of the government’s attitude to certain phenomena taking place in the cityscape. Fines for the consumption of alcohol in streets and squares also punished the gatherings on the premises of the riverside *Kazbegi* brewery which were so popular among Tbilisi’s male residents.<sup>46</sup> When I

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<sup>44</sup> Lomsadze, G. (2010). “The glass age comes to Georgia”. *Eurasianet.org*. Available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61718>

<sup>45</sup> Kupatadze, A. and Slade, G. (2014). “The failed mental revolution: Georgia, crime, and criminal Justice”. Open Democracy. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/gavin-slade-alexander-kupatadze/failed-mental-revolution-georgia-crime-and-criminal-justice>.

<sup>46</sup> Ambebi.ge (2014). “Mzad khart gadaikhalod ludis dalevis sanatslod 150 lari? – Kuchashi dalevis saprtkheebi da gamkatsrebuli sanktsiebi” (“Are you ready to pay 150 lari to drink beer in the street? The dangers of drinking in the street and the strengthening of sanctions”), 9 September. Available at:

visited Tbilisi in 2014, the people drinking around the brewery had largely disappeared, as had the stalls selling smoked fish. My participants explained that in the later years of his presidency, “Misha” (diminutive of “Mikheil” Saak’ashvili) had started charging people to drink there. The stalls had been removed, as the products they sold had been deemed harmful to health, with rumours of cases of severe food poisoning caused by bad fish. Moreover, there had apparently been complaints about the groups of men eating and drinking around the brewery polluting the river and the surrounding area with the waste they left behind.

The brewery case highlights the ambivalence of the moral and social boundaries which are drawn between what is appropriate, or at least acceptable, in the public space and what is disruptive of space and the people inhabiting it (see Chapter 6). The government’s policies appeared to be based on legitimate concerns over order, health and safety. Excessive drinking threatens public spaces as hospitable places for everyone. However, many of my participants – who were not necessarily either involved in *birzha* or sympathisers with street life – thought these measures inappropriate as sanctioning disproportionately what they regarded as Georgians’ everyday habits, or even traditional customs, such as toasting and drinking with friends in open spaces. My participants who were alien or hostile to the cultural, social, political and economic changes that the Rose Revolution claimed to have brought did not see in the government’s assertive interventions in the cityscape attempts to make public spaces accessible to all citizens. On the contrary, these participants felt increasingly threatened by an authoritarian power which was arbitrarily turning streets and squares into inhospitable places for many people.

The conflict between future and past emphasised by modernisation narratives was reflected in tension over the hospitality of public spaces. The government’s ideas of what a hospitable space in a modern city looks like clashed with *birzha*’s use of public spaces, which was negatively associated with a past of disorder and crime. Post-revolutionary reforms punished these practices, which modernisation narratives depicted as hindrances to the country’s path towards its Western future. In the following section, I investigate the ambivalence of transparency in relation to

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<http://www.ambebi.ge/sazogadoeba/110613-mzad-kharth-gadaikhadoth-ludis-dalevis-sanacvlod-150-lari-quchashi-dalevis-safirthkheebi-da-gamkacrebuli-sanqciebi.html>;  
<http://mtavari.info/com/news/view/4029>

contested understandings of public spaces as hospitable spaces. I point out that the government's attempt to re-establish control over the public space amounted to the creation of opaque zones to which people and practices which belonged to the past were to be relegated. These opaque zones made the inconsistencies at the heart of the post-revolutionary modernisation project increasingly apparent, ultimately undermining the leadership's moral and political legitimacy.

## **5.4 When hospitality is denied: political legitimacy between transparency and opacity**

### **5.4.1 The politics of transparency in opaque zones**

The opposition between past and future became a visible token of change in the urban space, in Tbilisi as well as in other cities and towns. Anthropologist Martin Demant Frederiksen, referring to Mikhail Yampolsky's work on iconoclastic practices at the time of the demise of the Soviet Union, defines the materialisation of change in the cityscape as "overwriting", which he describes as "a process involving official attempts to replace one historical period with another by covering or removing certain structures, making them 'previous' rather than present" (Frederiksen 2013: 30). In post-Rose Revolution Georgia, the material overwriting of the cityscape went hand in hand with the moral and social overwriting of people and practices which were negatively associated with the Soviet era and the 1990s. Conflicting ideas of hospitality in urban public spaces played an essential role in this process, since the accessibility of spaces applied differently to specific individuals, groups and areas of the city. Everyday practices that made spaces in neighbourhoods hospitable for young *birzha* men clashed with the political leadership's ideas of hospitality, which were promoted by mainstream narratives and implemented through reforms.

For a number of reasons the government identified *birzha* as one of its main targets for removal as part of the modernisation project. First, *birzha* was a blatant expression of the despised features of the past: petty crime, over-drinking, drug use and inactivity. Second, *birzha* and the criminal world to which it was ambivalently related carried a moral, social, political, legal and economic authority in competition with the state. This authority had its strongest grip on the young, which the

government's project placed at the forefront of the country's modernisation (Polese & Ó Beacháin 2012, Jones 2006). An indication of the popularity of street life and the criminal world among young people is the fact that 25 per cent of Georgian schoolchildren interviewed in 1993 declared that they wanted to be thieves-in-law when they grew up (Slade 2007: 179). Third, young men who hung out in public spaces, getting drunk, talking loudly and negotiating dubious deals, spoiled the image of cleanness and safety which the government aimed to project to external observers and visitors.

Competition between the state and *birzha* took place in a struggle over the hospitability of public space. On the one hand, the government's project envisaged a Western-style cityscape. Citizens who inhabited this space were successful in the private sphere thanks to their hard work and spirit of initiative, while at the same time they were respectful of the public exercise of authority in the form of state power. On the other hand, *birzha* embodied liminal use of public spaces, transcending the divide between the public and the private which the political leadership aimed to (re)establish as a fundamental sign of the country's modernity.

The zero-tolerance approach taken by the government envisaged the annihilation of undesirable practices, of which *birzha* was a paradigmatic expression, and those who engaged in them. In his 2006 address to parliament, Saakashvili referred to the tough policies being implemented against petty crime as aiming to "clean our streets of this rubbish".<sup>47</sup> The Georgian Criminal Code was reformed to include harsher sanctions against petty theft and minor drug-related offences (Glonti 2012). During Saakashvili's rule, many of my young male friends and acquaintances were worried about the increasing presence of police patrols (*p'at'ruli*) in the streets. Some people avoided going out at night, even to go to the local shop. This behaviour was motivated by the belief that young males hanging out after a certain hour in certain areas looked suspicious. My friend Dato (22, unemployed) explained:

It doesn't matter if you are a clean guy, somebody who has never had any problems with the law. Police stop guys who hang out on

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<sup>47</sup> Slade, G. (2012). "Georgian Prisons: Roots of Scandal". *Open Democracy*. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/gavin-slade/georgias-prisons-roots-of-scandal>; Civil.ge (2006).

their own or with other guys. If you go out with a girl, then probably they are not going to stop you, they don't think that you're going to *birzha* or that you're a *dzveli bich'i* if you hang out with girls.

Vakho (26, see 1.2.3) recalled a misadventure when he was stopped by the police at the time of my fieldwork in 2008:

I was going home from a friend's house. I took a taxi, because taxis are usually safer than walking or getting a ride from a friend if you have to go out at night. But a police patrol stopped my taxi! They got me out of the car and started asking what I was doing in the street so late at night. They didn't believe I'd been at a friend's for some drinks and was just going home to sleep. They thought I was a drug dealer or something like that. They took me to the police station, and I had to do some tests because they wanted to check if I'd taken drugs. I was completely clean, just a bit drunk. But they locked me up for the whole night. The morning after, I was taken to court. The trial was quick, and the judge told me that I was free to go but I had to pay a 100 *lari* fine because I was drunk and had been aggressive with the police, that's what they said. My father is very happy that they didn't put me in jail, so he said he's going to pay the fine, otherwise I wouldn't know where to find the money.

Episodes such as the unlucky night recounted by Vakho were not isolated cases. Data confirm the government's repressive stance against people and practices considered unsuitable to the modernisation project. The harsh sanctions imposed for petty crime during Saakashvili's presidency led to the prison population becoming one of the highest per capita in the world.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Kupatadze & Slade (2014); Slade (2012).

In Chapter 2, I pointed out that post-revolutionary elites' willingness to erase the past led to the stigmatisation of traditional hospitality as a set of backward practices to be eradicated. The same push for renovation informed the way in which the state dealt with *birzha* and the spaces inhabited by street communities. Yet, although neither *birzha* nor *supra* fitted modernisation narratives, the government approached these practices in different ways. While *birzha* was openly associated with organised crime as a justification for the zero tolerance approach, traditional hospitality had a double-edged position.

While *supra* was selectively promoted as a tourist attraction, everyday hospitality practices like those taking place in public spaces were regarded less benevolently. Manifestations of hospitality such as sharing a bottle and some food in the street while singing and toasting amounted to backwardness. This kind of misbehaviour was associated with a past when people spent their days hanging around their neighbourhoods with nothing to do, or engaging in dubious deals. Such practices were not only harmful as expressions of debauchery among youth but also as a visible token of the grey zones in which street communities cohabited with corruption and crime. From the government's perspective, street hospitality encapsulated in *birzha* practices was an expression of unlawful connections and exchanges which must be annihilated.

Similarly to Frederiksen's young men in the city of Batumi (2013), *birzha* members from my fieldwork in Tbilisi, while depicted by the state as remnants of a turbulent past, were unwelcome in the country's future. The hectic construction of shiny buildings in the cityscape contrasted with the immobility of the young men's present lives. Their exclusion from the future planned by the political elites was mirrored by the management of urban spaces. The state-sponsored reconstruction of Tbilisi made the city hospitable to foreign visitors (with the construction of hotels and other touristic facilities), political elites (with buildings being refurbished to welcome visiting foreign leaders) and the new middle and upper classes (with fashionable restaurants and bars in the city centre; see Chapter 2). The government did not pay the same attention to urban areas which were not part of its modernisation project – mostly (but not exclusively) residential areas (*mikrorayony*) developed through Soviet planning (Van Assche & Salukvadze 2012). At the end of the Saakashvili era (2012-2013), the brand new city centre, as the government's



showcase for international institutions and foreign investors, contrasted with several neighbourhoods where little had changed in terms of building renovation and infrastructural improvement.

Unwelcome in the future, at the same time *birzha* was surrounded by an inhospitable space in the present. The Saakashvili government's most notable achievement was allegedly the drastic reduction of criminality.<sup>49</sup> Yet, this result was attained through social and political repression which contrasted with the image of the country as a "beacon of democracy" promoted by the political leadership.<sup>50</sup> The commitment to transparency did not apply to the way in which the state dealt with *birzha*. If transparency was a token of the government's victory over crime and informality, there were also opaque zones in which state power arbitrarily denied hospitability.

The following section analyses the way in which the inconsistencies generated by the co-existence of transparency and opaque zones undermined people's trust in modernisation narratives and thus in the post-revolutionary political leadership and its project as a whole. I discuss the government's progressive loss of legitimacy for the population *vis-à-vis* the resilience of practices of hospitality – at home, in the street and elsewhere. Hospitality, reproduced along with the tension between tradition and modernity, assimilation and rejection, conservation and change, catered for a kind of moral, social, political and economic relationships which stood out as a potential alternative to the models brought by the Rose Revolution.

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<sup>49</sup> According to statistics, zero-tolerance policies made Georgia safer than many Western countries. As K'up'at'adze and Slade report (2014), by 2010 "a person in Georgia was half as likely to be a victim of burglary, four times less likely to be robbed and ten times less likely to be assaulted than in law-abiding Germany". The same scholars, however, also maintain that the post-revolutionary government's obsession with crime was largely unjustified. Despite the chaos and violence of the 1990s and the emphasis on a criminal culture supposedly rooted across society, Georgia "has never been (by comparative standards) a particularly high-crime society. It is still a relatively agricultural and rural place, maintaining strong social institutions – the family, organised communities and religiosity – which are a natural check on crime" (K'up'at'adze & Slade 2014: page number not available).

<sup>50</sup> This definition was given by then-US president George W. Bush during his visit to Georgia in 2005 (see, for example, BBC News (2005). "Bush praises Georgian democracy", 10 May. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4531273.stm>).

