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AUTHORITY THAT MATTERS: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF TRUST AND FOOD SAFETY IN POST-SOVIET GEORGIA

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an ethnographic account of the moral politics of food safety in post-Soviet Georgia. It focuses on the intersection of Georgian regulatory expertise and EU-designed reforms of food safety laws and governance in the capital city of Tbilisi, where I conducted three years of fieldwork within different institutional contexts of food safety reform: Georgian experts in food safety at the National Food Agency (NFA), food vendors at outdoor popular food markets, and household matriarchs tasked with provisioning and caring for their families every day. It examines how public recognitions of and claims to trustworthy regulatory authority are made possible, articulated, and valued. These processes of claiming and recognizing authority, as they unfold in daily life at the local level, have unintended and ironic consequences that allow us to think about authority and trust as potent sites of political meaning-making. In more general terms, this ethnography demonstrates what daily decisions about food, such as deciding what to eat or feed one's family, tell us about expertise, moral authority, broader geopolitical transformation, and the gendered ways these processes unfold. The dissertation analyzes how EU-designed regulatory regimes of consumer good safety stem from the EU's self-awareness as a moral formation grounded in its presumptions of its own technocratic authority, its mandate of public safety, and its own forms of liberal-democratic governance. In relation to this moral stance, the lived experience in the EU's post-socialist eastern zone is, in varied ways, ambivalent in its orientation to both "Europe" and "Russia." This ambivalence often surfaces as an emergent public politics that only recognizes and trusts particular forms of moral authority (often of a socialist or early post-socialist dispensation).

Keywords: Post-socialism, food safety, public health, moral authority, trust, gender, bureaucracy

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Part I: Georgian Food Politics

INTRODUCTION
Global Food Safety, Trust, and the Making of Moral Authorities in Post-Soviet Georgia, 2013-2016

This dissertation is an ethnographic account of the moral politics of food safety in post-Soviet Georgia. It focuses on the uneasy articulation and production of "global food safety" in the post-Soviet context, centering on the intersections of Georgian popular food politics, regulatory expertise, and global as well as European Union (EU)-designed reforms of food safety laws and governance in the capital city of Tbilisi. It is based on three years of fieldwork within different institutional contexts of food safety reform: Georgian experts in food safety at the National Food Agency (NFA), food vendors at outdoor popular food markets, and household matriarchs tasked with provisioning and caring for their families every day. These chapters examine how public recognitions of and claims to trustworthy regulatory authority are made possible, articulated, and valued. These processes of claiming and recognizing authority, as they unfold in daily life, have unintended and ironic consequences that allow us to think about authority and trust as potent sites of political meaning-making. In more general terms, this ethnography demonstrates what daily decisions about food in the post-Soviet context, such as deciding what to eat or feed one's family, can tell us about the making of moral authority and why it matters, about collective forms of belonging and sovereignty, and the gendered ways in which these processes unfold.

Global regimes of food safety are (re)produced at sites like Georgia and Tbilisi. Global institutions and interests such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), together with transnational configurations of (neo)liberal governance such as the European Union, converge at the Georgian NFA, which adopted a reformist stance after Georgia

signed an EU Association Agreement in 2014. The contract, which asserts Georgia's nominal inclusion in EU markets but exclusion from mutual political obligations like military interventions in territorial conflicts, is politically performative in its public (yet still non-committal) identification of "Georgia" with "Europe" rather than "Russia."

It is this spirit of partial commitment, the processes and emergent worlds of reform that it demands and produces, respectively, as they relate to Georgian political-economic and moral economies of food and food safety, that are the subject of this dissertation. The primary argument of this dissertation is that the globalized politics of food safety – as lived experience at sites of its own (re)production, of which post-Soviet Tbilisi is just one – inadvertently engenders battles over moral authority and mobilizes public senses of uncertainty, anxiety, and, at times, in the case of Georgia, alienation from the very idea of "Europeanization." In this way, the lived, political effects of "global food safety" exceed the institutionalized, political-economic configurations of governance, communication, and commercialization that labor to present it – "food safety" – as a coherent thing that is implemented, to varying degrees, across time and space.

Like the free public HIV treatment programs in Botswana that Brada (2011) argues constitute the very sites of "global health's" *production*, the case of regulatory reform of food safety in post-Soviet Georgia offers a lens into the forms of authority, the semiotic reorderings, and the embodied claims to sovereignty of which "global food safety" as a process is generative. I argue that EU-designed regulatory regimes of consumer food safety stem from the EU's self-awareness as a moral formation grounded in its presumptions of its own technocratic authority, its mandate of public safety, and its own forms of liberal-democratic governance. In relation to this moral stance, the lived experience in the EU's post-socialist eastern zone is, in varied ways,

ambivalent in its orientation to both "Europe" and "Russia." This ambivalence surfaces as an emergent public politics that only recognizes and trusts particular forms of moral authority (often of a socialist or early post-socialist dispensation). These moral politics are visible ethnographically, at the intersections of lived, nationalized, and still deeply (post)socialist-informed practices of safety expertise, governance, and daily commodity consumption.

Stemming from this claim, four interconnected arguments shape the five chapters that follow: First, as the tangible, material medium through which human bodies (*organizmebi,* plural, the Russian cognate in Georgian used when talking about the ingestion of foods) are not simply (re)produced but also vitalized, nourished, sustained, and/or made hungry, foods themselves, and the worlds of valuation, procurement, and provisioning in which they live, are constitutive of a form of sovereign, moral authority that grounds itself in its ability to claim the making of a "good" ontological being and existence itself.[1] Food is like language in the ways it is mobilized as a "natural element" of nationalized beings, identities, and differentiations. Its ontological, epistemological, and semiotic presence in homes, in mass-mediated communications like television shows and magazines, in fantasies of foreign contamination, and in the voices of food safety bureaucrats at state agencies like the NFA suggests the power of food to articulate and reproduce the structured ideologies that govern daily life: notions of gender and gender roles, the public/private divide, the legitimate role of the state, the healthy body, and the informed shopper at the market.

Second, in post-Soviet Tbilisi food practices, these claims and instantiations of authority are gendered and multi-sited in their unfolding. Specific forms of authority claims include (a)

[1] This is related to, but not exactly the same as Berlant's notion of a "good life" (e.g. 2011), which stems from a post-war Euro-American world of fantasized upward mobility and material plenty generated from "clusters of promises."

strongman patriarchal, (b) discretionary matriarchal, and (c) a politically "neutral" state bureaucracy drawing from (a) and (b) to cultivate its own trustworthiness. Strongman politicians, men like Mikhael Saakashvili (President from 2004-2013), Bidzina Ivanishvili (Prime Minister from 2012-2013), and public male voices of their administrations like Kakha Bendukidze (Saakashvili's first Economic Minister), are elected and succeed one another the way in which, one interlocutor told me, different Georgian toastmasters (*tamadebi*) occupy their seat at the head of the table at different ritual feasts (*supra*). They demand that food "consumers" in their liberalized market economy be vigilant and conscientious in detecting and reporting, to state and/or consumer-interest agencies, food and marketplaces that are deemed "unsafe" according to newly EU-approximated legal codes (e.g. mislabeled, past expiration, spoiled). These public figures, like those of a recently-emergent authoritarian politics in other parts of the world, are certainly not new to the former Soviet socialist world. Like *tamadas* at *supras,* strongman political authority is public, visible, vocal, and macho.

Meanwhile, matriarchal authority – as the life force of food provisioning, bears the burdens and glories of managing the excesses and shortages of the proverbial table. [Nicely put!] If men are expected to "provide" for their *families* as patriarchs,[2] women "provision" the *bodies* that constitute families and thus the very substance of their livelihood(s). Providing for a family (*ojaxis uzrunvelyopa,* where *uzrunvelyopa* is the verbal noun including the indirect object marker "u" - "the providing for" and *ojaxis,* genitive singular for family) is assumed to be a man's responsibility, but can be used, though it not often is, when talking about a woman. In contrast, the word for a woman in charge of provisioning for the household is *diasakhlisi*

[2] The Georgian expression, *ojaxs kargad uvlis* (S/he tends to/cares for his family well), can refer to either a man or a woman, and the verb *uvlis* (s/he tends to) is also commonly used to refer to caring for non-human animate beings, like dogs (*dzaglebs uvlis*).

(manager of the house(hold)), and while Georgian language does not have gender distinctions, *diasakhlisi* is exclusively female.[3] Moreover, *diasakhlisi* is more capacious in its meaning than *ojaxis uzrunvelyopa.* If someone says "she is a good manager of the house" (*kargi diasakhlisia*), this phrase can and usually does means several things at once, but it is always specific to a woman and to her home. It is something like the English word "housekeeper" or "homemaker," but less bourgeois, enclosed, and anachronistic in its implications: She is organized. Her house is clean. Her kids are fed. She is a good cook. Her home is not chaotic. She manages everything and everyone, time and space. She works hard. Her matriarchal authority is discretionary[4] and does not necessarily call attention to itself while it *acts* within the worlds of the home and market.[5]

In their public theatrics, as *tamadas* and strongmen, men-as-patriarchs are allowed, if not expected, to be excessive; it is understandable and often even good if they eat and drink too much, or collect mistresses, or overspend at the casino once in a while. But as Metzo argues in her work on alcoholism in contemporary Russia (e.g. 2009; see also Petryna 2003 and Raikhel 2016), it is different for women, especially for matriarchs. Women-as-matriarchs must manage excesses while they themselves cannot visibly or publicly embody them. In other words, they must manage shortages and negatively-valued excesses, within and in relation to both themselves

[3] Thank you to Keti Gurchiani for clarifying and confirming this with me.
[4] Thanks to William Mazzarella for pointing out how discretion is at once "discreet" and unbounded at the same time, as in "discretionary authority," or "discretionary spending."
[5] A woman who is not a mother or wife can also be a *kargi diasakhlisi,* though she will most likely refer to herself in that way, rather than being recognized as such by women who have families and who consider themselves, and those like them, to be "real" *diasakhlisebi* (plural). Providing for one's family (*ojaxis uzrunvelyopa)* or taking good care of one's family (*ojaxs kargad uvlis)* implies a more specific kind of interface, more akin to the English "breadwinner": S/he provides *things* (food, money, medicine, a roof over their heads, a yard) for their family; s/he raises the family (but again, it can also be a dog, or a garden) so that it can physically grow, develop, and, if they do it "well," flourish.

and others.