### 5.4.2 From transparency to civility?

From the government's perspective, the modernisation project aimed at introducing moral, social, political and economic transparency to Georgia was ultimately an effort to bring about civility (see 2.4). Lack of civility can be defined as general negligence towards one's social and physical surroundings – in other words, towards the “public good”. In this sense, certain features of hospitality – whether performed around the table following *supra* etiquette or reproduced in the street in simplified ways – appear to belong to a context of incivility. In modernisation narratives, noisiness, drunkenness, overeating and other expressions of debauchery attached to traditional hospitality were defined as a lack of civility in people's practices. The use of personal ties to circumvent official procedures for one's own benefit also amounted to incivility. Through the public use of private connections, epitomised by endemic pre-revolutionary corruption, the public good was exploited for private purposes. The predominance of grey zones over a clear-cut public and private was the most resilient mark of incivility, and was therefore what was preventing the country from modernising.

However, the means through which the government aimed to make society more “civil” were in fact not transparent. For many of my participants, resentment generated by disappointed expectations bestowed upon the Rose Revolution was framed as lack of improvement in people's socio-economic status, but also in the perception of an arbitrary power which made it dangerous walking in the streets of the neighbourhood after dusk, discussing politics in public, or going to a protest rally (see also Frederiksen & Gotfredsen 2017). The perceived opaqueness informing the government's interventions aimed at undesired practices and those who engaged in them increasingly alienated citizens' trust in post-revolutionary political elites. . In this morally, culturally, socially, politically and economically fragmented context, ties developed through hospitality practices neither faded away nor retreated into the sphere of private life as post-revolutionary narratives asserted they would. On the contrary, hospitality practices maintained their “public” role as a means of moral, cultural, social, political and economic support against a system which had left many of its promises unfulfilled.

Considering the deep divides across the population emphasised by post-revolutionary narratives, it can be argued that the post-revolutionary reforms hardly made Georgian society more “civil” – if by “civil” we mean a moral, cultural, social and political stance which prioritises the pursuit of public good over the fulfilment of narrow private interests (Caldwell 2009, Calhoun 2000, Pye 1999, Putnam et al. 1994). In this context, can hospitality be understood and cultivated as an embedded source of civility *vis-à-vis* Western models of modernity, which were oblivious of Georgian society’s specifics? Indeed, the system of exchanges based on solidarity and generosity which underpins hospitality practices is conducive to a social system in which people aim to accommodate their individual needs within a framework of collective interests.

However, hospitality’s ambivalence cannot be overlooked. The relationship between hospitality and the notion of “civility” is problematic from various perspectives (see 2.4). First, traditional hospitality rests on an exclusive structure, which assesses individuals and groups on the basis of their reputation, connections and ascribed identity (gender, age, nationality and so on). Second, relationships between hosts and guests unfold in a vertical way, entailing unequal power. Third, the personal connections on which hospitality practices rest convey material and non-material transactions which benefit insiders while excluding outsiders, reinforcing bonding ties among in-group members rather than bridging different communities. Finally, as the case of *birzha* indicates, practices of hospitality spreading beyond the private domestic realm may encroach on public spaces with socially harmful and legally dubious behaviours, undermining the viability of common spaces. In the next chapter, I delve deeper into the ambivalence of hospitality *vis-à-vis* the tension between civility and incivility, pointing out how “civil” and “uncivil” are themselves contested notions resting upon blurred boundaries.

## 6

# PUBLIC USE OF PRIVATE GOOD? HOSPITALITY AS CIVILITY

## 6.1 The multiple moralities of civility

The blurred boundaries within and across which articulations and performances of hospitality unfold are reflected in the ways in which meanings of “civil” and “uncivil” promoted by the post-revolutionary modernisation project are reproduced or challenged in people’s everyday practices. Focusing on the “multiple moralities” underpinning articulations and performances of hospitality (Ledeneva 2014, 1998, Polese 2014, Zigon 2011, Oswald & Voronkov 2004, Zdravomyslova & Voronkov 2002, Bourdieu 1990, Zinoviev 1985), this chapter analyses hospitality as a form of civility which, stemming from everyday practices, may improve the quality of political institutions. Institutional quality is generally assessed according to how responsive institutions are to citizens’ needs and preferences and how efficiently they act on the citizenry’s demands, conducting “public business” in appropriate ways (Putnam et al. 1994: 63). This perspective on everyday hospitality practices is in contrast with what post-revolutionary narratives depicted as a backward and socially harmful phenomenon, which was largely responsible of uncivility haunting the moral, cultural, social and economic life of the country since Soviet times. I argue that such narratives have created and exacerbated deep divisions across the population, supporting the implementation of reforms and certain attitudes from the political elites which led to increasing social inequality and, at the same time, a loss of legitimacy of the government in its citizens’ eyes. As an alternative, I propose to investigate hospitality as the “public use of private good”, which, as a practice embedded in local traditions of solidarity and reciprocity between relatives, friends and neighbours, generates civil values spreading from small communities to society and politics at large.

As a device to organise society by drawing boundaries between insiders and outsiders, hospitality practices delineate the civil with respect to the uncivil. However, the relation between hospitality and civility is ambivalent. With

mainstream definitions of civility referring to notions of citizenship, civic engagement and polite behaviour, several features of traditional hospitality may indeed be labelled “uncivil”. I point out that the tension between civil and uncivil hospitality indicates a broader ambivalence between civility and incivility in the moral, social, political and economic context of post-revolutionary Georgia.

“Civility” comes from the Latin noun *civitas* and the adjective *civilis*, “relating to citizens”. In its earliest usage, the notion indicated “the state of being a citizen, and hence good citizenship and orderly behaviour”. Civility can thus be considered to be the set of collective norms on which society is built. In the English language, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century “civility” referred more narrowly to “formal politeness and courtesy in behaviour and speech”, becoming synonymous with “amenity, attention, formality, gesture, pleasantry” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989). These various perspectives resonate in the social and political sciences and in political philosophy, which define civility as etiquette and politeness, universal citizenship, equality and mutual respect, deeming it the basic concept for understanding how societies work (Caldwell 2009, Calhoun 2000, Pye 1999, Putnam et al. 1994). Definitions of civility are intertwined with one another, yet the meaning of being “civil” within a specific society is contested, producing understandings of social life which often conflict with one another.

The notion of civility did not emerge directly from my participants’ articulations and performances.<sup>51</sup> Yet, in hospitality practices multiple moralities were expressed as “ethics of propriety [...] that classify [...] spaces into settings for both civil and uncivil society” (Caldwell 2009: 123). Discourses of propriety are “ultimately discourses of civility” (Caldwell 2009: 122). The latter does not just indicate norms of politeness, but defines “the mark of the competent participant in the social settings of everyday life” (Calhoun 2000: 257).

However, multiple moralities are often in conflict with one another. The boundaries between civil and uncivil behaviour – at home, at work, in relationships with other people, in the use of public spaces – are ambivalent. Articulations of

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<sup>51</sup> The Georgian translation of “civility” – *tavazianoba*, from *tavaziani*, “civil, polite” – is mostly used to refer to good manners. The term that, in my participants’ articulations and performances, was closest to the idea of civility which I discuss here is *k’ult’uruli*, “cultured, educated”. A “cultured person” (*k’ult’uruli adamiani*) is someone with remarkable qualities not only from an intellectual, but also from a moral perspective (see also 3.3).

civility versus incivility are the object of what Ledeneva (1998), after Bourdieu (1990), defines as the “misrecognition game” (see 4.1). Misrecognition challenges moralities predicated on the clear-cut opposition between civility and incivility. People who behave in ways that are considered uncivil by others attribute alternative ethical meanings to their actions, at the same time applying their own standards of civility and incivility to what other people say and do. Social actors’ practices are placed in an ambivalent moral world, in which incivility and civility are two sides of the same coin.

The ambivalence of the relationship between civility and incivility emerges in the blurred moral boundaries which define practices such as drinking beer in the street next to the *Kazbegi* factory in Tbilisi (see Chapter 5). Observed externally, this is an expression of the degenerate use of urban public space, but at the same time it represents participation in an affordable form of sociability, a way to share drinks, food and stories, and an opportunity to meet people outside the home and neighbourhood. The ways in which this practice is articulated respectively by those who observe and those who participate sometimes differ radically. These discrepancies have important implications for the political approach to certain social practices, as well as for how this approach is received by the social actors involved. The state uses law enforcement to tackle a source of socially harmful behaviour, while participants in the practice regard such prohibitions as unfair norms which thwart the community’s habits and jeopardise the hospitality of public spaces.

Moralities of civility as opposed to incivility intermingle with the distinction between lawfulness and unlawfulness. In an ideal context, civil behaviour is necessarily law-abiding, since the law supposedly promotes expressions of civility within society. By the same token, “not obeying the law” is considered a sign of utter incivility (Calhoun 2000). However, multiple moralities make associations between civility and lawfulness vs. incivility and unlawfulness ambivalent. In this regard, I had an illuminating conversation with my host Lela (53, see Chapter 1), which focused on what she defined as “different levels of morality”, and on how she thought these levels had changed in Georgian society since the final years of the Soviet era. While discussing the relationship between moral behaviour and the law, Lela told me that behaving according to “what the law says” (“*ras it’q’vis k’anoni*”) is one of the highest types of morality, as she believed law to be necessary.

However, in Lela's words, an even higher level of morality is represented by "universal ethical principles", which are above the law. A case in point is Vazha Pshavela's poem (see Chapter 1), in which Jokhala opposes community law in order to abide by the ethics of hospitality. In this moral order, people have the freedom to uphold ethical principles in defiance of the law if the latter is unjust. Lela's thoughts resonate with arguments maintaining that "genuine" civility should have a critical or even subversive stance towards principles which are codified by law but are in fact neglectful of "real" respect and inclusiveness (Zwiebach 2010, Calhoun 2000). In such circumstances, breaking the law is a civil act.

This chapter investigates the way in which ambivalent understandings of civility *vis-à-vis* incivility emerge in articulations and performances of hospitality. I point out that the tension between civil and uncivil practices of hospitality rests on the blurred boundaries between the public and the private. The multiple ways in which people articulate what is civil (or uncivil) in their everyday practices are in an ambivalent relationship with the public meanings of civility and incivility. I subsequently focus on how the opposition between uncivil and civil came to mirror the past/future dichotomy in post-revolutionary narratives, which postulated a necessary correspondence between orientation towards the West and the realisation of a society based on civil values. The inconsistencies of modernisation narratives which I have investigated in the thesis through discussion of my participants' articulations and performances of hospitality call into question the outcomes of the government's attempts to bring about civility. I explore hospitality as a source of civil values embedded in local traditions of solidarity and reciprocity *vis-à-vis* Western models of civility and incivility implemented from above by the post-revolutionary political leadership.

## **6.2 Civil or uncivil hospitality?**

### **6.2.1 Moderation vs. excess**

In dictionaries and encyclopaedias, as well as in academic literature, the term "civility" often lacks a clear definition of its own. Civility is referred to vaguely as politeness at social events and public encounters or is discussed in relation to other

notions, such as citizenship or “public reason”.<sup>52</sup> On the contrary, what is meant by “uncivil” is made explicit in detail. The following example encompasses various expressions of incivility:

in addition to shoving, shouting, giving the finger, making insulting remarks, not waiting one’s turn in line, there are the incivilities of nosiness, bossiness, snobbishness, breaking appointments, *overstaying visits, failing to offer thanks or apologies or responses to invitations, not reciprocating hospitality*, hogging the road, littering, proselytising, and offering unsolicited advice (Calhoun 2000: 253, *emphasis added*).

Among the features of incivility listed in the quote above, I have highlighted three related points which stand out for their relevance to hospitality: the lack of *moderation* in one’s personal habits, as well as in relationships with other people and the surrounding environment; *intrusiveness* as a lack of respect for others’ private space; and *failing to reciprocate* other people’s generosity in the form of invitations and other hospitable acts. Below, I discuss these three points, drawing upon examples from my fieldwork. I focus on the blurred boundaries which separate the civil from the uncivil in practices of hospitality.