Third, on top of the gendered categories of provisioning and their implications for popular senses of trustworthiness, the moral authority of "goodness," and the management of negatively-valued excess, both Russia and the memory of Soviet technoscience are alive and well in the world of Georgian food safety expertise and food provisioning. Food is a medium through which my interlocutors reckon with the present. As these chapters show, there are popular senses of not measuring up to the ways in which matriarchs, and a concomitant figuring of matriarchal authority, were able to provide for their families during extreme scarcity and existential precarity during the violent and traumatic 1990s, and to the ways in which the Soviet past was remembered, during my time in the field, as a time of reliable and effective technoscientific infrastructures and thus biological wellbeing. These feelings of not measuring up in the present constitute a burden and a sense of loss (but also longing) that my interlocutors regularly expressed, in varied ways, when food was around – at a dinner table, being prepared in the kitchen, groceries being unpacked. Popular memories of the Soviet past and the 1990s are as much an anxious mode of self-location as they are a critical indictment of a felt absence of the state: Maybe the 1990s were a period of extreme scarcity, and all kinds of hunger, but during this situation of a chaotically revolving-door of men-as-political elites and an absent state, our matriarchs were able to somehow provision their families and sustain them, with food and more. Maybe the Soviet past was a taboo/profane aberration from the liberal path we Georgians have appeared to join, but as if it had been outside of politics and like a perfectly calibrated state of nature,[6] *that* state ensured our biological wellbeing.

[6] Thank you to Michael Fisch for pointing out this quality of the remembered Soviet past as a kind of apolitical "state of nature."

In addition, aligned with the EU and EU-administered technocracy, the NFA – as a site through which globalized food safety regimentation (re)produces itself – competes with the Soviet past and Russian present in its claims to technoscientific authority. One of the primary arguments of this dissertation, which structures the last three chapters on the NFA, is that state bureaucratic authority, in its labors of presenting itself as trustworthy and *different* from the public perceptions of what it claims is a *formerly* corrupt and personalized form of state governance. At the same time, the strongman image of Georgian politics exists simultaneously with this other "neutral" state stance that aligns itself with scientific expertise, and implicitly mobilizes the moralized and gendered implications of "good" family provisioning.[7]

A third related argument of this dissertation is that these gendered and spatio-temporal divisions of labor in food provisioning and concomitant modes of authority engender popular forms of "trust" and "distrust." Trust, I argue, constitutes a political and popular epistemological process that affectively orients toward, while also constituting, claims and systems of moral authority. The assemblages of food provisioning practices that constitute matriarchal authority, for example, allow women-as-matriarchs to claim and reap recognition as trust*worthy*. A daughter would say that she trusts her mother, who knows what she is doing when she shops for food at the outdoor "black" food market (*bazari*) to find the most delicious and nutritious foods. Authority *matters* in a double sense: First, in its claims to trustworthiness and second, in its very materialization through "good" food objects and the bodies that they sustain.

[7] The way this "neutrality" plays out, as the second part of my dissertation demonstrates, is that while engaging in the legal-juridical, biopolitical, and semiotic labor to craft its own trustworthiness in a post-Soviet political sphere of well-publicized strongmen, corruption, and promises, the liberal bureaucratic state, in the form of the Georgian National Food Agency (NFA) and following EU legality, ultimately and repeatedly defers the responsibility of safety to market interests (and vice versa).

In these ways, this is not just a story about standards and their uneven implementations, or organizational rules that are meant to be broken. First, such a story would imply that "standards" and "rules" are something that exist "out there" as if they were uncontested things that are exported, or implemented, in "local" contexts. Second, my ethnographic focus is not on the life or emergence of standards per se, though I do pay attention to the ways in which, for example, "global food safety," as a governmental assemblage, mediates the production of Georgian food safety standards as Georgian food safety legal codes are "harmonized" with those of the EU. However, this attention to processes of harmonization and approximation is part of a larger argument around the making and claiming of authority itself: How does the NFA work to embody trustworthiness and to appear trustworthy, and what are some of the ethnographic situations that offer a lens into this process? What and/or whom, in turn, do my interlocutors (at the NFA but also, and sometimes overlapping as subject positions, Tbilisi food provisioners) trust, turn to, and cite as trusted expert authority when figuring out such things as how to translate an English legal word into Georgian legal codes, or whether to bother to read a label for an expiration date? How is the very authority of "global food safety" articulated in these instances, all while it is here made, recognized, refused, deferred, and/or disavowed. In the following section, I will discuss the key concepts of my dissertation, and the literatures that shape them.

Concepts and Literatures

Political Ontologies: Food, Bodies, and Sovereignties

Recent work on the politics of Georgia's 2001 Rose Revolution, as well as on the political unrest following the collapse of state socialism, opens the question of trust - empirically and theoretically - without explicitly foregrounding this concept. These studies analyze how

post-socialist Georgia, like other formerly socialist states in Central and Eastern Europe, experienced a jarring and prolonged collapse of a semiotic regime that had long mediated state-governed, industrialized forms of production and distribution (e.g. Dunn 2008; Manning 2007; Manning and Uplisashvili 2007; Suny 1994). This political-economic transition marked a dramatic shift in the public semiotics of power and security. Many noted an absence of a tangible, publicly-recognizable power that could ground its legitimacy in ensuring a reliable, sincere source of material and biological well-being.

For my interlocutors, this felt semiotic absence and experience of meaninglessness is generative of an urgency to make do. The compromises that state agencies like the NFA have to make in relation to an ever more complex market landscape that accompanies a globalized, neoliberal political-economy of food and food safety add fuel to the fire. Large Georgian and non-Georgian branded grocery retail chains, for example, coexist with smaller independent grocers and the outdoor food markets; there is a visible presence of foreign and unfamiliar business interests and commodity objects; and accommodations are coded with an EU-derived legal language. Where is sovereignty located, here, in the present?

Existing between the embodied strongman politics of figures like Saakashvili and Ivanishvili, who sit at the head of the figurative public table as metonyms for a form of masculinized, patriarchal authority, and the embodied discretionary authority of matriarchs-as-provisioners, the Georgian body politic that I discuss in this dissertation lives in Tbilisi. This order is anxious in relation to its geopolitical futures and traumatic pasts and felt to be intransigent in relation to mobile and wealthy elites. The imagined or dreamed of body politic is also often hopeless in relation to a sense of national sovereignty that is existentially threatened at every border and, through constant separatist activity, from within.

In using the term "body politic," I am seeking a way to talk about the ways in which food, specifically "good" (rather than "safe," per se) food, mediates and stands in for a shared sense and experience of sustained, embodied, and collective being that is not quite reducible to a notion of the biopolitical. By "biopolitical" I am referring to an aggregate political body or population, governed by diffuse assemblages of power/knowledge (Foucault 1980 and 2003). In using the term "sovereignty," as in the "biopolitical sovereignty exercised by nation-states" (Bernstein 2012), I refer to Agamben's conceptualization of "bare life" – public and political life stripped of all sociality and upon which sovereign power is performed, in exceptional states (Agamben 1998). And while the nation and an ethno-nationalist sense of "Georgianness" is something my interlocutors invoke and I discuss throughout these chapters, there is, at the same time when figuring food as an ingestible substance, some appeal to a kind of human body and vital life itself, evidenced in the use of the word *organizmi* (Georgian cognate of the Russian). Such *organizmi* are bodies that ingest "good," "nutritious," "natural," "delicious," "dangerous," or "poisonous" food. As I will discuss soon below, the word "safety" is not often invoked in daily formulations of food and bodies.

In this way, this dissertation draws from, and is in conversation with, recent work that seeks to rethink and destabilize abstract and Eurocentric understandings of "bodies," "power," and "sovereignty." My dissertation draws from classical work that takes "the body" as its object of critique and that reconceives it as a "contingent formation" (Lock and Farquhar 2007). It connects this rethinking of bodies and relates it to political theories and theologies that locate sovereignty within a dualistic nature of leaders and their political realms, or body politics (e.g. Kantorowicz 1957). It also draws from more recent work on the *publicity* of the incorporation of bodies and political power as itself a semiotic process of sovereignty-making (especially through

displays of dead bodies) (e.g. Gal 1991; Bernstein 2012; Yurchak 2015). Through these literatures, I seek to understand how Georgian and post-Soviet conceptions of bodies-as-living-*organizms* might be, following Bernstein's formulation, "metonymic for broader political processes" (2012:264) and how they might elaborate notions of collective political being (see also Farquhar 2002).

In thinking about embodied collectivities revealed by the public food politics around trust and "good" foods in Georgia, recent literature in medical anthropology is also relevant, as are medical sociology, and science and technology studies concerned in critical ways with categories and analogies of body-ecology boundaries and "entanglements" (Mol 2002; Roberts 2017, 2019): "metabolism" and "metabolic life" (Landecker 2001; Solomon 2016); "exposures," "porosities"," "contaminations" (Roberts 2017, 2019; Agard-Jones 2016; King 2016). Roberts and Solomon make good use of Landecker's work on metabolism. To quote Roberts, citing Landecker:

> some philosophical biologists and biological philosophers have proposed metabolism as a third space, where matter is exchanged with its surroundings, producing an "open inwardness" (Landecker 2013, 217). In this framework, metabolism does not burn energy directly but converts it into *a milieu interieur* that makes self. Distinction between self and other lies not on the surface of bodies but deep inside, in the energy reserve, or the pool that is not quite the organism or the environment but the moving zone in which the "two become one." 597

Related to this, work on bodily pollution, contamination, and immunity of course also draw on critical theories of the body, as well as critically relating to a rich anthropological canon on ritualized purities and dangers (Douglas 1966). In his book on the ideo-theological fault lines between "Greco-Roman" science-superstition and "the early Christian subculture['s]" understandings of the body, Martin draws on medical anthropologies (Farquhar 1991, Lock 1980, and Dubos 1959) to discuss how disease etiologies, stemming from particular ideologies of

bodies and the ecosystems in which they are thought to live, might be understood as either "ontological" or "physiological" (1995, 141). For example, "[t]he ontological view holds that disease is a specific 'entity separate from oneself and caused by an agent external to the body but capable of getting into it and thereby causing damage'" (141, citing Lock, 1980). Martin writes that in this formulation, "'disease is seen simply as an abnormal state that is due to imbalance experienced by the individual organism at a given time.' Health is regarded as a harmonious relationship between the human body and its environment." (141). Although I do not have the space to elaborate in more detail here, I consider the ways in which my Georgian interlocutors talk about food (especially vegetable produce and mineral water) as growing, or coming up, from a plentiful and generous Georgian *terroir*. This focus on foods growing from Georgian *terroir*, I argue, indexes anxieties around threatened national purities while they also reflect anxieties around what constitutes, and how one might recognize and locate, the integrity of the very substance of ingestible life forms themselves.