The uncivil opposite of moderation, excess, refers to various aspects of individual and social behaviour, from loudness and grossness in speech and gestures, through openly rude behaviour like “giving the finger” or “making insulting remarks”, to careless acts towards the outside world, such as “littering” (Calhoun 2000). Looking at the cases discussed in this thesis, a lack of moderation appears to be a prominent feature of Georgian hospitality practices, especially when traditional patterns are followed. The amount of food and – mostly alcoholic – drinks to which guests are nearly forcibly treated; the *tamada*’s endless speeches, which sometimes resemble pointless rants more than ritual formulae; the aggressive spirit of competition, which is substantially fuelled by the enormous amount of alcohol

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<sup>52</sup>“Public reason” (2013). *Stanford encyclopaedia of philosophy*. Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/public-reason/>



consumed: these elements, which are rarely missing from a *supra*, are signs of the excesses which inform the host-guest relationship.

The following ethnographic snapshot is an example of excess at a traditional *supra* – excess which is not necessarily lacking from more improvised gatherings either. I was invited to join my friends at a *supra* celebrating the baptism of a neighbour's newborn child. The *supra* took place at the hosts' flat and met all the characteristics of traditional hospitality events: women were busy in the kitchen and men smoked and chatted while waiting for the feast to begin; men negotiated the choice of *tamada*; men and women sat separately at different ends of the table; there were long and articulate toasts followed by copious consumption of wine; and there were an impressive number of various dishes piled on the table.

As is common in traditional *supra*, drinking was strictly regulated by the *tamadoba* toasting structure, but eating did not follow a specific sequence (see 1.1.2). Women went back and forth between kitchen and table bringing various sweet and savoury dishes and refilling half-empty serving dishes (see also Chatwin 1997). After a few hours it seemed that the *supra* was coming to an end. The hectic serving of food had stopped and the sequence of toasts had slowed down, while the tablemates chatted and ate cake. However, at some point women came out of the kitchen with more hot savoury dishes (mostly *mts'vadi* – roast pork skewers) and jugs of wine. The *supra* revived, although only a few men were keen to continue eating and drinking, while other guests tried to refuse the offer of additional food after an already lavish banquet. My friends had to negotiate with their parents and the hosts' family for "permission" to leave, which was given reluctantly since the *supra* had not yet finished.

The lack of moderation in hospitality is something which my participants appeared to be aware of. However, attitudes towards excess varied according to the different relationships people had with practices of hospitality. Some of my respondents – mostly, but not exclusively, male and over 30 – did not hide their pride in practices which they positively articulated as "tradition". The resumption of *supra* was met with enthusiasm by several tablemates, since it is by following shared traditions that the community is kept together. The fact that the excesses of tradition could appear bizarre or even unpleasant to outsiders enhanced the value of such

practices in these men's eyes. The inability of most foreigners to drink, eat, sing and talk in the same conspicuous and heartfelt way as Georgians boosted their sense of superior bravery and cunning. The possibility that foreign guests might find traditional practices of hospitality uncivil is taken as confirmation of Georgians' uniqueness.

Other respondents, especially women and younger men, adopted different strategies to handle the excesses of traditional hospitality practices: from creative reinvention, through benevolent jokes, to open condemnation (see Chapter 4). Yet, the frustration of women and the young with exaggeratedly lavish and prolonged events such as the *supra* described above could hardly be voiced in public as an open challenge to traditional practices. People tried to reshape hospitality both within and outside tradition in moderate ways, leaving aside excesses related to food and drink, the size and duration of events and the hierarchy between hosts and guests. In some cases, my respondents' words mirrored the concern that these uncivil practices substantially contributed to Georgia's cultural, social, political and economic "delay" with respect to the West. Marina (25, student, see 4.1) was sceptical about the treatment that Georgians provide to visiting foreigners:

When we have people coming from abroad, what do we do? We lock them up in our houses and stuff them with food until they feel sick. We have so many beautiful things to see and do here, and I am sure that guests would like much more to be shown around rather than sit at a *supra* all the time!

Articulations and performances of moderation and excess in traditional hospitality practices vary across different individuals and groups. Several participants – especially adult men - regarded the excessive features of *supra* as specifics which define Georgians positively *vis-à-vis* outsiders, as part and parcel of what holds the community together, the latter being a function which moderate expression of hospitality could not appropriately fulfil. Other participants, mostly women and young people, pursued moderation as a necessary attribute of more egalitarian and inclusive practices. In the first instance, civility is generated by overwhelming

generosity, warmth, and the unconditional welcoming of guests. In the second instance, civility is expressed by less constrictive and hierarchical hospitality practices, which allow all individuals and groups to participate in the way they please. Post-revolutionary political narratives resonated in some of my participants' view, which stated the relinquishment of excessive hospitality in favour of more moderate practices as a step to bring Georgian society closer to Western models of progress and modernity. .. The tension between excess and moderation informs the way in which everyday practices define boundaries between individuals, groups and spaces. The way in which hospitality acts as a tool for not only drawing but also trespassing these boundaries is a further indication of the grey zone between civility and incivility which hospitality inhabits.

### **6.2.2 Discretion vs. intrusiveness**

The lack of moderation is related to a second indication of the tension between civility and incivility: *discretion* versus *intrusiveness*. I use the term “discretion” as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989), according to which it is “the quality of being discreet; the possession or demonstration of sound judgement in speech or action; prudence; tactfulness, trustworthiness”.<sup>53</sup> In other words, discretion refers to the ability to be unobtrusive and therefore to recognise and respect the lines that define other people's space.

Among the ways in which civility is defined is as “a bond uniting honest men busy minding their own affairs, who are neighbourly but who recognise that *good fences do make good neighbours*” (Calhoun 2000: 255, emphasis added). “Overstaying visits” as a sign of incivility is useful case for investigating the meaning of such fences, which are physical as well as moral boundaries. It is necessary to specify that “overstaying”, in most cases, is not a matter of visitors' impoliteness. On the contrary, guests may be disrespectful if they refuse the sometimes pressing offers to stay, which may entail sleeping over at the guest's place.

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<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, the *Oxford English Dictionary* also defines “discretion” as an obsolete term indicating “courtesy, politeness; propriety of behaviour; *civility*” (1989).

According to tradition, from the host's perspective "incivility" is failure to offer shelter to visitors. Guests are thought to be in permanent need of food, drink and warmth. This attitude, which envisages the guest's stay as potentially endless, might be helpful for visitors, considering that outside Tbilisi Georgia still largely lacks budget accommodation. Yet, the insistence with which guests are often asked to stay may sound intrusive. Generosity is intermingled with power, which is exercised vertically by the host over the guest. Since having visitors, besides being a source of conviviality, is also a matter of reputation, hosts may be reluctant to let their guests go and honour other homes with their presence.

The tension between discretion and intrusiveness is also part and parcel of the exchange of invitations, with all the implications entailed by accepting or declining. "Failing to respond to invitations" (Calhoun 2000) was hardly an issue among my participants. In many instances, invitations are not required, since hospitality events start and grow spontaneously. The ability to improvise hospitality at any time with the available resources is a mark of a host's excellence (Herzfeld 1985). The penchant for improvisation – with the exception of large *supra* organised for life-cycle events, which need long preparation – requires potential guests to be available to visit someone's place at all times. A text message or phone call shortly beforehand, or a call from outside a friend's window, are enough notice. People who decline an invitation, even if issued at the very last moment, are the object of disappointment, if not resentment. This can be tricky for guests, since plans can be easily disrupted by relatives and friends organising last-minute gatherings from which it is hard to excuse oneself.

Improvisation trespassing into intrusiveness also applies to the opposite situation, when people show up uninvited at someone's place with the intention of staying. In particular, young men do not usually have money to go out to bars and clubs, and yet neither do they want to stay in the street, either because it is cold or because police controls makes the outside space unsafe (see Chapter 5). For these reasons, buying a large bottle of beer with the little money available and ringing a friend's doorbell in small groups is a widespread practice. Such gatherings may last just as long as it takes to drink the beer and listen to some music, or they may go on for hours, with more people from the neighbourhood joining.

The “good fences” which make “good neighbours” epitomise the ambivalence of hospitality with its double-edged features of discretion as civility versus intrusiveness as incivility. Sometimes these fences are physical boundaries between private and public spheres, which nevertheless merge into one another. Lela (53, see 1.2.2) invited me to spend a week at her husband’s family’s house in a small village in North-West Georgia (see 4.1). The family property shared a courtyard, a back garden and a field at the front with some relatives. The doors of the two houses were constantly open. People from the two households moved back and forth with little formality in crossing thresholds. A similar pattern of reciprocal visits, although with lower intensity, was followed by other villagers, who strolled around the village, stopping at one house or another. Visitors are usually seen as a pleasant diversion in otherwise uneventful days, as well as a precious help with the hard tasks of mountain life. However, visitors can also become undesired intruders, breaching the host’s privacy or coming to scrounge food and wine from the household.

Ambivalent feelings towards guests emerged in Lela’s attitude. Although always friendly with people who came over, she would wait before opening the house door in the morning – a sign that we were awake and ready to receive visitors. She wanted to enjoy some privacy before “people from next door start flooding into the house”. Yet, she resented other villagers for not coming to visit her often enough. In her view, this happened because she was not a native of the village and therefore was treated as an inferior outsider. She proudly declared that she would never ask people to come over, as social habits imply that visitors show up without invitation. Also, she would not be the first to go to visit others. She felt it was the other villagers’ duty to pay her a visit first, because she had just arrived from Tbilisi and also because her husband’s mother had died recently (see 4.1). The problematic balance between visits paid and received mirrors the struggle for reputation, which follows a social hierarchy according to which the most honoured people “are visited” rather than “visiting” (Abu-Zahra 1974).

The incivility of intrusiveness as opposed to the civility of discretion may be reversed. The ambivalence of moral and physical fences entails that these divides, as well as their trespassing, are simultaneously marks of civil and uncivil behaviour. On the one hand, Lela considered uncivil the endless visits from her neighbours, who could not wait for the fences/doors to open before “flooding in”, neglecting the

privacy of her house. On the other hand, villagers who did not pay “spontaneous” visit to Lela were considered equally – or possibly more – uncivil, as they breached those “standards [...] that render the behaviour of individuals more or less predictable and set the tone for public life” (Pye 1999: 765; see also 1.2.2).

Excess and intrusiveness, while identified as two paradigmatic examples of incivility, are closely connected to the relationship between hosts and guests in Georgia, raising questions about whether pivotal aspects of hospitality practices amount to uncivil behaviour. Moderation in hospitality is largely seen as contrasting with the nature of tradition, and therefore as something alien to practices shared by the community. Similarly, discreet people might be praised as respectful of privacy but be simultaneously stigmatised for their lack of competence in the customs which regulate the exchange of visits.

The third attribute of incivility, analysed in the following section, is “not reciprocating hospitality” (Calhoun 2000; see 6.2.1). In this case, the requirement for reciprocity in order to be considered a worthy member of the community is consistent with the practices of hospitality I have discussed in this thesis. Reciprocity is pivotal to the regulation of the relationship between host and guest, turning sporadic convivial events into ongoing exchanges of material and non-material items which lay the basis for social life. The lack of reciprocity cuts off the circle of exchanges and triggers “social warfare” (Mauss 2002 [1925]). However, the relation between reciprocity and civility is ambivalent in the context of hospitality practices. The same reciprocal ties which foster social participation and solidarity can become vehicles for unjust privilege and exclusion.

### **6.2.3 Reciprocity as corruption?**

It is hardly questionable that “reciprocating hospitality” is a fundamental expression of civility. No matter the personal relationship between hosts and guests, reciprocity in hospitality exchanges is mandatory for acceptance as members of a community. As I have repeatedly pointed out in this thesis (see for example 1.2.3), reciprocating hospitality in appropriate ways crucially affects people’s reputation among relatives, friends and neighbours, with negative consequences when reciprocation fails. In the case of the Ts’ik’lauri family, the (real or perceived) lack of reciprocity in hospitality

from their in-laws disrupted the relationship between the two households and triggered a conflict which spread throughout the neighbourhood.

Anxiety about mutual expectations in hospitality exchanges suggest that my participants attached a more important role than mere politeness to “reciprocating hospitality” in social relationships. Several social scientists point out that social capital is built on reciprocity (Portes 2000, Putnam et al. 1994, Bourdieu 1986). Through reciprocity, relationships are created or severed, networks are enlarged and items are circulated. Long-lasting social ties, generated and reinforced through reciprocal exchanges of hospitality, keep smaller and larger communities together, providing the ground for shared practices based on mutual support. The accumulation of social capital is essential for creating the conditions for effective collective behaviour (Pye 1999). Trust and accountability are built between citizens and institutions, which are supposed to work together on issues of common interest. In this sense we can define the accumulation of social capital through reciprocal exchanges as a fundamental condition for the creation of a viable and inclusive public sphere.

The mutual exchange of gifts and favours is broken only at a high social price, since it is reciprocity that enables social relationships to continue (Mauss 2002 [1925]). This not only applies to hospitality, but also to other practices based on the accumulation of social capital through informal mechanisms. In certain such instances, social capital is accumulated through “negative” connections, increasing the predominance of private interests at the expense of the public good. The interpersonal links which make up the social fabric, rather than being publicly accountable, develop through hidden channels based on patron-client-type dynamics, according benefits to a few individuals and groups while excluding the larger community (Aliyev 2014b, Kubik 2005). This is indeed the case with corruption, considered to be the main cause of Georgia’s “underdevelopment” with respect to Western countries, and which was therefore at the top of the agenda for the post-revolutionary government’s modernisation project.

Corruption is opposed to civility, since it embodies “coercion, intimidation, [...] unrestrained pursuit of self-interest, the arbitrary exercise of power, disrespect for others’ rights and dignity”, all undisputed marks of uncivil behaviour (Calhoun

2000: 253). Corruption is uncivil as it represents the “private use of public good”. Rather than creating a public space for the pursuit of common goals independently of centralised power, corruption, while itself being somehow an aggregation of individual interests *vis-à-vis* the state, privileges a few insiders at the expense of the community.

In the Georgian context, several analyses have pointed out that access to the connections through which corrupt practices unfold is largely gained through hospitality events (Manning 2003, Chatwin 1997, Mars & Altman 1987, 1983). *Supra* are often not only occasions on which larger or smaller deals are made, but also events which put individuals and groups into a circle of exchanges which may be conducive to corrupt transactions (see chapters 2 and 5). This was indeed the way in which Soviet authorities and media perceived and depicted hospitality practices in the socialist era. Lavish hospitality events were regarded as a pointless waste of resources, largely made possible by the siphoning off of public goods (Muehlfried 2007, 2005, Manning 2003, Mars & Altman 1987, 1983). The cartoons analysed by Manning and reported in Chapter 3 indicate that, from the Georgian standpoint, the speech, gesture and materiality of hospitality were a valuable social currency used to access material and non-material benefits through the circumvention of official procedures.

Analysts and observers consider the strengthening of these personal networks after the end of the Soviet Union to be largely responsible for state collapse, widespread organised crime and economic disaster (Aliyev 2014b, Slade 2013, 2007, K’up’at’adze 2009). From Saak’ashvili and his government’s perspective came to power, the annihilation of corruption in the “top spheres” of politics and economics was deemed achievable only through a campaign against practices based on reciprocal exchanges unfolding through personal relationships. This perspective is shared by international organisations which aim to tackle corruption globally. Transparency International categorises gift giving and “excessive” hospitality as types of bribery, backing up approaches which emphasise potential links between reciprocal exchanges and corrupt deals (Transparency International 2014; see also 2.2). While reciprocity in general, and reciprocating invitations in particular, is mentioned as a clear sign of civility, it is also a principle which supports the opposite of civility, the corrupt “private use of public good”. Street hospitality taking place in



*birzha* is a case in point. Everyday reciprocal exchanges of material and non-material items strengthen in-group ties, feeding young men's sense of belonging to their community and affective attachment to one another. However, the exclusive structure of *birzha*, which keeps social capital locked into the small circles of street communities, is conducive to various kinds of deals – from petty criminal activities, to the “occupation” of urban public spaces for gathering within closed groups – which builds on reciprocal obligations to benefit few insiders. *Birzha* ties and activities sometimes develop at the expenses of the possibility for larger communities to enjoy public goods – in terms of space, material resources, but also social relationships and emotional ties.

The definition of incivility discussed in this section (Calhoun 2000: 253) includes behaviours which appear to be constitutive elements of hospitality practices. Lack of moderation, defined as a sign of incivility, is also considered by many hosts and guests who I met in the field as an inalienable trait of tradition which highlights their distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* outsiders. Intrusiveness, notably in the form of unsolicited or unduly prolonged visits, amounts to incivility as a sign of disregard for other people's private space. Yet, in the context of my study, people are expected to pay visits without previous invitation, as well as to receive guests warmly when they have not preannounced their arrival. Boundaries between what is perceived to be civility and what incivility are blurred, since what is regarded as a sign of consideration for someone else's privacy is at the same time seen as selfish disrespect for the norms regulating hospitality exchanges.

The principle of reciprocity which underpins the exchange of visits and the circulation of material and non-material items stands out as a fundamental mark of civility. It is reciprocity that generates the shared practices of solidarity on which society is built. However, when reciprocal exchanges are conducted through personal ties which benefit a few insiders while excluding the larger community, reciprocity becomes conducive to corrupt deals. These exchanges are the opposite of civility, as they exploit the public good for private purposes.

Following the Rose Revolution, the ambivalence of hospitality as both a civil and an uncivil practice was confronted by the images of civility and incivility presented by modernisation narratives, which matched the binary past/future

opposition. The following section discusses images of civility and incivility in post-revolutionary Georgia in relation to the narratives which underpinned the modernisation project. I point out that in these narratives, which were endorsed by part of the population, practices negatively associated with the past amounted to incivility. Yet, I draw upon the tension between civility and incivility to question the “civil” character of a project which, while pursuing civility as a fundamental token of Western-style modernisation, ultimately generated deep divides across the population.

## **6.3 Civility and incivility in post-revolutionary Georgia**

### **6.3.1 Past incivility vs. future civility?**

Images of civility and incivility in everyday narratives and practices have changed dramatically with the deep cultural, social, political and economic transformations brought by the Rose Revolution. The government’s promotion of Western values as carriers of modernity affected people’s ways of articulating their own beliefs and lifestyles. The re-conceptualisation of practices considered to be attachments of “Georgian tradition” *vis-à-vis* Western models reflected divides across society, and the (actual or perceived) endorsement of either one or another set of values by different parts of the population deepened such divides.

The interplay of multiple moralities affects the way in which competence in the norms regulating social life within a (local, national or international) community are articulated. Section 6.3 investigates how ambivalent meanings of civility and incivility informed the way in which the boundaries between insiders and outsiders were drawn. My analysis shows how images of civility *vis-à-vis* incivility, largely modelled on Western patterns, were enforced on citizens from above rather than stemming from people’s everyday practices. These images led to moral, social, political and economic discrimination between “past” and “future” Georgians, ultimately labelling a large part of society as “uncivil”. The following ethnographic

snapshot illustrates the depth of the divides predicated on the civility/incivility opposition by post-revolutionary modernisation narratives.

### **6.3.2 The ambivalence of being Georgian**

After a few days trekking in the mountains, I was waiting to take the 5am minibus (*marshrutka*) to Tbilisi from the village of Mest'ia in the Svaneti region of North-West Georgia. That morning the rain was heavy, and people were waiting impatiently to get a place on the bus. Svaneti is a mountainous region which has opened up to tourism, particularly since the second term of Saakashvili's administration (2008-2013), becoming one of the main destinations for foreigners travelling to Georgia. The radical transformation of this previously isolated area, which was even provided with a small airport, is regarded as a remarkable outcome of the post-revolutionary government's modernisation project (see 2.3).

However, the hectic pace of renovation, aimed at making the area attractive to foreign visitors, has had a serious impact on both the physical and the social landscape of what was a beautifully untouched place. The main village of the area, Mest'ia, which I visited in August 2014, had been rebuilt from scratch in a "stone-and-wood" cottage style. Hotels, guest-houses, restaurants with menus in several languages, Internet cafés and souvenir shops, many owned by foreign companies and expensive by Georgian standards, were packed with tourists.

On the rainy morning of my departure, the passengers on the *marshrutka* were both foreigners and Georgians, most of them tourists. In front of me were a couple, young Georgians, speaking in English and explaining the procedures for stowing luggage and buying tickets to foreign passengers. Finally the *marshrutka* left, but after a short time, and in the pouring rain, it stopped again outside a house. After few minutes, the young woman from the English-speaking couple irritably asked the driver why we had stopped. He replied that we were waiting for someone who "had booked a place" on the *marshrutka* – although the driver had told us the day before that reserving seats was not possible.

Trips by *marshrutka* are usually chaotic. Minibuses are crammed with people and bags, and any additional passengers picked up on the way are somehow squeezed

in. The radio often plays loud pop music, making it hard for passengers to relax. Some drivers are daredevils, with little consideration for traffic rules or safety, and they indulge in long stops to eat, smoke or, as in our case, wait for their friends. Although *marshrutkas* are the most widespread and affordable form of transport in both urban centres and across the country, some people find these travelling conditions stressful. During trips it is not unusual to perceive tension among the passengers or between passengers and the driver, which may result in sometimes heated arguments.

Indeed, the tension increased as we waited for the driver's friend. Since the passenger we were waiting for had not yet shown up, the young woman addressed the foreign passengers in English:

The driver is waiting for his friend, so we all have to wait. We have been in the rain to get a place, and this gentleman has a car to pick him up on his doorstep. And still, he makes us wait for him! [...] He's probably having a shower or eating some breakfast, he doesn't care that we are waiting. People in Georgia don't care about these things, about being punctual, respecting others, and so on. These are not things that matter here in Georgia!

The young woman considered the behaviour of the driver and his friend to be utter incivility. Disrespect for the other passengers was an abuse of his position. Although my travelling companion's irritation was understandable, it is necessary to highlight that the young woman emphasised that such attitudes were typically "Georgian" (see chapters 2 and 3). Rather than engaging in a discussion with the driver, she voiced her annoyance, in English, to the foreign passengers. Her expression was of apology to the foreign visitors, but also an accusation against the uncivil manners of her co-nationals, from which she openly distanced herself. The fact that the *marshrutka* was travelling from Svaneti is another relevant point. The mountainous region functions largely as a showcase for foreign tourists, who, accommodated in commercial hospitality venues, are spared the intense exchanges that, for better or for worse, characterise domestic host-guest encounters. The young

woman's remarks were intended to offer to visitors the same positive picture, blaming "Georgians" for revealing such an uncivil aspect of their habits.

This is an example of the way in which ideas of civility and incivility are predicated on increasing divides across society. The young woman's irritation was understandable. Indeed, the attitude of the driver and his friend amounted to incivility. However, the insistence in front of foreign guests on the specific "Georgianness" of such attitudes highlights the cleavages between "past" and "future" citizens. These divides deepened throughout Saakashvili's leadership and had a strong influence on social and political life even once he was no longer president. Future citizens who more or less explicitly embraced "Western values" had an ambivalent attitude to what was considered "traditionally Georgian", exhibiting national pride on the one hand and stigmatisation along with dissociation from uncivil practices on the other.

Dissociation from the past entailed detachment from certain cultural and social norms considered "traditional". In hospitality practices, detachment was often expressed through reshaping or circumventing these norms in ways that fitted people's identities, as indicated by articulations and performances of hospitality around the tension between conservation and change analysed in the previous chapters (see especially Chapter 4). However, in some cases the search for more inclusiveness, which challenged what was perceived as an authoritarian tradition, went hand in hand with the derogatory framing of people and practices associated with that tradition. The "Georgian" label attached to these people and practices implied backwardness – and therefore incivility – in contrast with the progressive, Western-oriented part of the population - in this case, the young couple of the *marshrutka* were city dwellers living in a residential middle class neighbourhood of Tbilisi, working in higher education (a PhD student and a junior researcher), English speakers and with extensive experience of living abroad.. In the following section, I delve further into these divides, analysing the way in which the post-revolutionary modernisation project was articulated by a certain part of my participants as the only form of civility amid uncivil people and practices. At the same time, I point out the dramatic inconsistencies at the heart of this project, which, by generating deep divides across the population, brought incivility to Georgian society.

### 6.3.3 The uncivil outcomes of modernisation

The attitude displayed by the young woman on the *marshrutka* was not an isolated case among people I met in the field. An underlying narrative shared by several other participants – possibly, but not necessarily, from well-off backgrounds, relatively young and female - was one of more or less open contempt for Georgian practices which were not in line with “Western” and therefore “civil” standards of behaviour. In this regard, I now take a detour from the timeframe of my dissertation – Saakashvili’s presidency. I focus on the way the Rose Revolution leader’s electoral defeat at the hands of the Georgian Dream coalition in 2012 generated articulations of civility versus incivility, which projected the uncivil pre-revolutionary past onto Georgia’s present and future under the newly elected government. During the run-up to the election, the incumbent UNM had already spread rumours about Bidzina Ivanishvili, the billionaire leader of Georgian Dream, who was depicted as a Kremlin *protégé* or even a Russian spy.<sup>54</sup> The new government’s over-friendly relationship with Russia remained the opposition’s strongest criticism after the UNM’s political defeat.