Returning to how bodies, foods, and sovereignties connect, I find Mazzarella's work on "the mana of mass society" and his use of Durkheim's analysis of corroboree rituals and the mana-fest energies of "collective effervescence" especially useful to think with (2017). Positioned as they are between strongman political elites and their own idealized matriarchal authority, my Georgian interlocutors, in their anxious forms of self-provisioning and their comparing themselves to imagined selves in the past, are asking: Who, and/or what, is the "we," here? How can we figure ourselves? Again invoking the image of the Georgian *supra*, is this a collective body that sits at a table while the *tamada* recites and the *diasakhlisi* tends to the table? Do we trust either of them (and depending on the situation of the feast in question, they might not even know one another) in the sincerity of their words, and in not poisoning our food? While

the *tamada* and *diasakhlisi* differentially relate to, embody, and calibrate potential excesses, do we have our own energy? Thinking with work on publics (national, counter, recursive, invisible, affective) (e.g. Anderson 1983; Warner 2002; Kelty 2008; Lippmann 1925; Berlant 1997), I suggest, through the voices of my interlocutors, that food-as-public mediation offers a way for us to think about public embodiments and popular senses of how, and whether or not, there is a hunger for an actually existing, and vitally embodied collective body that can sustain itself, claiming its own ontological and sovereign being. The uncertainties of the present demand such an inquiry into the relationship between performances and embodiments, or ontologies, of sovereignty.

In its circulation as a medium of performed authority (e.g. the ritual practice of provisioning by women enacting discretionary, matriarchal judgment) and embodied sovereignty (its recognized, ontological status as an ingestible substance that sustains bodies and good lives), food offers a way for us to think about "sovereignty in practice" (Hansen and Stepputat 2006). This approach stands in contrast to abstract renderings that already assume the scales and narratives of structured relationships between a priori sovereignties, rather than focusing on their practiced unfolding: formal vs. informal, global vs. national, centralized vs varied and diffused. This is of course not to say that structured asymmetries do not exist, but that falling into an analytical narrative that reifies formations of sovereignty risks at least repeating, and thus reinforcing, an already powerful narrative of globalized food safety and public health expertise. This global narrative simply seeks to catalogue points of locality and "culture" that either complicate regulation or can be abolished through standardizations. Instead, my analysis – by figuring Tbilisi as a site wherein global food safety is *itself* produced – allows for questions like, what are the conditions of possibility for the very making of varied forms of authority and

sovereignty in the first place? In the next section, I will discuss some of the literatures and conversations that inform my own writing on food.

Food and Food Politics

Food, as a substance that can embody "goodness" and sustenance, on the one hand, and ontological subsumption (in the case of food objects considered "other" and of foreign origin, for example) or annihilation (in the case of a sense of shared vitality lost through foods that are "not real/natural," as in genetically-modified foods,[8] on the other, food embodies a sense, and the substance, of *living, energized* sociality derived from everyday practices and gendered patterns of food provisioning.

At the same time, foods bought at markets are commodity objects with political-economic value and histories. This dissertation is concerned with the ways in which a contemporary, (neo)liberalized, and globalized political economy of food and food safety, characterized by regimes of abstraction, standardization, and quantification, runs up against and through a dialectical co-existence with the status of food as a living, life-giving, and vital substance. This vitality is experienced but not necessarily recognized as such publicly, and it generates popular concerns with public, and hence political, forms of sociality and collective belonging. Not just thinking of food or a food sector as a political-economic category, or group of (implied in a liberal juridical-legal phrases like "consumer publics," "consumer choice" or even "consumer rights" – the language of which was introduced and incorporated into Georgian legal codes during my very time at the NFA), my interlocutors are grappling with food that is not

[8] Which is not so different from the fantasy of a total subsumption, as in a threatened ethno-national identity in the case of a complete infiltration of food markets with foreign origin points and composition.

just commodities but at the same time the substance of a shared vital life, morally and authoritatively in control, in food itself.

Here, I will focus on literatures and conversations that have contributed to how I am thinking about food and food safety discourses, practices, and objects as at least three things at once (a) semiotic processes of identification and differentiation along multiple axes and scales; (b) embodied substances of vitalized being, derived from gendered practices of provisioning and valuation, and shared between bodies, allowing for the popular understanding (more about which in the section below), or figuration, of a living body politic; (c) the site at which moral and sovereign authorities are made, claimed, and/or disavowed.

As Karrebaek et al have recently argued in their analysis of food's relationship with language (2018), forms of food industrialization, large-scale production, and processes of globalization have elicited a rich ethnographic literature and critical interventions in food studies. They write that "Food…has a (syn)aesthetic appeal and a particular rhetorical force" and ascribe the "rising attention" to food to the fact that "[it] is a fundamental need…When there is an excess of food, people can choose what to eat, generating a potential for producers and consumers to create special values and meanings for foods, a process often linguistic in character" (26). While my dissertation discusses why "consumer choice" (rather than say, matriarchal discretion) is not a completely adequate concept for this analysis of political ontology, and why a situation of "food excess" is not always experienced as "excess" or material sufficiency as such, the ways in which foods, like language, constitute powerful and often naturalized sites of semiotic differentiation and identification are central to my analysis.[9]

[9] They put the poetics of praxis succinctly: "While food and language practices are diverse, they are also inconveniently similar, as both edibles and words need to pass through the oral cavity and their co-occurrence needs coordination" (18).

Much of this work in critical food studies hinges on the relationship between "small-scale" and "large-scale," or "global" and "local" forms of production, distribution, and consumption. Stemming from a tradition of Marxist critique of the alienating, extractive, and exploitative political-economic conditions of (post)colonial and global food systems, current work identifies "food sovereignty" and "food justice" with "local foods" (Beriss 2019). *Terroir*, the "taste of place" (61), and related ideologies that assign specific foods to specific places through marketing practices introduce issues and controversies over authenticity claims, erasures of territorial conflicts, injustices of exploitative labor practices, and morally-charged distinctions between smaller, independent markets and larger branded corporate chains (e.g. Caldwell 2004; Meneley 2007, 2008, 2011; Paxson 2013; Weiss 2016). My ethnography mobilizes some of this literature to argue that the popular outdoor food markets and small grocers in Tbilisi are very different from Euro-American farmers markets and smaller boutique grocers, even as they do rely on a public image of being proximate to the Georgian countryside.

Recent work on food practices in post-socialist contexts have focused on the lens food offers into, and how it is generative of, processes of "transition" – political-economic, socio-historical, experiential, and spatio-temporal. One body of work, for example, focuses on the production of post-socialist "consumers" and the ways in which these subject positions elide, transgress, and otherwise outsmart political-economic ideologies that posit distinct "socialist" and "post-socialist" consumer subjectivities. One such group of literature focuses on the consumption of mass-produced goods and the "material lives" of consumers and things as experienced in socialism (e.g. Reid and Crowley 2000; Koenker and Gorsuch 2006). And as Gronow (2004) has demonstrated, even in the highly-regulated atmosphere of Stalinist times, stereotypically bourgeois, pre-revolutionary "luxury goods" such as champagne and caviar were

valorized as highly desirable and integrated into the Soviet (i.e., for some people, Russian nationalist, e.g. by some of Caldwell's informants, 2002; and also in Caldwell and Patico 2002) project of publicizing the democratization of mass-produced goods, thus promoting Soviet claims to materially provide for citizens, reframing goods emblematic of bourgeois decadence as available to the "masses" (even if this is not how things actually happened, as Gronow points out).

Another approach to thinking about post-socialism through food focuses on the industrialization of food and the concomitant refiguring of nature itself (though not in the postsocialist context, see Blanchette 2020). These literatures attend to the biopolitics of food "systems," focusing specifically on governmental strategies and practices that position food in relation to predefined knowledge and safety ideologies of food lifecycles as prescribed stages of production, distribution, and consumption: safety protocols like the Hazard Analysis HACCP, phrases like "from farm to table" and "rituals of verification," configurations of risk and valorizations of audit cultures (Callon 2001; Beck 1986; Power 1997), and scientific regulatory reforms and initiatives (e.g. transnational and global regimes of safety standards, audit cultures, and market research), as they exist in practice (Power 1997; Strathern 2000; Collier) and in relation to commodity food chains (Phillips 2006; Dunn 2003, 2004, 2008; Gille 2016). In iterations that seek to present scientific expertise and neoliberalism itself as dispersed and emergent assemblages of governance, much of this literature is informed by Foucault (1991) and Rose (1999), as well as Callon's and Latour's actor network theory (1984, 1987).

Connected to the critique of expert/non-expert dichotomies and the knowledge politics that these distinctions involve, a third body of work focuses on welfare and post-welfare states (socialist and post-socialist respectively), and concomitant questions of care, the politics of

gender, and the governed needs of subject bodies, including policies and programs of public health and emergent forms of biological citizenship (e.g. Caldwell 2004, 2016; Haney 2002; Petryna 2003). Across these differentially-placed theoretical and empirical approaches, the question of food as a semiotic medium for (re)productions and communications of moral value, authority, and subjectivities is ever present. Though these literatures do not always focus on food per se, food and the social mitigation of hunger is still present, as welfare states are "institutions of social provision" through "set[s] of social assistance and social insurance programs" (Orloff 1996). Emergent paradigms of care, bodies, and health in post-socialist conditions of radical privatization foreground the politically-contested and contingent terrain of public health, expertise, therapy, and clinical treatment (e.g. Raikhel 2016, and not exactly related to food, Matza 2018). In the next section, I will discuss the ways in which I conceptualize food safety and the state agency of the NFA in relation to authority, mobilizing the concepts of trust, trustworthiness, and popular epistemologies and understandings.

Political Epistemologies: Trust and Moral Authority

In this section, I will outline the literatures informing my conceptualization of trust, popular understanding, and how these relate to claims of trustworthiness and moral authority. Food safety reform and food provisioning in contemporary Georgia offer a very special opportunity to examine the politics - and political effects - of the competing interests that comprise (neo)liberal reform. In the context of political and economic precarity, moments of food consumption - of buying, storing, ingesting, sharing, borrowing, remembering, and maybe even forgetting – are suffused with? ethical orientations and evaluations of trustworthiness, (in)sincerity, safety, and danger. In particular, theorists of trust (and related to this concept, sincerity) are helpful in conceptualizing the ethical-political relationships in question here.

Seligman theorizes the dialogic nature of orienting one's "self" to the purported agency and intentions of an "other" through his theory of "trust." He argues that trust, as a structurally-positioned, historically-situated "set of moral evaluations" (1997), is a product of early modern, Reformation-derived philosophies of personal intentionality, interiority, and moralities of individualism (53). In theorizing how this binary structure of a "self" apprehending an unknown "other," with an assumed agency of their own, maps onto the structural and structured relationships of social life, he argues that as a socio-political phenomenon, trust "emerges" from a particularly "modern" historical moment (59); Seligman, following Maine, Weber, and Durkheim, narrativizes "modernity" as a movement away from kinship bonds with the rise and ideological mapping of "the individual" onto macro-structures of political economy: "freedom of contract" laws, the juridical person (85-87), and the structurally diverse - though institutionally ordained - social roles accompanying the division of labor in modern society (94). Seligman argues that though modern social roles are mutually recognizable and bear standard sets of expectations, built into this structure of familiarity and expectations between structural positions is a troublesome logic of unfamiliarity - that of the "other's" possible agency and opaque intentions (92-94).