The association of Ivanishvili and Georgian Dream with the Russian archenemy was aimed at depicting the rival political project as returning Georgia to the despised pre-Rose Revolution years. The hard work that Saak’ashvili’s administration had done to modernise Georgia by pushing it closer to the West risked being frustrated by the new government. Georgian Dream valued a return to the past, epitomised by proximity with Russia, more than continuing along the path to the future initiated by the Rose Revolution. As Saak’ashvili described the rise of his political adversary:

We thought that past was gone, but it was not gone. And suddenly there was an alternative past that had something more to offer than, you know, just pure opposition. The past came with a real shape of

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<sup>54</sup> Doward, J. (2011). “I’m not a spy or an oligarch, says Georgia’s secretive billionaire”, *The Guardian*, 3 December. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/03/bidzina-ivanishvili-georgia-secretive-billionaire>

‘We will do things’, ‘We will deliver things’, ‘We can be strong’  
(*Full Speed Westwards* 2013).

In the former leadership’s political narratives, the return of the past amounted to a revival of the practices which inhabited the grey zones that Saak’ashvili’s government thought they had effaced. In other words, incivility was bouncing back.

This sort of narrative resonated with particular strength across that part of the population which had been the moral, cultural, social, political and economic “winner” in the post-revolutionary modernisation project. Some of the respondents I met after the UNM’s political defeat established a clear link between Saak’ashvili’s fall and the return of incivility. In summer 2014, I mentioned to Mariami (55, teacher) that I found Tbilisi and its surroundings cleaner compared to my last visit in 2009. The amount of litter in certain areas of the city, notably around the river Mt’k’vari, seemed reduced. The same applied to the myriad coloured plastic bags which “decorated” trees and bushes in the city’s outskirts. Mariami disagreed with me, explaining:

Well, a couple of years ago it was much better, everything was very clean, both here and in the countryside. But you know, with this political situation.... People have started to dump everything around again, they no longer care.

She went on:

Last month I was with my relatives in my native village in Imereti [in western Georgia]. You should see what a beautiful place it used to be! But this year everything around was so dirty... People trash their stuff all over the place! We organised ourselves with some friends and spent a few days cleaning a water spring and a creek

which were full of rubbish. I am ashamed of my co-nationals when it comes to these things.

She also showed me pictures of rubbish which had been published on her Facebook page, accompanied with indignant captions.

Another participant, Tak'o (38, housewife), reported to me that, according to unspecified sources, cases of harassment, assault and domestic violence against women had dramatically increased since 2012. Like Mariami, she assumed that such unfortunate circumstances were connected to Georgia's abrupt departure from a pattern of freedom and tolerance and its return to a brutally patriarchal model. These transformations were implicitly associated with the change of political leadership. Civility, brought about by Saak'ashvili's government through the introduction of Western moral, social, political and economic standards, was jeopardised by a retreat to uncivil pre-revolutionary local practices.<sup>55</sup>

The neoliberal reforms implemented by Saak'ashvili's government, along with the state's increasingly authoritarian stance, left the country and its people profoundly divided. These divisions were not just expressed in social and economic inequality, but also through moral boundaries between the past/uncivil and the future/civil. The "public good" for which people were supposed to struggle was defined from the top by mainstream political narratives, according to exclusive standards. From these narratives' perspectives, a certain part of society was not suitable for that "public good", while also representing an obstacle on the path to modernisation. Social exclusion and political repression were the ways through which "civility" was enforced from the top.

Georgia in the 1990s featured a lack of civility manifested in the aggressive encroachment of private interests on the public good. A failed state, plagued by

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<sup>55</sup> Another typical case which illustrates how part of the population framed the change of political leadership as a return to incivility is the huge protest against a gay rights rally in Tbilisi in May 2013, largely led by representatives of the Orthodox Church and endorsed by Patriarch Ilia II (BBC News, 2013. "Thousands protest in Georgia over gay rights rally", 17 May. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-22571216>). The Georgian Dream government was regarded by some as deliberately neglectful of LGBT rights, among other things, as allegedly incompatible with Georgian society. However, a thorough discussion of the matter would require an analysis of the relationship between Church, government and civil society under Saakashvili and his successors, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.



rampant corruption and crime, prevented citizens from organising in an inclusive and transparent way, in other words it stopped them creating a strong civil society (see Chapter 2). The Rose Revolution and the ensuing reforms, carried out under the banner of modernity, meant clearing the grey zones in which public and private merged. In a context of clear-cut oppositions, the ambivalence of hospitality was expected to “naturally” disappear. If not, neoliberal reforms, supported by the renewed strength of the state, would annihilate undesirable practices.

Following this argument, it might be assumed that in post-revolutionary Georgia the pervasiveness of hospitality practices faded away: firstly, because political accountability and economic development in theory made the informal circulation of gifts, favours, support and connections redundant; and secondly, because practices of hospitality as expressions of backwardness, anti-social behaviour or even openly criminal attitudes were relegated to the margins of society and/or were cracked down on by the state. Post-revolutionary hospitality was formalised into a separated public and private, becoming a public showcase to attract foreign tourists and investment or a routine exercise of private sociability and courtesy subsidised by people’s own money.

The points discussed in this thesis indicate that the post-revolutionary modernisation project did change hospitality. Traditional hospitality was questioned from various angles: as a waste of time and money, as an expression of hierarchical relationships, as a manifestation of socially harmful behaviour or as a vehicle for more or less illegal deals. From a material perspective, the quality of items displayed and exchanged at hospitality events changed on the basis of the social and economic inequalities brought by neoliberal reforms (see Chapter 3). Hospitality became more “liberal”. Women and young people, who were largely excluded from the making of traditional practices, reframed images of hospitality in more horizontal ways (see Chapter 4). Manifestations of street hospitality in urban neighbourhoods were thwarted by the government’s zero tolerance policies, which meant to revitalise public space by cleaning the streets of petty crime and anti-social behaviour (see Chapter 5).

However, the modernisation project failed to undermine the tensions at the core of hospitality. My hosts and guests articulate and perform their practices not

through clear-cut models, but on porous boundaries which blur public into private, tradition into modernity, solidarity into competitiveness, generosity into individualism – and vice versa. Yet, the political leadership’s top-down interventions, while undermining the viability of grey zones through economic austerity and political control, did not manage to create an alternative channel to the moral and social role of ambivalence. In the following section, I discuss this channel as civility.

## **6.3 How the private can serve the public**

### **6.3.1 Civility from the top vs. civic community**

The connection between civility and politics postulates that the quality of political institutions depends on their social, cultural and economic surroundings (Putnam et al. 1994). Citizens’ good practices are supposed to have a positive effect on the way in which institutions work. This argument contrasts with the approach of post-revolutionary political elites, who assumed that importing Western institutions would make Georgian citizens and society a great deal more civil. This perspective is reflected in a speech that Sandra Roelofs, Saak’ashvili’s wife and Georgia’s “first lady” from 2003 to 2013 (see Chapter 4), delivered in London in March 2014, when she was hosted at a reception at an exclusive city centre club. Originally from the Netherlands, “Sandra”, as she was referred to by many of my participants, embodied the ideal of the sophisticated yet balanced, clever and progressive Western woman imagined by many of those participants – especially women - who supported Saak’ashvili’s modernisation project. The fact that the president had a European wife was seen as confirmation of his commitment to Western values, from the public realm of politics and economics to the private sphere of the family.

At her London speech, Sandra was asked by someone in the audience – which was largely made up of well-off Georgians living and working in the UK – to define the experience she and her husband had had as their country’s leaders for ten years. She replied that she and “Misha” had needed to “work hard” to “make Georgians understand” that “the good way to follow was the European way”. She went on to vividly depict the efforts of her husband, who she described as having spent many

sleepless nights trying to figure out how to take the country and its people down the right path.

Sandra's words highlight that the political leadership envisaged the implementation of reforms as a top-down process. It was assumed that a good leadership which brought good institutional models from the West would change not only the country's political and economic make-up, but also citizens as individuals and their moral, cultural and social practices. In this way, Georgia and Georgians would become more civil. A Western-style civil society would flourish as a result of imported models for citizens' associations, such as NGOs and youth organisations. Yet, the implementation of good models may be hindered by the resilience of the bad practices to which some citizens were still attached. Hence, the leadership had to work hard to "convince" part of the population what was better for them.

The post-revolutionary government's approach is revealing of the degree of institutions' detachment from citizens' lives. The political leadership's project was considered "good" by default by its promoters and supporters, as it was based on an unquestionably positive set of Western values. Georgian citizens' everyday practices were essentialised as cultural features instrumental to the fostering of nationalism, or considered folkloric expressions in an orientalist fashion. In her talk, Sandra referred to Georgians as "tough people", but she also praised some of their "specifics", such as "making wine at home". Otherwise, such practices, regarded as detrimental to the implementation of the modernisation project, were stigmatised and repressed by political elites.

The vertical implementation of neoliberal reforms and the use of state control did not make Georgian society more civil. Rather, moral, social, political and economic divides were exacerbated. I want to investigate hospitality in the framework of an alternative perspective on the relationship between politics and society, which envisages the mutual interaction of civility and institutional quality. Following this approach, I focus on what makes a society more or less civil as a way of analysing how good institutions stem from a "civic community" (Putnam et al. 1994: 83). I use the term "civic community" to highlight the difference between a "society of civility" and standardised models of "civil society" imported from the

West which, as I highlighted in Chapter 2, took root only limitedly among the Georgian population (see also Ekiert & Kubik 2014).

Analysing the wide gap in institutional quality between Northern and Southern Italy, Putnam and colleagues argue that the consolidated thesis which asserts that economic development is the “natural” ground for genuine democratic institutions does not tell the whole story (84). Instead, they refer to “civic virtue” within a “civic community” as “patterns of civic involvement and social solidarity” (83). These patterns are a fundamental factor for determining the success or failure of democratic institutions. Looking at the empirical evidence of connections “between the ‘civic-ness’ of a community and the quality of its governance” (91), the scholars define civic virtue as “a steady recognition and pursuit of the public good at the expense of all purely individual and private ends” (88). This does not mean that self-interest is eliminated from the civic community. Rather, “civic” self-interest is “defined in the context of broader public needs”: it is “alive to the interests of others” (88).

How does a community achieve such a degree of “civic-ness”? In other words, how do individuals and groups come to act together on the basis of a public good as opposed to myopic private interests? In the Georgian case, I have pointed out that the implementation of ideas of civility following Western models caused deep divides in society, while also undermining institutional quality. As an alternative approach, I now look at local practices of hospitality as a basis for cultivating civil values.

### **6.3.2 The public use of private good?**

In the first section of this chapter, I discussed the ambivalent position of hospitality between civility and incivility. Putting aside those meanings of civility (or the lack thereof) which focus specifically on etiquette, I consider here the notion of “civic virtue” and “civic community”. I thus propose to understand incivility as “the private use of public good” versus civility as “the public use of private good”.

Competitive excess, intrusive exclusiveness and reciprocity degenerated into corruption make hospitality an uncivil practice, as it benefits the private interest of

the few at the expense of the public good. In Soviet Georgia, in the face of the scarcity entailed by a planned economy, hospitality events were made possible by resources provided through personal connections. These resources were a public good used for private consumption, which due to its excess was in stark contrast with Soviet principles (see chapters 1 and 3). It might be argued that practices of hospitality were people's rightful way to get by in a system haunted by political oppression and economic shortages. However, resources "wasted" on lavish hospitality could have been used in more inclusive ways, although not necessarily in line with the Soviet order. The extraction of resources through informal channels, while benefitting a narrow circle of people, did not improve the overall structure of the system, leaving the population at large to struggle with perpetual shortages.

In the 1990s, rather than fostering "positive" reciprocity, hospitality was often conducive to the corrupt deals which were held largely responsible for the increasing inequalities in people's private wealth. Hospitable events in their lavish traditional forms were affordable only to people who had managed to accumulate scarce resources in the shattered social, political and economic context, something which required the use of one's connections in possibly illicit ways. Traditional hospitality was a way for the political and economic elites emerging from the demise of the Soviet system to show off their newly acquired private power amid public decay. At the same time, people who lacked connections were cut out of the circle of exchanges, and were therefore barred from access to goods and services.