Built into the concept of trust in modern society specifically is "risk," according to Seligman, following risk theorists like Luhmann and Beck. Risk, unlike danger, is conceptualized as the "framing of contingencies internally, not in terms of an external system," a kind of domestication of danger (173; see also Lupton 1999 for a comprehensive account of this theory of modern risk; and Callon 2001). According to this theorization, a food safety expert might approach a bottle of apple juice produced in Ukraine as a source of potential risk because of its position as an object of knowledge and calculation originating in a systemic epistemology

concerned with radioactivity and nuclear contamination. The emphasis on risk's calculability implies a specific epistemological system of quantifiability and mathematical precision, independent of any experiential assessment of dangers.

This emphasis on technoscientific expertise is especially important in the second half of my dissertation, where I argue that the state bureaucratic agency of the NFA labors to establish itself as a trustworthy regulatory authority. By "technoscientific expertise" I am referring to a form of expertise emergent in particular historical contexts in which authority and value are assigned to a form of modernist, calculative reasoning and practice that is severed from "non-expert" forms of knowing, being, and acting. For the purposes of this dissertation: As a mode of governance in nation-states (socialist and capitalist), "technoscience" is the domain of "technocrats" who, through bureaucratic organization, administer to modalities of national life in a "biopolitical" capacity (Foucault 1972) and with deeply political effects (e.g. Ross 1995; Anand 2012). Geopolitically-mapped sites of authoritative, technoscientific emanation (Silverstein 2004) – specifically the EU and (Soviet) Russia, but sometimes the US as well – are invoked and valuated in relation to one another, especially in the bureaucratic practices that constitute "official" legal reform and harmonization that constitute the subject of the second part of this dissertation.

Related to my discussion of technoscientific authority as it relates to Russian, Soviet, and Georgian technosciences of food safety, theories of bureaucratic authority inform my discussions of the NFA as a bureaucratic organization that works to substantiate and publicize its claims to trustworthiness. This process implies a troubled sovereignty. In thinking about the ways in which my colleagues at the NFA turn away from, and distrust, what seem like disembodied forms of EU and global technoscientific authority in favor of Russian and Soviet technosciences,

literatures on bureaucratic authority and its gendered structuring has been especially useful. Georgian and other post-socialist men-as-experts embody, I argue, a form of bureaucratic authority that partly indexes the Weberian rational-legal ideal type and at the same time embodies what Acker has famously described as the inherently gendered (masculinized) structuration of bureaucratic organizations (1990). One of the qualities of charismatic authority (in Weber's sense (1922)) that I mobilize is the fact that such authority must be recognized ("'proved' by being recognized as genuine[,]" as Parsons suggests (1947)). This kind of recognition is different from the "consent" of, for example, abstract publics in electoral politics of liberal democracies (1947). Recognition in relation to "charismatic authority" implies a different kind of orientation to authority, wherein the object of recognition is him/herself embodied and individualized in unique ways.

In addition, recent ethnographies of technoscientific and bureaucratic infrastructures, informed by science and technology studies, ask us to think about the materialities, contradictions, and creative political possibilities for thinking about collectivities, power, and accountability in conditions of privatization and (neo)liberal political-economy (e.g. Hull 2012; Fisch 2018; Collier 2011; Von Schnitzler 2016).

Related work offering democratic theories of knowledge, expertise, and the ethical recognition of popular epistemologies (e.g. Jasanoff 2005) foregrounds epistemics as a political problem. The focus on epistemics offers an opportunity to think about the contingent ways through which experiences of knowing and knowledges in conditions of chronically felt threat, vulnerability, and precarity emerge. This is why I use the term "popular understanding" rather than "knowledge" per se. I follow Glaeser in his analysis of "political epistemics;" his critique of the reason/non-reason binary through his "poetics of understanding" posits a lived dialectics

and interactional quality of what he distinguishes as discursive, emotive, and kinesthetic modes (2011). In the spirit of a Bakhtinian sense of open-ended and emergent dialogics, Glaeser writes: "According to Freud, desires and aversions orient action by directing it. But they do not do so in an unambiguous fashion; instead, they can quickly draw us into a maelstrom of different directions…" (14). Similarly, Mazzarella has written on the politico-aesthetic effects of cinema's emergence and what this means for a critical understanding of "how public communication works," against valorizations of public "reason": "[J]ust as David Hume once insisted that what we call rational thought is actually grounded in passions that it largely disavows, so the deliberative reason of the bourgeois public sphere, notwithstanding its own ideology, rests on both routinized and emergent currents of public affect" (25).

In order for Glaeser to make such a claim about the political potentials and stakes of public understandings, "understanding," in the sociological sense, involves an interactive mediation between at least three things: an institutional actor (e.g. the police), another institutional actor (e.g. a public), and some kind of claim, communicated in many possible ways, as to the (nature) of the relationship. In a deeply helpful critique of instrumentalized rationality, for Glaeser, "knowing" that things are a particular way (the FDA will make sure my drugs are safe) implies a deep "trust" (rather than "knowledge") that one's world and the institutions that inhabit and make claims in relation to it is ordered reliably. But when (social) shifts happen that disturb "normal" forms of experience (gas prices rise to say 12$ per gallon, for example), the presence of understandings begins to emerge (Why is this happening? This is outrageous. Who is responsible?), claim status is questioned (Where did the market go wrong? How is "the government" involved here?), and "understanding*s*" as things might be recognized as conditional understand*ing* as processes (42). Rather than knowing or not knowing some thing,

understanding is a process of orienting, or attuning, to relative degrees of (un)certainty (24).

Unless one has the time, space, energy, and money to produce all of their own food, (and after all, most food consumers are distant from the sites and processes of production and distribution), the political epistemics of safety is like a very elaborate semiotic house of cards. And unlike Glaeser's Stasi police, in this world of institutionalized claims the food-consumer interface positions "markets" at the center of political and politicized meaning-making.

A Post-Soviet Ethnography of Trust and Safety: Issues and Methods

Food anxieties in Tbilisi – Defining the Problem

For my Georgian interlocutors, the Georgian nation itself – land, language, and ethnonational identity – was perceived to be relatively without value in the eyes of others, and existentially threatened in relation to at least three circumstances seemingly beyond its control: a larger geopolitical context of neoliberal political economic reforms and "globalization," the constant dread of Russian invasion and occupation, and the deeply unfamiliar option of EU identification. Already well-documented by anthropologists of post-socialist Central/Eastern Europe and in many other regional contexts, neoliberal regimes of governance – primarily financed and administered by international institutions, governments, and corporate agencies – have exacerbated sentiments of uncertainty in an environment of uneven priorities and unreliable standardizations (e.g. Koch 2006).

This context of simultaneously felt, nationally-scaled existential threats mediating the experience of daily life has engendered narratives and public understandings of bio-moral vulnerabilities, wherein commonly legible and idealized daily sites of national reproduction – families (men, women, children), human bodies (however ideologically construed – e.g. biological, organic, "natural," flesh, sacred, aggregate, collective), language, and religion – have

become sites for a semiosis of both potential and felt instances of annihilation and/or redemption every day.

As an icon of diminishing value and anxiety in relation to the threatened existence of Georgia as a nation and its material embodiment as land and animate bodies, food and its imagined circulation indexes the felt threat to embodied, reproducible, nationalized being. Within this anxious communicative context, food proliferates, and with it the recursive relationship between "it" and biological threat: in photos on the front pages of newspapers reminding readers that "You are What you Eat" (*xart rasac' ch'amt*), on the sets of lighthearted morning television talk shows that include segments on how the National Food Agency of Georgia tests for pesticide residues on fresh fruit, and in rumors voiced in kitchens and around dining tables throughout Tbilisi.

For the most part, my interlocutors during my three years of fieldwork were young and old; male, female, and (rarely) non-binary; some were of the former Soviet intelligentsia, and relatively wealthy, but for the most part the people I spoke most often with belonged to the socio-economically disadvantaged majority – they were unemployed, or employed and struggling to make ends meet in Tbilisi. While I did have several interlocutors who were men, I spent the most time with women. Women happened to comprise the majority of the National Food Agency staff with whom I worked, and also, for the most part, were in charge of regularly buying and preparing food for their families, buying most of their family provisions from green grocers who were also women and whose shops were in the same apartment complexes as their customers and with whom I also spent a significant amount of time. When mothers worked regularly along with their husbands, and still had young children coming home from school hours before the end of a workday, other women (often Armenian migrants) would be hired for

about (40 Georgian Lari (GEL) / approximately 35USD) to spend a few hours preparing a week's worth of dinners for the children and parents.

Part of the burden that food shoppers in Tbilisi felt reflects a crisis of responsibility and accountability that is unfortunately built into food safety policy implementation in the liberalized context of the EU, the even more global standards that govern EU food safety regulation, and the political-economic patterns of a post-Soviet reform process. By "liberalized context" of food safety regulation I mean that it is basically impossible to point to a legible institution or configuration of actors who can and are willing to claim responsibility and accountability in ensuring the safety of foods. In what follows, I will outline my methodological approach toward and ethnography of food safety in this precarious situation.

Sites and Methods

Based in fieldwork I conducted over three years (2013-2016), my ethnography of food safety regulatory reform in Tbilisi centered on three institutional sites of reform and the ways in which these sites interacted with one another to generate novel forms of trust between the actors involved. My fieldwork was based in Tbilisi, as this was the ideal place to observe the ways in which sentiments of trust and safety around food are experienced in daily life across an array of institutions. In addition, as the most highly-populated city in Georgia (approximately 25 percent of the national population is concentrated here), its inhabitants come from all regions of the country and its borders (including Abkhazians, Ossetians, Azeris, Armenians, and Russians), magnifying (or not) anxieties around political and identificatory uncertainties reported by my Georgian interlocutors.

These three specific sites were: (1) a government agency (the NFA), which is responsible for the design and implementation of food safety regulatory reform according to EU and global

standards; (2) a group of popular food retailers (including multi-national chains, small family- and individual-owned shops, and the large outdoor "unofficial markets" for food products); and (3) several familial networks (approximately 10 families (between 45-50 individuals) of differing socio-economic backgrounds) of different socio-economic positions in the everyday contexts of food procurement, the market, and the home. Throughout my fieldwork at these sites, I tracked popular modes of communicating around issues of trust and food safety, such as televised and printed news reports, product packaging, online blogs and food consumer interest forums, and rumors circulated among families, friends, and acquaintances.

At each field site, my ethnographic methodology consisted of semi-formal interviews, informal conversation, recording of personal histories, participant-observation, and audio as well as photographic documentation (all of which I conducted with Institutional Review Board approval). Verbal, written, and/or electronic communication was usually in Georgian and, when necessary, Russian or English.