In the Soviet era, and even more so in the 1990s, hospitality was a form of "private use of public good". In both cases, hospitality practices were detrimental to the development of an inclusive civic community. While in Soviet times certain social phenomena could not be transparent because of political oppression, in the 1990s the exclusive connections of hospitality underpinned a social and political culture structured around cronyism and driven by the pursuit of private gain through personalised channels.

Expectations of a viable public sphere in which all citizens could openly voice their interests in full respect of other people's needs were largely disappointed in the aftermath of the Rose Revolution. Although ostensibly more viable than in neighbouring countries, Georgia's post-revolutionary civil society has so far not

enjoyed wide participation across the population (Aliyev 2014b). This is partly due to the shortcomings of imported models of civil society, as discussed in Chapter 2. The persistence of strong personal connections as a social, political and economic tool for “getting things done” is a further obstacle to the development of civil society, especially with regard to people’s engagement with civil society associations (Aliyev 2014b, Kubik 2005, Howard 2003). Many of my respondents – especially those who, for various reasons, were disappointed by Saak’ashvili promised changes – regarded personal links reinforced through hospitality practices as more trustworthy than organisations which were largely perceived as being detached from people’s everyday lives – political parties, public institutions such as the school and the police, many NGOs and, of course, the government . Looking at studies of social capital and civil society (Putnam 2000, 1994, Granovetter 1973, Kubik 2005, Howard 2003), “bonding” ties between families, friends and neighbours connect a group’s insiders solidly to one another. However, this often does not result in social relationships which “bridge” different groups, a prerequisite for “a diverse and vibrant society” (Aliyev 2014b: 266). In this way, social capital accumulated through “strong-ties” networks (Granovetter 1973), rather than spreading to the public sphere, remains confined in private connections within the family, the group of friends and the neighbourhood (Aliyev 2014b).

To sum up, in both Soviet times and the 1990s, hospitality practices, rather than fostering the creation of an inclusive sphere in which people could cater for their needs amid political oppression, economic scarcity and social turmoil, were grounded in exclusive and competitive relationships. Hospitality worked as the “private use of public good”. Following the Rose Revolution, personal ties of hospitality did not give way to more inclusive forms of association with a critical role in the public sphere. Personal connections remained strong, locking social capital into the private realm of kinship and friendship at the expense of the growth of civil society.

Yet, these considerations overlook the fact that the ordinary distinction between civility and incivility is confounded by the grey zones which pervade social life. Grey zones, which challenge “grand dichotomies”, are conducive to the functional ambivalence of hospitality between the public and the private. Defining hospitality as the uncivil “private use of public good” presupposes first a clear division between public and private, and second a widely shared understanding of

what the “public good” is. Instead, analysis of people’s practices indicates how articulations and performances of hospitality unfold on the basis of ambivalent boundaries.

In its obliviousness of the ambivalent role that hospitality practices had in people’s everyday lives, the modernisation project led to deep divisions among the population. Post-revolutionary Georgian society differs substantially from a civic community, understood as “patterns of civic involvement and social solidarity” (Putnam et al. 1994: 83). Notions of civility and incivility introduced from above by modernisation narratives failed to make society more civil in terms of social inclusiveness, political transparency and balanced economic wellbeing. In the following section, I investigate hospitality as a practice which, rooted in reciprocity and bestowed with the positive attributes of “tradition”, may generate civility *vis-à-vis* the disappointed expectations of the modernisation project.

### **6.3.3 The civil tradition of hospitality**

The ambivalence of hospitality, expressed in oscillating forms of civil and uncivil behaviour, mirrors ambivalent attitudes to tradition in post-revolutionary Georgia. The problematic relationship between tradition and modernity with regard to the viability of a civic community is investigated by Putnam and colleagues. Referring to Tönnies’ sociological difference between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, Putnam compares a traditional small-scale community, underpinned by a universal yet archaic sense of solidarity, to a modern and rationalistic society resting on more impersonal ties and driven by self-interest. However, the scholars discredit the assumption that “modernity is the enemy of civility” (Putnam et al. 1994: 114). Far from idealising the civic ethos of traditional societies, they highlight that the least civic communities are found in traditional villages, where social life is grounded in “hierarchy and exploitation” (114).

In Georgian society, the relationship between hospitality traditions and civility is indeed ambivalent. The structure of *supra* and *tamadoba* is far from being egalitarian and progressive (Tuite 2005, Manning 2003, Nodia 2000). Hosts and guests reproduce rigidly ascribed social roles in apparently unquestioned ways. Traditional hospitality practices are informed by competition, exclusiveness and

instrumental reciprocity. Stigmatising the incivility of certain traditions, revived in a stereotyped way to boost nationalism or as folkloric images to be offered to foreigners, was a pivotal point of the modernisation project, reiterated by the political leadership and echoed by part of the population. In post-revolutionary modernisation narratives, hospitality was associated with incivility as it entailed the primacy of personal connections over state institutions and the rule of law.

However, ambivalent practices of hospitality may become a source of civil values if, rather than being locked within a narrow circle of individual interests, they open up to the public good. “Amoral familism” (Banfield 1958; see Chapter 1), a ruthless struggle to secure scarce resources within one’s closest circle, is not a necessary attachment of hospitality practices. On the contrary, hospitality can turn from the private realm of family, friends and neighbours to the public, becoming an expression of civility.

The articulations and performances of hospitality which I have discussed in this thesis talk of excess, intrusiveness and self-interest, but also of trust, solidarity and generosity. For hosts, trust means opening their houses to strangers in the confidence that visitors are good people who will honour the household. For guests, trust is walking into a host’s house in the hope of finding a friendly environment. Trust also means expectations that relationships built through hospitality exchanges grow stronger as means of mutual support. Trust in the other’s good will, friendliness and respectability was a fundamental attitude expressed by my participants/hosts towards me as a visitor, but also towards one another in their everyday hospitality exchanges.

Solidarity is the opposite of opportunistic and patronising attitudes to increasing inequality, which celebrate newly-acquired social, political and economic privileges while putting the blame for disadvantage on the disadvantaged themselves. Solidarity means attempting to redistribute both material and non-material resources through hospitality events. The visits to my participant Levani bringing over food, drinks and other gifts to help him and his family to get by amid financial hardships (see 3.5) represent a kind of solidarity which is radically different from charity, as it develops horizontally. Those who give are – temporarily or permanently – in a better position than those who receive. Yet, sharing resources at a hospitality event, where



everyone can enjoy the goods provided, is a far more egalitarian practice than vertical, hierarchy-enforcing charitable giving. Horizontal solidarity intermingles with horizontal generosity, since exchanges usually happen in a circular way. Although Levani's family could not invite and treat guests to the same extent of friends in a less difficult situation, in a way or another they managed to find the resources to throw *supras* at their house. In this way, the mechanism of reciprocity ensures that generosity and solidarity are perpetuated through ongoing exchanges.

Western-style civil society, developing between state and family, should provide space for private citizens to pursue the public good. However, post-revolutionary civil society was largely detached from citizens' everyday life concerns. As an alternative, hospitality practices come across as a potential source of civility, which, stemming from local traditions, override self-interest in favour of collective need. The positive relation between local practices and civic virtue within a community is highlighted by Putnam's analysis of different outcomes of democratic institutions (1994). "Continuous mutual aid and exchange of services" (142) spread beyond the family across the larger community, regardless of the socio-economic condition of the social actors involved. Local traditions of solidarity and generosity appear to be deeply rooted in areas with higher quality political institutions.

Hospitality entails the circulation of the private good, understood both as people's material property and as social capital. Mutual exchanges channelled through social relationships, developing beyond narrow self-interest, come to serve the public in the form of psychological, social, political and economic solidarity. The ambivalence of hospitality across the public and the private is the way in which trust, solidarity and generosity are circulated from the circle of relatives, friends and neighbours to the realm of political and economic institutions. In her analysis of moral levels, Lela maintained that Georgian society is close to a pattern she called a "good boy-good girl" society (*k'argi bich'i-k'argi gogo sazogadoeba*), which she described as a community which ties members together through horizontal reciprocity and mutual responsibility. All members care about the community, since their moral and social position within the group is determined by the way in which

they abide by common norms. Individualism is considered a negative attitude which is alien to community members.

Lela defined the collective set of principles driving community members as a “thief mentality” (*kurduli ment’alit’eti*). This definition refers to the powerful “thieves-in-law”, who had an almost mythical status among the figures inhabiting Georgian criminal world (see Chapter 5). Despite their unlawful status, “thieves-in-law” were well-respected persons within their communities (Frederiksen 2015, Slade 2014, 2007; see also Hobsbawm 1985). Thieves’ disdain of state laws developed alongside total commitment to community norms. For this reason, thieves were largely considered more trustworthy than politicians and state officials. Lela’s definition of the “thief mentality” as the basis for the “good boy-good girl” society does not necessarily have a negative connotation. This social pattern is ambivalent, with all members expected to show unconditional dedication to the community. If the common principles are bad, then society as a whole is bad. On the contrary, if practices are grounded in the inclusive pursuit of collective well-being, the public good flourishes. Moreover, if these shared principles unfold along with bonding ties, social capital remains locked within closed circles, reproducing dynamics of exclusion, privilege and inequality. However, if ties developing within small communities of relatives, friends and neighbours spread across and outside these groups and bridge people from different origin, gender, age, social and economic status, reciprocity and solidarity underpinning everyday practices become a basis on which to build political culture.

The ambivalence of hospitality as a practice informed by multiple moralities between civility and incivility is epitomised by Lela’s description of the “good boy-good girl” society. Norms of trust, solidarity and reciprocity demand that individuals act in the interest of the community. From the perspective of modernisation narratives, this pattern was responsible for the moral, social, political and economic decay which pervaded Georgia prior to the Rose Revolution. The higher legitimacy and authority bestowed upon private relationships of hospitality prevented public institutions from working for the benefit of society as a whole. However, the post-revolutionary modernisation project overlooked the ambivalence of these personal ties, neglecting the potential role that hospitality practices have in putting private resources at the service of the public good. When local traditions of trust, solidarity

and reciprocity spread beyond the family, the house and the neighbourhood and inform relationships between citizens and the way in which people interact with public institutions, hospitality practices may foster the creation of a democratic society, as well as strengthening it.

## CONCLUSION

### CHANNELLING CIVILITY THROUGH AMBIVALENCE?

The central contention of this thesis is that official institutions' obliviousness to the ambivalent mechanisms underpinning local practices brings about incivility in a society. I have framed incivility as moral stigmatisation, social marginalisation, political oppression and economic inequality, which generate deep fragmentation across the social landscape. I have investigated the inconsistencies lying at the heart of the modernisation project pursued by Georgia's post-revolutionary political leadership, which envisaged the implementation of Western moral, cultural, social, political and economic models as the only way to generate civility in Georgian society. I have highlighted these inconsistencies through analysis of modernisation narratives promoted by the political leadership *vis-à-vis* people's articulations and practices of hospitality as an ambivalent practice unfolding between and across the blurred boundaries of public and private.

Drawing upon analysis of ethnographic data, this thesis has pointed out that hospitality is largely articulated as a personal disposition, informed by individuals' friendly attitudes to guests. Hospitality practices mostly take place in the private domestic realm, involving more or less close circles of relatives, friends and neighbours. However, at the same time people talk about hospitality as an inherent feature of their community, an attribute which binds all Georgians together and differentiates them from other people. In the thesis, hosts and guests articulate and perform hospitality as a practice underpinned by publicly shared norms with which everyone has to be familiar, and which everyone has to perform adequately in order to be considered worthy members of society. The private space of the house becomes a public stage on which hosts' and guests' identities and roles within the community are negotiated (Chapter 1).

I have explored the discrepancies between the modernisation project's perspectives on hospitality and the way in which my participants articulate and perform hospitality in their everyday practices with regard to three main dimensions, in which hosts and guests constantly trespass and redraw the blurred boundaries of

public and private. First, I have investigated the way in which interplaying images of the guest/stranger from public narratives and private articulations and performances are underpinned by the tension between unity and division (Chapter 3). Hospitality was depicted by public narratives promoted by the official system as a unifying bond which marked negative or positive Georgian distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* outsiders. However, different ways of articulating and performing hospitality became a divisive mark predicated upon conflicting moral and cultural perspectives, which reflected deepening social, political and economic cleavages across the population.