A preliminary, guiding set of questions structured my interactions at each site:

1. *At the NFA*: How do regulatory experts define and address Georgian consumers, and how do these experts solicit trust from their audience(s)? How do images of "Georgian" consumers index and (re)produce the ideal of a "consumer" who is also a national "citizen," part of a governable population? To what extent do EU-derived and other globalizing food-safety standards figure in processes of privatization and legal reform along the commodity food chain within Georgia (including sites of production, marketing, and distribution)?

2. *At food retailers*: How do vendors interact with and relate to NFA inspectors? How is responsibility and blame articulated at the market? What kinds of familiarity and history exists between individual vendors and food consumers? What kinds of stories do vendors and shoppers

share (e.g. family-related, past-oriented, clothing and appearance-related, etc.)? What kinds of questions to shoppers ask vendors (e.g. "Are these apples Georgian or Turkish?" "Is this cheese fresh?")? How do vendors compare themselves to newer and sleeker retail chains such as Goodwill and Carrefour? Is there any competition between these kinds of retailers? How do vendors think about "food safety" and do they perceive "food safety" as differing between different retail spaces?

3. *With food consumers*: How do Georgian consumers decide whether or not a food is safe to eat? How might the relative sincerity of a perceived site of origin be measured, assessed, or questioned? Do consumers invoke the Georgian state and market as a source of potential security (e.g. through regulation), or risk, while evaluating the relative safety of foods? How do Georgian consumers decide whether or not a food is safe to eat if it originates in an unfamiliar place? How might the relative sincerity of a perceived site of origin be measured, assessed, or questioned?

The National Food Agency (NFA)

My primary research site in the state sector was the National Food Agency (NFA), a governmental institution responsible for regulating domestic commodity food chains and also food imports. At the NFA, I could track the processes of global and EU food safety encounter with post-Soviet life and Georgian food safety experts.

The three-year period of my ethnographic fieldwork auspiciously overlapped with a moment of institutional transition within the NFA in two ways: First, I arrived and started my work as a translator and researcher right after the 2012 Parliamentary elections, which marked the beginning of a process of state-building and a program of increased national visibility of government food safety regulation. Second, Georgia was in the process of signing the EU

Association Agreement, so my time there was also helpful to my Georgian colleagues, in that I could offer linguistic assistance during the process of so-called legal approximation.

The NFA operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), and during an early visit to Tbilisi (summer 2012), my contact in a supervisory role at the Ministry of Agriculture agreed to work with me in finding an acceptable place within the Agency for me to conduct my research. I met with the Deputy Head of the Agency, but because of the subsequent Parliamentary elections (October 2012) and the consequent political changes taking place with the political defeat of Mikhael Saakashvili's United National Movement Party and the rise of Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream Coalition, there were significant personnel changes at the MoA and at the National Food Agency. I had been advised by my contacts in the MoA that the timing of my return in February 2013 was felicitous; most likely, changes in the National Food Agency's management will have just taken place or will soon thereafter.

Related to my work at the NFA, my ethnographic inquiry into "regulatory systems" consisted of a network of Tbilisi-based food safety experts in dialogue with state agencies in the process of regulatory reform. These sites of regulatory expertise included the food safety section of the privately-funded Eurasia Foundation, a think tank on policy research that also oversees projects of the smaller Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC). These institutions collaborated with other policy groups, international food safety institutions, and NGO's to advise the process of legislation drafting currently taking place in the Ministry of Finance (MoF). Together, these sites of expertise were in a position of advocacy for global food safety standards such as the HACCP, and in their interactions with state regulatory interests, they positioned themselves as a body of "objective," "non-political" experts responsible for ensuring that global food safety standards are "uniformly" and "fairly" implemented across food sectors, in

"harmony" with international norms of liberal democratic legal philosophy and procedure.

The data I collected across these systems of regulation included: Official and draft reviews of food safety legislation; interviews with managerial and non-managerial-level regulatory experts and administrators; notes from meetings with non-managerial staff detailing projects, documents, and reviews to be and currently being carried out around issues of food safety as they relate to Georgian food shoppers (e.g. efforts at public "awareness" and "rights" advocacy (including the publicity of the techoscientifically imagined food chain itself)); reviews of draft legislation dealing with "consumer rights" and food safety; and strategies of implementing and enforcing these laws across the food chain, especially in terms of how the consumer-food interface might be imagined and affected.

Food Shoppers and Provisioners

This site consisted of a network of Georgian consumers and their families (at least five extended families, approximately 35-40 people, primarily working with the women who did the majority of food shopping and preparing), whose ties extend as far back as the socialist and even pre-socialist periods. Its members comprise a mix of socio-economic class backgrounds, living in neighborhoods of ranging affluence, including Didube, Saburtalo, and Vake. With food and family connections in both the city and countryside, this group provided an ideal lens into the complexities of food procurement and sentiments of safety.

Through participant-observation and interviews, I closely followed and accompanied my Georgian friends, paying attention to the forms of evaluation, such as reading products and packaging, communicative forms and expressions of perceived "safety," "danger," "risk," and "trustworthiness." I also listened for and took extensive notes on judgments of "quality" and/or/vs "safety," and the geopolitical, ethico-political mappings of trust evidenced in expressed

formulations of self/other, domestic/foreign, here/there, and us/them. I was also conscious of emergent comparisons and associations consumers might make between shopping in the "officially" private market sector vs. the "unofficial," personalized sphere of exchange (most likely demonetized) with family, friends, and acquaintances. I also worked with a contact at a consumer-interest research institution that independently tested food samples for biological safety. She offered to let me contact, through the organization's Facebook page, the Georgian food consumers of momxmarebeli.ge, a consumer interest forum designed to voice concerns around issues of food safety. The Facebook page had over 8,000 followers during my time in the field.

During my time with household matriarchs and their families, I also collected archival and contemporary materials that constituted past and present public cultures of food safety, such as Soviet-era newspapers and magazines that circulated in Georgia (e.g. both Russian and Georgian print media such as "Izvestiia," "Pravda," and "Tbilisi"); contemporary popular print and online media from Georgia; recorded video clips of television commercials; photographs of billboard advertisements; and expert and professional documents of market research projects.

I designed the following preliminary questions to bring this textual and discursive analysis into relation with regulatory and market sites: How do popular discourses around the safety of imported foods manifest themselves and circulate? How do these forms of discourse relate to one another? How are rumors related to public perceptions of safety? When people talk about food, do they refer to mass-mediated information (e.g. televised and online news reports)? How does the concept of an "origin" emerge in these materials? What kinds of stereotypes and national iconicities are (re)produced? How is sincerity articulated?

Regulatory Reform in Marketplaces

This site primarily consisted of food retailers, where I at first thought food safety regulatory reform would be unfolding, only to find that the reforms of the NFA and the world of the small food vendors with whom I spent the most time were distant from one another. I spent time at the regular shopping spaces used by Tbilisi-based food provisioners: outdoor markets (*bazrebi)*; small independently-owned grocery and basic goods stores; the Georgian-owned grocery chain Populi; and finally, the more prestigious and expensive Georgian Goodwill "Hypermarket." French-owned Carrefour had also recently opened in Tbilisi (September 2012), and many of my interlocutors did shop there as well, from time to time.

I spent a great deal of time with a few small grocers in particular. I also accumulated photographs, notes, and audio recordings at the large outdoor food market, the *bazari*. During one part of my fieldwork, I was lucky enough to have funding to work as a methods mentor to two Georgian sociology MA students who were my research assistants. Because I do not have the space to include all this ethnographic material (including that from my time at the smaller food vendors), for now I am planning to use this research toward additional journal articles and maybe a separate book monograph. Together with my mentees, we were able to track our own sociology of the bazaar according to labor patterns and habits, exchange relations, and the daily politics of trust between vendors and consumers.

We were also able to organize a set of key discursive exchanges, or patterns, that reflect the relationships and conditions of familiarity and trust that characterize consumer/vendor interactions. These conditions include the questions consumers ask of vendors (sometimes none at all) about food products; the degree of proximity vendors claim to regional sites of origin; and the kinds of intimacies and familiarities between vendors and consumers. Our work on the bazaar included notes on the personal, experiential histories that vendors embodied each day.

Overview of the Chapters

The dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part, Chapters One and Two, introduces the kinds of Georgian food politics that have been emerging in Tbilisi as a site of production for global food safety expertise. Food politics in contemporary Tbilisi offer a lens into but are also themselves constitutive of the moral, epistemological, and ontological binds that my Georgian interlocutors find themselves in on a daily basis, positioned as they are at the edge of Euro-American (neo)liberalisms and Russian Putinism. The chapters look to mass and social media, outdoor food markets, and to spaces of Georgian homes and practices of food provisioning in Tbilisi to demonstrate that in understanding how my Georgian interlocutors navigate sentiments of fear, uncertainty, safety, and trust, it is necessary to examine not only newly-institutionalized technocratic modalities of food safety reform, but also gendered, Georgian Christian Orthodox, Soviet, and early post-Soviet understandings of embodied life, the sacred, and moral authority.

Chapter One, "Epistemic Mercurial: Rumored Food Dangers and the Political Epistemics of Safety," mobilizes Glaeser's concept of political epistemics and popular understandings. This chapter discusses the rumored fears of foods that I tracked during my time in the field. Voiced mainly by my women interlocutors responsible for provisioning their households, these fears offer a lens into anxieties around ethnonationalist identity and belonging in precarious conditions of post-Soviet reform, just as much if not more so than they are about food itself. Through comparing what I classify as two genres of rumor – one in which voiced fears of pollution and contamination index a legible food system and the other in which GMO foods index a deeply uncanny effect of an unfamiliar food system positioned in what I am currently thinking of as extreme privatization – I demonstrate the stakes of food anxieties, as narrated modes of

understanding, in post-Soviet Tbilisi.

Chapter Two, "Hungry for a body: Inhabiting a missed body politic in post-soviet Tbilisi," argues that narrations of the 1990s and of the ways in which women were remembered to feed families and effectively make something from very little reflects what "a good life," in the form of moral sustenance through food, means, and how the discernable, experiential conditions of food's becoming and (im)possibility matter. Good food, generated through the medium of maternal care, especially in the instance of popular memories of the 1990s, embodies good, vital, life-giving qualities in relation to the body (*organizmi*) that encounters and ingests it. These stories of the past index anxieties around safely evaluating food objects in the present – whether a grape, bowl of soup, or even the color of a Russian-produced vitamin purchased in a Georgian pharmacy – that are understood to be uniquely "good" and vital objects that carry and sustain life. "Good" foods and the ability to recognize and procure them, I argue, constitute materializations of a morally authoritative popular sovereignty. The sovereign ability to decide on whether a food is good or not, embodied in the discerning body of the food provisioner, lives side by side with Georgian strongman politics on the one hand, and with uncontested and taken for granted matriarchal authority on the other. Matriarchal authority, which presents itself as "natural," exists in gendered, domestic spaces that are often claustrophobic and violent in their affective demands, and within a socio-economic context of deeply felt situational intransigence, precarity, and helplessness in relation to mobile and wealthy elites. Matriarchal provisioning is not exactly a utopian counter to the masculinized world of strongman politics.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five constitute the second half of this dissertation. Each of these chapters offers an ethnographic account of state bureaucracy and the everyday ethics of food safety regulatory reform as Georgian food safety experts work to relate to and address

Georgian food consumer audiences.