Behind the sometimes inflamed nationalist tones in which stereotyped images of hospitality were instrumentalised in post-revolutionary narratives to boost Georgian superior uniqueness (notably with regard to Russia), post-revolutionary narratives largely stigmatised attachment to traditional hospitality practices as a socially harmful habit belonging to a despised past. These practices were characterised by some participant - who usually supported the post-revolutionary government's modernisation project - as "typically Georgian", an attribute which had ambivalent meanings in modernisation narratives and in the way in which these narratives resonated among the population. While nominally depicting inclusion within the national community, this attribute referred negatively to people and practices which did not follow the country's path towards West, and in fact hindered it.

Second, I have focused on the relationships between hospitality norms and members of society who are largely excluded from the active making of hospitality practices on the basis of their ascribed identities, notably women and the young (Chapter 4). Traditional practices of *supra* and *tamadoba* have been criticised in political analyses, cultural debates and popular narratives for expressing strict gender and generational hierarchies. Tradition demands that women and young people contribute, while actually denying them an autonomous role in articulations and performances of hospitality. The exclusive character of traditional hospitality with regard to women and the young was reiterated by modernisation narratives, and was fundamental to the characterisation of certain practices as backwards and the promotion of more "modern" expressions of conviviality.

Both females and young people who contributed to my research manifested alienation and intolerance with regard to practices that relegated them to a subaltern position by default. However, their opposition to an oppressive tradition which older men imposed upon them did not have the clear-cut trajectory that modernisation narratives envisaged. In these narratives, women and young people, emancipating themselves by endorsing the Western values of individual liberty and self-realisation, unreservedly rejected tradition. On the contrary, my young and female participants' articulations and performances of hospitality point out that tradition is negotiated along the tension between public conservation and private change, as well as that between public rupture and private continuity. Amid official narratives which depicted the rejection of traditional hospitality as the only way to liberate themselves, women reframed their relationship with tradition between the private reproduction of traditional norms and the public exposure of inequalities which these norms entail. Young people, while vividly expressing intolerance of traditional norms of hospitality which their fathers imposed upon them, articulated tradition among their peers as a burden, but also as a precious source of symbols and meanings used to negotiate their identities in times of dramatic change.

Third, I have analysed the conflict over meanings of hospitality in the urban public space in Tbilisi (Chapter 5), focusing on the form of street male socialisation known as *birzha*. I have defined *birzha* as an expression of street hospitality whose members, through the exchange of material and non-material items predicated upon norms of trust, solidarity and reciprocity, create hospitable spaces in liminal areas between and across the public and the private. The emphasis on transparency as a key feature of the post-revolutionary modernisation project also applied to the cityscape. From the political leadership's perspective, a hospitable space was a functional, clean and safe space which provided evidence of the country's Westward development. This perspective clashed with *birzha*'s practices of street hospitality, which the government regarded as socially harmful not only for their ambivalent link with the criminal world, but also because they contested state authority over urban public spaces.

The government adopted a tough approach to re-establishing its authority, annihilating street practices which did not match the meanings of hospitality promoted by modernisation narratives. Yet, the political leadership's fairly arbitrary

repression of undesired people and practices contrasted with images of the transparency with which the radical renovation of the country's physical and social landscape was supposedly being carried out. Taking an increasingly authoritarian stance, the government overlooked urgent social problems, morally stigmatising and socially excluding many citizens. The discrepancy between modernisation narratives and what the post-revolutionary political leadership actually delivered ultimately undermined the state's legitimacy for the population.

In line with certain scholarship on post-revolutionary Georgia in the social and political sciences (Frederiksen & Gotfredsen 2017, Rekhviashvili L. 2015, Aliyev 2014a, Gugushvili 2014, Dunn & Frederiksen 2014, Frederiksen 2014, 2013, Gotfredsen 2014, Jones 2013, 2012, Dunn 2012), my empirical findings have looked behind narratives of "successful" modernisation to expose the Saak'ashvili's leadership failure to address urgent social, political and economic problems. The haste with which the government tried to erase the past and bring about a bright future in the present dismantled the social structures on which people were relying in a situation where the neoliberal paradigm had led to the removal of state-led social protection. This pattern is not exclusive to the Georgian context, and has been noted in the over-optimistic expectations that Western models could be successfully introduced overnight which accompanied the fall of socialism in Central and Eastern Europe (Round & Williams 2010, Polese 2008, Smith & Rochovská 2007, Blank 2004, Carothers 2002, Humphrey 2002, Andorka 1993). My thesis finds a clear link between these failures and the way in which national governments, often assisted by international institutions, stigmatised and marginalised social practices grounded in local traditions of trust, solidarity and reciprocity.

The top-down approach which post-socialist governments adopted to bring about "transition" in their countries ruled out the ambivalent role of local practices as meaningful ways to negotiate conservation *vis-à-vis* change amid dramatic transformations of citizens' everyday lives. Yet, failure by political leaderships to create alternative ways to channel this ambivalent role in the form of social protection and political participation led to social, political and economic fragmentation. My thesis points out that the Georgian post-revolutionary government's obliviousness to the ambivalence underpinning local practices of hospitality not only led to social marginalisation and economic impoverishment for a large part of the population, but

also to a loss of the political leadership's legitimacy for citizens. These developments have had a deep impact on the development of a democratic culture in the country – if by democracy we mean a system which caters for social justice and political participation at all levels of society, and not just a guarantee of fair elections. In this way, the modernisation project of bringing about civility defeated its own purposes.

Assessing the inconsistencies of the post-revolutionary modernisation project, and the impact that these inconsistencies have had on Georgia's social, political and economic development, my thesis has investigated hospitality practices as a source of civility. Analysis of my data indicates that hospitality is articulated and performed as a practice which organises people's interaction with their social surroundings across life's private and public spheres. I have argued that hospitality practices, stemming from private ties of affection and mutual responsibility between relatives, friends and neighbours, have the potential to inform the public sphere of social, political and economic institutions with relationships based on trust, solidarity and reciprocity.

My research locates itself in the literature which highlights the multifaceted effects of local practices on various spheres of life *vis-à-vis* government-led reforms intended to bring about political inclusion and socio-economic well-being (Polese 2015, Rekhviashvili L. 2015, Morris & Polese 2014, Ledeneva 2014, 2013, 1998, Aliyev 2014a, 2014b, Polese et al. 2014, Giordano & Hayoz 2013, Mandel & Humphrey 2002, Gupta 1995). Part of this literature defines these practices as persistent to the extent to which the provision of material and non-material goods and services from official institutions is lacking. People who lack support from these institutions often consider personal ties of kinship and friendship from which these practices stem to be more trustworthy than the state, the market and the rule of law. Local practices are bestowed with a positive role as informal mechanisms of psychological, social, political and economic help for citizens *vis-à-vis* the official system's shortcomings.

Yet, the perverse effects of these practices are also highlighted. The superior legitimacy and authority which people attribute to personal relationships compared to the official system is indicated as a powerful hindrance to civil engagement, which in turn is considered a fundamental requirement for the flourishing of viable



institutions (Aliyev 2014a, 2014b). Therefore, practices which overcome the shortcomings of formal procedures through informal channels are regarded as both a symptom and a cause of the weakness of official institutions (Ledeneva 2009, 1998, Mars & Altman 1987, 1983). As a corollary, it may be assumed that the fading away of informal mechanisms is both an outcome of and a pre-requisite for the construction of a solid institutional framework.

The analysis of articulations and performances of hospitality on which my research is based shows that hospitality practices do not fit into the informal/formal opposition. My data highlight hospitality practices as embedded in people's everyday lives and intertwined with specific historical, cultural, social, political and economic conditions (see also Morris & Polese 2014, Polese et al. 2014, Smith & Rochovská 2007). Hospitality is ambivalently articulated and performed by hosts and guests on the tension between intimacy and display, closure and openness, calculation and generosity (Chapter 1); between hostility and welcoming, aggressiveness and conviviality (Chapter 3); between reproduction and reappropriation, rupture and continuity, attachment and rejection (Chapter 4); between instrumentality and sociability (with regard to both people and space), exclusion and inclusion, liminality and encroachment (Chapter 5).

A functionalist perspective which depicts hospitality as a mechanism working where the official system does not overlooks the multifaceted ways in which hospitality is articulated and performed between and across the porous boundaries of public and private. This does not mean that the crucial role that hospitality practices have in Georgian society as a way to negotiate individual and collective identities (chapters 3, 4 and 5), reinforce or severe social relationships (chapters 1 and 5) and circulate material and non-material items (chapters 3 and 5) is in no way related to the endemic lack of trustworthy institutions which are accountable to the population. Indeed, I have pointed out how hospitality practices worked as “coping strategies” in contexts of political oppression, economic shortages and social fragmentation such as the Soviet era and the 1990s (chapters 1, 3 and 5). However, considering the way in which people “get things done” through hospitality practices as a by-product of the flaws of specific social, political and economic systems does not account for the pervasiveness of hospitality practices, which people reproduce on the tension between conservation and change (chapters 3, 4 and 5).

The persistence of hospitality practices as a “coping mechanism” even when “transition” had supposedly come to an end has been pointed out as a sign of the shortcomings inherent to Saak’ashvili’s reforms (Rekhviashvili L. 2015, Frederiksen 2015, Aliyev 2014a, 2014b, Jones 2013, 2012). Georgian people’s ongoing reliance on personal relationships stemming from hospitality exchanges is directly related to the post-revolutionary government’s failure to bring about political inclusion and socio-economic well-being. Reforms which impoverished a large part of the population were implemented in a fairly authoritarian way. Most importantly, the state failed to win back citizens’ trust and loyalty as a legitimate and accountable institution. The superior authority and trustworthiness which many people still attribute to personal ties of hospitality highlights that the post-revolutionary government carried out a “failed mental revolution”.<sup>56</sup>

My thesis has challenged this perspective, which frames hospitality as an informal mechanism of psychological, social, political and economic support whose reason for existence is proportional to the weakness of official institutions. While recognising that this is just one angle from which hospitality can be analysed, I have argued that practices of hospitality stand out in their own right as an active source of civil values. The question is thus not what went wrong with the post-revolutionary modernisation project, and what could have been done to provide citizens with efficient and trustworthy institutions so that they would not have to rely on hospitality practices any longer to “get things done”. The question is rather whether and how hospitality practices can generate civility, and therefore strengthen a democratic culture within society which in turn enhances the quality of official institutions (see also Putnam et al 1994). My study has explored hospitality practices as neither a symptom nor the cause of a weak institutional framework, but as a source of civil values which can make this framework stronger. In my perspective, practices of hospitality stemming from personal relationships are not the “enemy” of the official system *a priori*. On the contrary, I have investigated the potentials of these practices to make the system better for everyone.

Yet, the potential of hospitality practices as a source of civility is problematised by the ambivalence of these practices, as highlighted in a series of

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<sup>56</sup> K’up’at’adze & Slade 2014.

empirical observations stemming from my analysis of people's articulations and performances of hospitality. First, the role of hospitality as a social device through which people assess their own status *vis-à-vis* others, but also through which this status is challenged by the community, makes hospitality a practice fraught with tension. The private solidarity which underpins hospitality exchanges between relatives, friends and neighbours is intertwined with public competition, in which the capability of individuals and groups to engage in hospitality practices according to shared norms is rated (chapters 1 and 6). Trust and generosity are publicly displayed as fundamental features of the host-guest relationship. However, trust unfolds along with privately articulated suspicion about the "real" nature of a hospitality exchange, in which the counterpart is often framed as acting in hospitable ways for instrumental reasons (chapters 1 and 3). Similarly, unconditional generosity is caught in a tension with calculation, through which hosts and guests aim to make sure that they are involved in a relationship of reciprocity and not of unidirectional giving and taking (chapters 1, 3 and 6).

Second, the principle of reciprocity which ties hosts and guests to one another makes hospitality practices an ongoing exchange of material and non-material items which is both a source of support and a burden. Reciprocity is conditional, since private relationships between hosts and guests are surrounded by public expectations (Chapters 1 and 5). Public openness to visitors is counterbalanced by private concerns over the exposure of one's private surroundings to outsiders, which may jeopardise one's position in the community. Public munificence is intertwined with private reluctance to share one's resources with others, which also entails resentment when offers of hospitality are perceived as not being properly reciprocated. The burden of reciprocity is particularly evident in conditions of shortage. People who have benefitted from others' generosity are caught in a dilemma between investing their scarce resources in returning the hospitality and saving them to meet their primary needs, at the risk of compromising their reputation (Chapters 1, 3 and 5).