Chapter Three, "Righteous Reform: Standardizing Biomoral Authority on a National Scale," considers some of the ways in which the NFA works to establish itself as a trustworthy regulatory authority. Focusing on slaughterhouse veterinary inspection training sessions in Georgian regions outside of Tbilisi, this chapter demonstrates that the process of introducing and scaling food safety norms nationally involves the NFA appealing to and seeking to persuade its audience to recognize its own trustworthiness, while it contrasts itself to the opaque intentions of privatized market interests. The politics of food safety, then, offer opportunities for standard *making* just as much as they about standard *meeting*. It matters that these training sessions are between Georgians and other Georgians, and take place in the Georgian language (rather than in Russian, when experts from other post-Soviet nations mediate the conversation, or in English, when EU people are there). When a state agency like the NFA begins a long-term campaign of appealing to Georgian audiences as a trustworthy, regulatory authority, its claim to sovereignty over Georgian biomoral life and its relationship to a marketized food commodity chain is at stake. The emergent political effect is an unintended consequence of EU policies that seek to expand the "Eurozone" market territory: Georgian state agents claim to care more about Georgian bodies than the EU itself, and also more than private Georgian food business interests. The resultant good/bad dichotomy – vis a vis Georgian state vs business interests in food safety – is central to the Georgian state's claims to biomoral authority and trustworthiness.

Chapter Four, "Encoding Ambivalence: Legal Harmonization and Emergent Technoscientific Authorities at the National Food Agency," ethnographically analyzes the daily practices of legal harmonization at the NFA as a process of "translation" (Gal 2015). This process unofficially and inadvertently invokes Russian presence by turning to Russian

technoscience as authoritative, trusted, and substantial as an imagined "framework" in response to that of the EU. By first establishing that the NFA practices legal harmonization in anxious relation and response to particularly imagined forms of EU technoscientific authority, I demonstrate the multiple forms such responses take: pragmatic resignation and strategies around EU regulatory intransigence and standards, and unofficial citations of imagined forms of Russian technoscience. This chapter demonstrates the experience of global food safety and EU border-zone making as it unfolds in the daily life of state bureaucracy tasked with ensuring safe food systems for envisioned Georgian audiences.

Last, Chapter Five, "Authority that Matters: Managerial Experts, Sincere Regulation, and Food Safety Reform in Post-Soviet Tbilisi, Georgia," discusses the gendered dimensions of bureaucratic, regulatory authority in the making. This chapter addresses some of the ways in which "gender" and "politics" are mutually constitutive in a process of meaningful sovereignty-making (here, the building of "state authority"; cf Scott 2017). I demonstrate how gender – as an ever-indeterminate process of selving/othering – is *meaningful* to claims of expert authority, and to the ways in which such claims are political (Gal and Kligman 2000). This chapter focuses on a series of ethnographic examples, from ordinary meetings between Georgian NFA workers and EU-based experts to a conference on "The future of food safety in Georgia," which was meant to constitute a conversation over the regulatory relationship between state and market interests. The chapter suggests that a regionalized form of masculinized, post-Soviet authority recurs (Gal and Irvine 2000) in embodied ways across these ethnographic situations.

Georgian expert-managers mobilize this form of masculinized authority in positioning themselves as caring and paternal in relation to Georgian audiences. This differentiates them

from the seemingly neutral, indifferent, and disembodied presence of EU and global food safety expertise.

Chapter One
Epistemic Mercurial: Rumored Food Dangers and the Political Epistemics of Safety in post-Soviet Tbilisi, Georgia

In 2011, international journalists started to write about the glass mansion overlooking Tbilisi from a ledge near its center. Its inhabitant, Bidzina Ivanishvili, a very wealthy Georgian man who made his billions in Russia during the 1990s buying and reselling mining and banking companies, had just announced that his political coalition party, Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia (*kartuli ocneba – demok'rat'iuli sakartvelo*), intended to challenge incumbent Mikhael Saakashvili's ruling coalition party, the United National Movement (*ertiani natsionaluri modzraoba* – UNM), in the 2012 parliamentary elections. As far as the ideological orientations of these parties were concerned – right vs left, conservative vs progressive – what mattered to my Tbilisi interlocutors was mainly that someone was contesting the reign of Saakashvili, then at the end of his second term; he had already for a while by then been the object of popular disillusionment in Tbilisi discourse. Individuals in my varied networks of Tbilisi interlocutors were sick of him. He was a "lunatic" (*gidzi*)," an "alcoholic" (*alk'oholik'i*), a "narcissist" (*egoisti* or less commonly, *narc'ist'i*), a "pervert" (*gafuch'ebuli* and then s/he would go on to give examples), and, above all, he did not really care about ordinary Georgians. The upcoming parliamentary elections were not so much about the alternating wins of two competing political party brands that appeared to be ideologically opposed, as they are in the US. After all, each party there was a "coalition" of smaller parties with relatively incoherent agendas but with a shared commitment to its public leader, nevertheless. The Georgian Dream coalition, for example, was a mix of smaller parties with wildly divergent orientations: conservative nationalist, radical nationalist, "liberal" and "pro-market," as well as Shevernadze loyalists from the 1990s and late Soviet period; the name of the party – Georgian Dream – originates with the lyrics from one of Ivanishvili's son's popular and mediocre rap songs. Moreover, despite their

varied orientations to Euro-American liberalisms, both parties were positioned within an overwhelmingly Georgian orthodox Christian context in a very small country (3.8 million people at that time, 1.1 million of them in Tbilisi), where social conservativism is the norm. This political moment was about personality and a strong man who was *felt* to care about ordinary Tbilisi life, whether or not people *knew* that he cared.[10]

Journalists who wrote for organizations like *The Guardian* or *Forbes* magazine titled their profiles on him with lines like "I'm not a spy or an oligarch, says Georgia's secretive billionaire" (Doward 2011); they focused on the glass of his house, its Japanese architect, and its ultra modernity. Like other global wealthy elites, Ivanishvili gets modern luxury "right," they implied. He collects icons of his "modern" being – a collection of "modern art," he and his staff refer to his home in English as the "glassle," and he has a zoo that includes zebras, penguins, and lemurs. His real art collection is said to be in a vault in London and the pieces in his Tbilisi home are actually copies.[11]

For many of my Georgian interlocutors, though, Ivanishvili's wealth is legible in terms of not his connoisseurship but his ability to effortlessly move to and from Tbilisi and Georgia, much like any other member of elite Tbilisi society: this elite stratum includes political elites, university professors, businessmen-husbands and sometimes their wives who travel, medical professionals who earned their degrees in the Soviet and post-Soviet Baltic states, twenty-

[10] Georgian political scientist Lortkipanidze writes: "In addition to fragmentation, another characteristic of the Georgian political system is the orientation towards a strong leader. Political actors often change their preferences according to the decisions of specific charismatic leaders. Accordingly, the process of party reorganization is rather dynamic. It would be fair to say that, in Georgia, we encounter political groupings that are based more on charismatic leadership and clientelistic approaches than on concrete ideologies and programmatic plans." (2016)

[11] See e.g. Luke Harding, "Bidzina Ivanishvili: the eccentric billionaire chasing Georgia's leadership," *The Guardian*, 1 October 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/01/bidzina-ivanishvili-profile-georgia.

somethings who come from former Soviet bourgeois families or the post-Soviet upper-middle classes based in what I call the "Upper East Side" of Tbilisi, the Vake neighborhood, and travel to London and Berlin for college. For so many of my interlocutors who felt either stuck in Tbilisi, without the means to travel and live abroad, or who, like many of the green grocers with whom I spent so much time, were forced to move to the city from their homes in Abkhazia after the Russian invasions of the 1990s, I imagine that Ivanishvili's glass and steel mansion, rather unlike a Tbilisi home, is an icon of tentative inhabitance and inscrutable privacy, a disturbing architectural blind spot in an otherwise intimately familiar, territorialized, and crowded urban landscape.

On top of this sense of relative immobility and not knowing, the feeling of being stuck occurs within a popular and public communicative context in which the place of the Georgian nation itself – for my Georgian interlocutors: land, language, and ethnonational identity – is perceived to be relatively without international value and existentially threatened in relation to at least three circumstances seemingly beyond "its" control: a larger geopolitical context of neoliberal political economic reforms and "globalization," the constant dread of Russian invasion and occupation, and the more "neutral," other option of EU "enlargement." Already well-documented by anthropologists of post-socialist Central/Eastern Europe and in many other regional contexts, neoliberal regimes of governance – primarily financed and administered by international institutions, governments, and corporate agencies – have exacerbated sentiments of uncertainty in an environment of uneven priorities and unreliable standardizations (e.g. Koch 2006).

I heard the term "globalization" many times during my fieldwork, and the word implied an anticipated gradual subsumption of what should be considered a coherent nation into several

different equally dreaded scenarios, all rooted in ideologies of ethnicized and racialized difference. For example, when complaining about the recent rise in university students from South Asia and Africa and hence an increased presence of racialized difference in Tbilisi, for example, one Georgian woman complained to me in her home: "Why do *we* get all these people from poor countries? They [non-ethnic Georgians and non-whites in general] don't even speak Georgian, and they come here and marry Georgian girls!" She continues the racist critique of "global" migration to Georgia (racist because the same is not said about Russian or Ukrainian migrants) by complaining about a black man (derogatively, *zangi*) who regularly stood on a corner on a main street near her neighborhood: "Ugh have you heard him [laughing]?! He says 'damexmare [help me] pleeeeeeeeeeeeeease?!'" She'd repeat this over and over in a high-pitched and emasculated tone, making herself laugh so hard she cried. The way he says "please" is pathetic, to her. The phrase as she conjured it voices grammatically correct Georgian in the first half, but the use of English "please" instead of, say, Russian (*pazhalsta*) or Georgian (*gtxovt*) signals a laughable and ungrounded sense of his audience, amounting to a troubling linguistic formulation inhabiting "her" city. She sees him as beneath her. "It's globalization! We have these paupers coming here, more and more. They [implying more wealthy nation-states from Euro-America] send their paupers here." In these fantasies of devaluation, my interlocutors would often misidentify the U.S. as a site of universal wealth: "You don't have such paupers. Everyone lives in a nice big house and has a million dollars."

The narration of imagined food commodity movement in relation to Georgia vs the world was always an opportunity to invoke globalization in similar terms: "We get their [most often Turkey's] rubbish produce and they get our natural, good produce." In these geopoliticized food rumors, the U.S. is always invoked as a site of particularly "unnatural" food: "You eat plastic. In

America, the food looks nice but has no flavor." Or, in a different set of voiced anxieties: "They send us the radioactive fruit from Ukraine because they don't want to eat it themselves." Who "they" are is never entirely clear. I was under the impression that the EU was always implied in this formulation rather than Ukraine, since within a shared hierarchy of "better" and "worse" former Soviet and post-socialist Central European nation-states, Ukraine was not often invoked as "better" or "worse" in comparison to Georgia in Tbilisi discourse, though I suspect the popular image of its contamination after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster might be contributing to its devaluation amongst my Georgian interlocutors. This is in contrast to, for example, the Baltic states, valued amongst my interlocutors for their Soviet and post-Soviet medical education system or, in many cases, Russia, for its position in popular consciousness as a site of "high culture," much like the idealization of France in (pre- and post-socialist) Poland.

The EU also emerges as an entity threatening Georgia. When speaking with many of my Georgian interlocutors, I had the sense that as both an ethnolinguistic territory and a "player" in globalized, geopolitical networks of commodification, the EU (most often called the more denotationally ambiguous "Europe") was most often implied rather than categorically named. "It" constitutes a very unfamiliar, distant, and vague center of cosmopolitanism and goodness (see Tsuladze 2013 and Borosz 2006). The second part of this dissertation addresses this encounter with EU difference through the lens of claims to technoscientific authority and processes of food safety regulatory reform at Georgia's National Food Agency (NFA). For now, I will say that in daily conversations with my Georgian interlocutors, the EU was invoked as a site of secularized and liberal but distant and threatening (im)morality; "Europe" presents an emergent crisis in the overwhelmingly popular sense of a Georgian shared morality and social conservativism rooted in Christian orthodoxy and propagated in the popular televised sermons of

Georgian Patriarch Ilia the Second.

I encountered this conservativism many times in Tbilisi. One of the best examples occurred when I met some Georgian strangers at a party that I attended one night with an American graduate student friend of mine. We were at her friend's apartment, and there were both Euro-American ex-pats and young English-speaking Georgians there. One of the Georgians, a young man in his early twenties, was watching a YouTube video on his laptop, a clip of Martin Luther King Jr. giving his "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963. At the time of my fieldwork, it was very popular for young Georgians to listen to classic American R&B music on car stereos while hanging out at night on the edges of parks; the "trendy" identification with sounds and images of civil-rights era US politics seemed to vaguely gesture to some kind of popular critique within the younger Georgian generation (but to explore this would be the topic of a different dissertation).

Of relevance for now, the definitive ethnographic moment occurred about an hour later, when I was standing on the balcony with him and a couple of other young Georgian men, both of whom were openly gay. They were talking about going dancing after the party, and I asked them which club they were going to. They said Galeria, one of Tbilisi's small "art cafés" in the Vera neighborhood, which on weekend nights transformed to a very popular venue – amongst young gay and straight Georgians and Euro-American expats –for house music and dancing. I jokingly laughed in disapproval: "Why would you go there? Don't you remember last year, when the owner publicly disavowed his gay clientele and said that club is 'not gay'? Why give him your business?" This publicized disavowal re-circulated on Facebook because it was made right after May 17, 2014, when socially-conservative activists (including Orthodox priests) were permitted to violently counter-protest a very small contingent of demonstrators marching through Tbilisi on

the International Day Against Homophobia. (Subsequent May 17's have been highly policed and the Georgian Orthodox Church has since named the day "Day of Family Purity").[12] "Liking" the orthodox stance was a bit of a deal breaker when it came to some Facebook friendships, and the controversy divided Georgians who were regular club goers but who came to the shared space from completely different ideological worlds: "straight" and "traditional" Georgians and more alt-identifying Georgian "hipsters."

The young man shrugged in response to my objection and just laughed that that was a year ago, and that everyone still goes there anyway. The young man who had been watching the civil rights era video, and who did not identify as gay, then chimed in: "This is Georgia. We are not Europe. We do not have 'gay rights' and gender," "gender" being the word used in much of this region to categorically dismiss sexual minority politics (see e.g. Graff 2014). At first I thought he made this statement in frustration and I, then still at the early stages of my time in Tbilisi, was taken aback when he clarified: "We are not Europe and we will never be Europe. Why should we be like them? We are Georgians." His point was that "Georgia" is unique and would somehow lose this identity if a generic "EU morality" took over. I was somewhat taken aback because what I initially mistook as his critically-informed political stance was not what I thought it was and, since I was then at the beginning of my fieldwork, its limits seemed arbitrary. I now suspect this identification with what he was watching on YouTube was more connected to the sentiment of one of the Patriarch's sermons from September 15, 2013, in which he asserted that "Often [the] majority is more oppressed than [the] minority," arguing that the focus on

[12] See for example Carmen Gray, "At this Techno Club, the Party is Political." *New York Times* 29 May 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/29/arts/music/bassiani-tbilisi-georgia.html?auth=login-google&login=google.

"minority rights" (which he does not define) is "good and needed…but everyone should also have [a] sense of responsibility." He then equates "minority rights" with "foreign" purchases of land: "We should not think that someone who came from China, India, or some other foreign country, will cultivate our lands. They may cultivate [it,] but they will do it for themselves not for us. So we should love the land…" (*Civil Georgia*: 2013). The popular sense of geopolitical devaluation engenders an identification with minority politics and crises of masculinity in other contexts. Again, this is the topic of a different dissertation but I will discuss it a bit more in the next chapter.

"Liberalism" and its forms are embodied in various legal processes that comprise the "EU Association Agreement," one part of which is food safety reform. "It" [Could you use a full noun here? "This liberal safety policy takes the form of something that wants to appear as an apolitical, laissez faire process of technocratic safety regulation that is an integral part of "transition." At the same time, however, many of my Georgian expert and non-expert interlocutors invoke and imagine a morally threatening, distinctly EU brand of "liberal" policy: what are seen as troubling secular sensibilities in contrast to Georgia's (and Russia's) national identification with its national Orthodox Churches; improper LGBTQ, gender, and human rights legal reform; a surfacing of reproductive politics; etc. As they were defiantly voiced by one of my Georgian interlocutors one evening, sentiments like "we will never be like the EU" index a popular rejection of generic, global (im)moral orders that are deemed threatening in not only their difference, but also, in their emanation from a site of governance (the abstract EU) that is seemingly indifferent to "Georgian" life. The "rise of the Right" and of nationalist radicalism has been noted in post-socialist national contexts like Poland and Hungary, with their widely publicized post-socialist "returns" to liberal democratic European identities (see e.g. Kotwas and

Kubik 2019). In contrast, Georgia's popular Christian Orthodox critiques of perceived threats to its patriarchal order, and to the authority of the Patriarch, are, like Russia's in some ways (and identified as such by many of my interlocutors), defining of a shared, popular sense of ethnonationalism and moral distinction.

Finally, popular senses of existential threat to the Georgian nation were also voiced in relation to Russia. Senses of Russia as a threat in contemporary Georgia are partly anchored in historical and remembered orientations toward centuries of Russian military, political, and economic dominance in the region?, always looming over Georgia and evidenced in, for example, the military? takeovers of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008; annual military exercises Russia performs on Georgian territory outside of Tbilisi; the pro-Russian orientations of Georgia's Caucasian neighbors Armenia and Azerbaijan, interests that are rumored to incite and strengthen ethno-separatist regions within Georgia; and, of course, Georgia's legacy of dependence under imperial and Soviet forms of Russian power and paternalism. Centuries of Russian imperialism, Soviet governance, and post-Soviet Russian occupations in Georgia have generated a love/hate orientation that manifests and recurs in ironic, unexpected, and predictable ways all at the same time. This love/hate disposition that emerges in the ethnographic situations that my chapters address, and which my Georgian interlocutors often convey, is at the heart of many of the contradictions that characterize post-Soviet reform as I write about it.

Ironically, and in a way that escapes the non-ethnographic nature of many political analyses of the region and of Georgia in particular (Bayulgena and Arbatlib 2013), "Russia" is at the same time invoked in daily discourse in apparently unexpected ways. As Sherouse has demonstrated in his work on the presence of Russian and "Russia" in present-day Georgia and as I discuss in more detail in Chapters Four and Five, political sensibilities and ethno-national

imaginaries of identity and difference are constantly (re)articulated and emergent in daily interactions in ways that can't simply be reduced to narrative of "strong" vs "weak," or "nation" vs "nation." No doubt, threats of "Russian power" and vulnerable borders are something very real for Georgians. I have witnessed close friendships nearly destroyed in heated and drunken arguments about whether Russia is "good" or "bad" (no doubt those personal rifts were actually longstanding and "about" other things). However, "Russia" itself recurs and is (re)figurated in many ways as a source of identification and value for what have become construed as particularly *Georgian* forms of embodiment and geopolitical consciousness. In this way, I argue, despite the geopolitics of threat, Georgia's relationship to Russia is in other ways highly ambivalent and contradictory, a relationship of love/hate expressed in a politically-affective register.[13]

This troubled orientation towards Russia is often voiced as rumored but secret loyalties between Georgian political elites and Russian "interests," broadly conceived. For example, in response to Finance Minister Bendukidze's reforms during Saakashvili's administration, and perhaps as a result of his close personal ties with Moscow during a period of increasing hostility

[13] Consider the inter-discursive nature of invocations that invoke and echo Russia's paternalistic, "civilizing" project of caring for Georgian lands and understanding them from a particularly "Russified," masculinized position. In her analysis of nineteenth-century depictions of Georgia in Russian literature, Layton refers to this representational trend as an "orientialization" of Georgia: "[These texts] have ideologically significant features which support the extension of Russian suzerainty of Georgia. Russian authors invariably invented the 'Asiatic' as a primitive, on a lower rung of civilization that Europeanized self. Ideological import resides likewise in the divergent typologies of male and female Georgian characters, where a rhetoric about the plentitude of virgin land plays an important role…The types of stories, the affective rhetoric and the dichotomous patterns of characterization (male vs. female, Russian vs Asiatic) comprise a literary discourse which justified the tsarist homeland's assertion of authority over Georgia…Georgia appeared decidedly non-European in Russian eyes: its most populous areas lay behind the mountains, it was contiguous to Turkey, nearly adjacent to Persia and its eastern part had a balmy, subtropical climate" (197).

between Russia and Georgia, rumors circulated (and continue to circulate) among Georgians that Saakashvili was somehow secretly colluding with Putin and the Russian oligarchs, selling out Georgian industrial interests (especially energy concerns) for the sake of business ties with Russia.[14] Similarly, several years after the defeat of Saakashvili and his UNM party in the parliamentary elections of 2012, rumors of Russian collusion and identification were centered on the billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, who holds citizenship in Georgia, Russia, and France.