Third, welcoming attitudes to outsiders are part and parcel of hosts' strategies for dealing with the threat posed by guests' alterity. Visitors' deep involvement in local practices of hospitality implies the proud display of the national community's moral and cultural specifics, to which the outsider must conform. The lavish and insistent offering of food and drink, while highlighting the host's munificence, is

aimed at reiterating the host's power over guests by putting the latter in an awkward position of being unable to refuse in spite of their unwillingness to eat and drink more. At the same time, by drawing boundaries between insiders and outsiders, hospitality practices reverse power relationships. Guests coming from more powerful political and economic contexts such as Russia or the West are subjected to the moral and cultural system of their hosts, who assert their superiority. The hostility surrounding outsiders' otherness does not translate to the open rejection of this alterity. On the contrary, alterity is embraced and made innocuous by denying guests agency in the host-directed plot of hospitality events (Chapter 3).

Fourth, hospitality is largely articulated and performed by hosts and guests as "tradition". Whether tradition is considered a constriction or a positive mark of distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* others, hospitality practices are considered, for good or for bad, to be a matter of public knowledge with which the whole national community is acquainted. The label of "tradition" which people attach to their hospitality practices further problematises the relationship between hospitality and civility in post-revolutionary Georgia. My analysis of the modernisation narratives promoted by the post-revolutionary political leadership indicates that the status of tradition in such a context of relentless modernisation is part and parcel of the ambivalence of hospitality. I have pointed out that the post-revolutionary government, in its political speech as well as in its program of reforms, framed modernisation as transparency. Transparency, in turn, entailed clearly separated public and private spheres, as opposed to the grey zones which had haunted the country's moral, cultural, social, political and economic landscape prior to the Rose Revolution.

My discussion of modernisation narratives has highlighted that the post-revolutionary political leadership was not inherently hostile to "tradition" as opposed to "modernity". On the contrary, in post-revolutionary hospitality, "tradition" was a fundamental feature of the public face that the country was supposed to present to outsiders, that is, a young democracy rapidly moving towards the future but not oblivious of its glorious past (Chapter 2). Yet, my empirical findings show that this stereotyped version of tradition clashed with the ambivalent ways in which people articulate and perform hospitality as a traditional practice. My participants perceived tradition as a monolithic structure resting on publicly shared norms which barely tolerate innovation. Hospitality as tradition was articulated and performed as a

constrictive set of norms which required everyone to be welcomed and treated lavishly despite people's need for privacy and limited ability to afford to act as a host (chapters 1, 3 and 6); as an expression of vertical structures grounded in patriarchy and inter-generational hierarchies, which demanded participation from women and young men while actually excluding them from the active making of the event (Chapter 4); and as a strict code of brotherhood in urban public spaces, the breach of which entailed various kinds of risk (Chapter 5).

On the other hand, analysis of my data shows that tradition is negotiated in hosts' and guests' articulations and performances of hospitality. While hospitality practices are shaped by the structure of "tradition", the structure itself is simultaneously transformed by people's changing strategies and purposes (see Introduction). In my participants' perspectives, tradition emerges as a cluster of fluid practices which people bestow with an active and therefore changing meaning in regulating their social interactions and assessing their position within society. The implementation of traditional norms at the table is a device to manage relationships between guests and hosts, negotiating identities *vis-à-vis* old and new strangers (Chapter 3). Women's struggle to be active makers of hospitality unfolds along with the re-elaboration of tradition in more inclusive and egalitarian ways between and across the public and the private. Young people reject the burden of static tradition imposed upon them by their older relatives by reshaping tradition in ways which are meaningful for defining their identities in a context of personal and social change (Chapter 4). The reproduction of hospitality practices across the cityscape makes the streets of a neighbourhood hospitable through a network of exchanges grounded in traditional norms of trust, solidarity and reciprocity (Chapter 5).

The active role that tradition has in people's articulations and performances of hospitality was not functional to the modernisation project, which envisaged tradition as a stereotyped façade for promoting the country to outsiders. Ambivalent articulations and performances of hospitality as tradition which unfolded between and across public and private were stigmatised by modernisation narratives as expressions of incivility (chapters 2 and 6). Incivility was the distinctive mark of those practices of hospitality which the post-revolutionary political leadership aimed to efface altogether as undesired legacies of a despised past. Such practices, for instance spending an excessive amount of time and money on organising or attending

*supra*, getting drunk, overeating, being loud or encroaching on public spaces with dubious activities, were dismissed as expressions of irrational, backward or anti-social behaviour (chapters 1, 3, 5 and 6), as reflecting an authoritarian social structure which oppressed women and young people in the name of compliance with outdated rituals (Chapter 4), or as petty criminal tendencies, debauchery and unhealthy behaviour among young men, which polluted urban public spaces and made them unsafe (Chapter 5).

As mentioned above, this thesis maintains that the post-revolutionary political leadership's obliviousness to the ambivalence of hospitality practices, which was framed as an embodiment of uncivility, made Georgian society uncivil. The way in which people's practices of hospitality were morally stigmatised, socially marginalised and politically repressed generated deep cleavages across the population. Such a framework is in contrast with the definition of civility I have referred to in my study as "the public use of private good", which, in Putnam's words, implies "a steady recognition and pursuit of the public good at the expense of all purely individual and private ends" (Putnam et al. 1994: 88). Growing incivility in post-revolutionary Georgian society ultimately translated to a loss of political legitimacy by a political leadership which was committed to bringing about civility by introducing a Western moral, cultural, social, political and economic model from above.

But is hospitality actually civil? Analysing expressions of uncivil behaviour *vis-à-vis* pivotal features of hospitality practices, the final chapter of this thesis highlights that hospitality may indeed amount to incivility, manifested across the private sphere of personal habits and the public sphere of relationships with one's physical and social surroundings. I have pointed out that excesses, intrusiveness and lack – or excess - of reciprocity in hospitality exchanges are not just expressions of bad manners which inform the relationship between hosts and guests. Following my definition of incivility as the private use of public good, I have argued that the fundamental traits of hospitality are uncivil, since they are conducive of social relationships which privilege the personal over the common interest. Drawing upon Putnam and colleagues' claim that the quality of public institutions depends on the moral, cultural and social surroundings from which they stem (1994), I have connected the weakness of the Georgian institutional framework to practices of

hospitality which rest on the private exploitation of public material and non-material resources.

Interestingly, this is the perspective which underpinned the post-revolutionary modernisation project. The Saak'ashvili government's approach was informed by the belief that in order to reform the country's political and economic landscape, citizens' moral, cultural and social habits first needed to be changed. The post-revolutionary political elite targeted practices of hospitality which, as expressions of the uncivil private use of public good, had haunted national politics and the economy since Soviet times and through the 1990s. Making these practices civil would make the system as a whole civil, and therefore modern.

However, in its attempt to bring about civility from above, the post-revolutionary political leadership was oblivious to the ambivalence of hospitality practices. Failing to appreciate the multifaceted effects that hospitality practices have on people's everyday life, the government stigmatised and repressed articulations and performances of hospitality as a traditional practice between and across the public and the private as the source of incivility. The modernisation project aimed to make hospitality civil by annihilating its ambivalence. Yet, the stigmatisation, marginalisation and repression of ambivalence, coupled with the failure to create alternative moral, social, political and economic ways to channel ambivalence, led to deep fragmentation across society. Moral stigmatisation, social marginalisation, political oppression and economic inequality made post-revolutionary Georgia uncivil.

My thesis brings about a different perspective on hospitality, focusing on ambivalence as a key feature of everyday practices which can serve, rather than hamper, civility. Through discussion of my participants' articulations and performances of hospitality, I have investigated the potentials of hospitality practices, grounded in local traditions of trust, solidarity and reciprocity, to be conducive to moral, cultural and social habits which favour the good of the community over myopic personal interest. The way in which hospitality practices trespass and redraw the blurred boundaries of private and public spreads generosity and mutual support beyond the close circle of relatives, friends and neighbours and across the public sphere. In this way, the trust, solidarity and reciprocity underpinning hospitality

practices support the creation of public institutions which favour social inclusion, political participation and equally distributed economic development. Modernisation is not achieved through top-down implementation of external models, but through the horizontal spread of the traditional norms of trust, solidarity and reciprocity which are the basis of hospitality practices. Unfolding in the private realm of intimacy, friendships, family bonds and neighbourhood networks, these norms may bridge different individuals and communities to one another, laying the foundation of a shared political culture which may help to improve the quality of official institutions.

The conclusion of my thesis raises two related concerns connected to hospitality's ambivalence which need to be addressed by further research. I have shed light on the risks that the obliviousness to ambivalence poses to a society's attempt to generate and strengthen a democratic culture which can form the basis for a flourishing institutional framework that caters for social inclusion and political participation. For this reason, the "reverse side" of hospitality's ambivalence, which shows hospitality to be an exclusive practice resting on authoritarian relationships, must not be overlooked. Empirical analysis of my fieldwork data has shown that in people's articulations and performances hospitality practices take the form of a competition underpinning individuals' and groups' struggle for position within society (chapters 1 and 3); a way to demean strangers' otherness and at the same time reaffirm the community's exclusiveness (Chapter 3); a set of patriarchal norms which uphold gender discrimination (Chapter 4); the embodiment of the authority of older generations imposed vertically upon the young (Chapter 4); an exclusive circle of exchanges resting on principles of hierarchical masculinity (Chapter 5); the pollution of physical and social public spaces (Chapter 5); an expression of disrespect for other people's space, taking the form of excess and intrusiveness (Chapter 6); and the exploitation of public goods through private connections (Chapter 6).

Overlooking the ambivalence of hospitality practices leads to an uncritical "romanticisation" of hospitality (Abu-Lughod 1990) as a grass-roots expression of solidarity and reciprocity *vis-à-vis* an oppressive and unjust power. Such a perspective entails two problematic outcomes. First, hospitality is relegated to a marginalised position *a priori*, as a practice which is always external, and possibly opposed, to power mechanisms. In this way, hospitality practices are denied a meaningful role in wider debates on social welfare, political participation and



economic redistribution, which is what this thesis has argued for. Second, neglecting the exclusive and conservative nature of hospitality practices favours, rather than challenges, the reproduction of a system based on moral stigmatisation, social marginalisation, political oppression and economic inequality, in other words of incivility.

The second related concern which my conclusions raise refers to the endorsement of hospitality as a source of civility from below, that is, a form of horizontal exchange which binds community members through solidarity and mutual responsibility. Such an approach may sideline the fundamental role of public institutions, notably the state, in the provision of social protection to citizens, a key part of the neoliberal doctrine. Celebrating people's practices as a resilient source of psychological, social, political and economic support in the face of the official system's shortcomings is functional to the neoliberal paradigm, which unburdens the state's responsibilities onto people's strategies. These strategies rest in turn on people's voluntary engagement in mutual help, which is praised by the neoliberal doctrine as a way for people to get by in spite of the withdrawal of support by public institutions. This thesis has not argued for the replacement of official institutions with local practices, but for the "institutionalisation" within a shared political culture of norms of trust, solidarity and reciprocity as a source of civil values. Future research on the relationship between local practices and civility needs to critically approach these potential backlashes from a theoretical, methodological and empirical perspective.

## Appendix

### Figures



**Figure 1.** One of the several gatherings at the Ts'ik'lauri's house, with homemade wine and *mts'vadi* (pork skewers). *Author's picture.*



**Figure 2.** A restaurant in Tbilisi with small cottages as separate sitting areas (*kupe*).  
*Author's picture.*



**Figure 3:** A picture of Tbilisi old town with the fortress of Narik'ala (4<sup>th</sup> century) in the background, taken in March 2008. The renovation of the capital's centre was a priority in the post-revolutionary government's modernisation project. *Author's picture.*



**Figure 4.** Homemade *khach'ap'uri* (cheesy bread) at a participant's house. *Author's picture.*



**Figure 5.** Homemade *khink'ali* (meat dumplings) at a participant's house. The collective preparation of Georgian traditional food among young people reflects the tension between the reproduction of tradition and the re-elaboration of traditional roles and identities (notably ascribed to gender and age). *Author's picture.*

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