As an icon of diminishing value and anxiety in relation to the threatened existence of Georgia as a nation and as its material embodiment in land and animate bodies, food and its imagined circulation indexes a widely shared felt threat to embodied, reproducible, national being. Within this anxious communicative context, food and talk of it proliferates, caught up in all kinds of life processes, an unavoidable state of affairs. Exacerbating this proliferation is the recursive relationship between "it" and biological threat: in photos on the front pages of newspapers reminding readers that "You are What you Eat" (*xart rasac' ch'amt*), on the sets of lighthearted morning television talk shows that include segments on how the National Food Agency of Georgia tests for pesticide residues on fresh fruit, and in rumors shared in kitchens throughout Tbilisi. As Alejandro Paz writes, "rumors," like "gossip," are metapragmatic descriptors that indicate forms of "telling news" (re)produced outside of recognized authoritative

[14] It is, at the same time, public knowledge that these business relations around energy were in place before the Rose Revolution, and that the largest stakeholder in Georgia's electricity industry was AES Silk Road – a US company, which was purchased by Russian investors in 2003). Such an atmosphere of rumor, suspicion, and uncertainty around political elite men and their loyalties in Georgia ironically mirrors the ways in which imperial Russian (and later, Soviet) authors such as Alexander Pushkin, Alexander Griboedov, and Mikhail Lermontov (many of whom have streets or other city landmarks named after them in Tbilisi) were located in a Russia anxiously positioned between idealizations of the Muslim and Asian "East" and Christian and European "West" (Layton 1992), and simultaneously represented Georgia itself as a site of contradiction and ambiguous affiliation, at the edge of "Asia" and "Europe."

news channels. Niko Besnier, in his book on gossip as a site of the "daily production" of politics similarly explains, following Max Gluckman, that rumor might be distinguished from "gossip" and "scandal." Gossip, he writes, constitutes "the negatively evaluative and morally laden verbal exchange concerning the conduct of absent third parties, involving a bounded group of persons in a private setting," whereas scandal might be understood as "gossip that becomes public knowledge." "Rumor" and "hearsay," in contrast, constitute the "unconstrained circulation of information about an event deemed important" (35).[15]

In this chapter, I will consider some of the types of rumors about dangerous foods that I witnessed as patterned and recurrent during my time in the field, among experts and non-experts, though this distinction in relation to expertise, as it plays out in differing interactional contexts, is problematic in some ways. For example, although these rumors are framed, in their narrative and pragmatic structuring, as positioned "outside" of official news channels, many of the examples I am citing here, including the tabloid story on GMOs, or "GMO foods" (and the Greenpeace report on which it is based), actually came to me through my Georgian expert colleagues at the National Food Agency. At the Agency these were subjects of lengthy conversations, often voicing serious concerns aligned with those of the GMO rumors.

In many of these popular formulations of safety/danger, Georgian bodies are imagined in terms of geopolitical valuations and vulnerabilities. "Georgia" tends to be positioned as a site of global de-valuation, to which dangerous forms of food commodities are carelessly if not perniciously directed (e.g. Georgian-produced tomatoes imagined to be chemically-laden as a result of farmers being made to use Turkish-developed seeds). I will then focus on popular

[15] I am not sure how "unconstrained" rumors really are across different communicative contexts, but this is the subject of a different conversation.

rumors around GMO foods and the material forms of their circulation. In contrast to the first set of rumors, wherein food consumers are exposed to possible objects of contamination through no choice of their own, rumors around genetically-modified foods, often understood as the branded products of "Western" privatized interests, are as much about geopoliticized anxieties as they are about an unease around emergent practices and ideologies of "consumer choice" and "awareness." In this vision, shoppers (most often women) bear the burden of "making the right choice;" they are expected to evaluate food products according to particular ideologies of safety, risk, and the narrated food chain.

In conditions of regulatory reform where the governmental, communicative, and lived experiences of food safety in Georgia – once the domain of the Soviet welfare state – were being "harmonized" with those of the EU, the liberalized legal-juridical framework of safety shifts the burden of assessing "safety" to the food consumer who, in Georgia, is most likely, but not always, a woman and mother. In the communicative economy of "public information" that this chapter traces, institutional actors that comprise the governmental assemblages known as "global" food safety and expert authorities (e.g. the Codex Alimentarius, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), public faces of (trans)national corporate interests and references to "scientific opinion" in general), are active in the governing processes of EU technoscience and legal reform. This process of "EU" encounter with post-Soviet life – while described in Georgian and mainstream Euro-American news as an advantageous, progressive, and "good" (i.e. liberal-democratic) alternative to the Russian and the post-Soviet CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) – inadvertently engenders suspicion, distrust, and public sentiments of moral crisis. Popular sentiments in relation to sources of responsibility and accountability are at the heart of these suspicions. Transparency, a form of

"regulation by revelation" (Garsten and Lindh de Montoya 2008, 286), and a promise of a never-ending process of liberal democratic transition, "cast[s] new shadows and, with them, new domains of darkness beyond their arcs of light" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003, 288). But some forms of transparency in this post-Soviet politics of public understanding are too distant from the information networks of daily life (televised news, online social media, family, and friends) for shadow effects, too inscrutable to appear as anything other than cold, opaque, mirrored glass.

Epistemic horizons: Living with contamination

By "public understandings" I mean to say the ways that public forms, or senses, of knowing and not knowing (e.g. if this politician cares; if this food is 100% "natural;" if that government agency regulates food safety, or not) are generated within particular geopolitical, historical, and communicative configurations of recognizable knowledge-objects and the ways in which these objects are understood to be positioned in this world. Public understandings are so often critiqued for being irrational, or lacking in expertise. As Mazzarella writes, liberal bourgeois critiques of state censorship that dismiss this form of regulation as simply a mechanism of paternalist "class domination" over the vulnerable uneducated masses who can't handle the "unacceptable" nature of the content on cinema screens, fail to recognize and take seriously the affective currents and "unruly forms of energy" emergent in the performed conditions of modern publicity in general: "[T]hey have in effect entertained the terms of the censors' discourse – that is, uneducated people are uniquely vulnerable to affective provocation…" (2013, 25). In reference to the description of Georgian "strongman" politics earlier in this chapter, the liberal bourgeois perspective would probably reason that the reason Georgians were so disillusioned with Saakashvili and, 4 years later, again with Ivanishvili, was that they just didn't know any better, early in each administration, and weren't well enough

informed. They're too oriented toward strongman politics. Despite the fact that many of my interlocutors are experienced and have lived through enough different political contexts to be cynical, which they are, they still trusted the claims of undemocratic leaders and they did not in fact know what was going on in the centers of power.

Michael Taussig's concept of "epistemic murk" (1986) suggests that tales of political violence, such as histories, rumors, and other forms that narrate "truth" ("fiction[s] of the real," "hallucinatory veils") "mediate…terror" (127) and fan the flames of fear in conditions of political violence. For Taussig, the concept also offers the possibility to mobilize these very forms of myth-making in counter-narratives against imperial power and its terrors ("mythic subversion of the myth" (10)). But "murk," in its focus on Taussig's own representational style and the subversive heroics of the writer, somewhat like "paranoia" (e.g. Hofstadter, 1964), in its focus on the vague obscurity of its objects, relates to the relationship between non-knowing subjects and imagined knowledge objects as one of confused non-reason ("'Much as violence often begets violence, rumours about political violence seem to reproduce rather than critique existing power relations.' Thus rumors about political violence are both an expression and a source of terror." (Kirsch, 2002)). As compelling as the concepts are in terms of a poetics of popular political discourse and epistemological orientations towards power, sovereignty, authority, and dispossession, the analytics can only take us so far. How might they be mobilized in a consideration of rumors as constitutive of forms of understanding, an exploration of "popular reasonings" as themselves generative of politically-relevant forms of knowledge production, mediation, and communication?

While my ethnographic focus is certainly not on conditions of political terror and violence, the focus by Taussig and others on epistemics offers an opportunity to think about the

contingent ways through which experiences of knowing and having knowledges emerge in conditions of chronically felt threat, vulnerability, and precarity.

This is why I use the term "popular understanding" rather than "knowledge" per se. As I outlined in the Introduction, I follow Glaeser in his analysis of "political epistemics;" his critique of the reason/non-reason binary through his "poetics of understanding" posits a lived dialectics and interactional quality of what he distinguishes as discursive, emotive, and kinesthetic modes (2011). He writes that while classical critiques of Enlightenment rationality "emphasized 'passion,' 'sentiment,' or 'affection' as a valuable source of orientation different and yet connected to reason" and it was "only with the work of Freud…[that] a real breakthrough came...[O]ur (partially unconscious) wishes and fears, desires and aversions..." structure and mediate our "very rationality" (13). I find this formulation helpful because rather than weighing our ethnographic material down in a heavy-handed and rather controlling grasp of representation, wouldn't one rather be open to wanting to see where a dialectics of lived understanding takes people? More in line with a Bakhtinian sense of open-ended and emergent dialogics, Glaeser writes: "According to Freud, desires and aversions orient action by directing it. But they do not do so in an unambiguous fashion; instead, they can quickly draw us into a maelstrom of different directions…" (14). Similarly, Mazzarella has written on the politico-aesthetic effects of cinema's emergence and what this means for a critical understanding of "how public communication works," against valorizations of public "reason": "[J]ust as David Hume once insisted that what we call rational thought is actually grounded in passions that it largely disavows, so the deliberative reason of the bourgeois public sphere, notwithstanding its own ideology, rests on both routinized and emergent currents of public affect" (25).

Glaeser mobilizes his sociology of understanding to think about the ways in which the

German Democratic Republic (GDR) state, materialized in the Stasi state police and its archive of public discourses in the late socialist period, failed to maintain its status of legitimate authority because it could not, as a public institution, validate itself in relation to shifting popular understandings of what "it" was and did (28). Glaeser's sociology of understanding posits a "process of orientation" wherein a shared "attunement" to events and circumstances in a given time-space is reproduced/able when things are relatively "stable": The Stasi-as-organization was able to maintain authoritative presence and was successful in its institutional reproduction when everyday life in the political-economy of the GDR was experienced as relatively stable and unproblematic. When, in late socialism, the orders of daily life felt unstable to the core ("[T]he GDR had reached a point of crisis that the old institutional arrangements had not only produced but also had failed to even recognize…" (40)), the GDR "failed in political epistemics." It was not able to successfully manage the epistemological and ontological gap that existed between "it" and how people understood "it."

In order for Glaeser to make such a claim about the political potentials and stakes of public understandings, "understanding," in the sociological sense, involves an interactive mediation between at least three things: an institutional actor (e.g. the police), another institutional actor (e.g. a public), and some kind of claim, communicated in many possible ways, as to the nature of the relationship. Politico-historical circumstances and the very state of being in a particular time-space condition, in a way, the kinds of claims that can be made and/or their taken-for-grantedness. Settled public understandings presuppose an "ordering" to social life that is often taken for granted as "reliable" (24). In a deeply helpful critique of instrumental rationality, Glaeser argues that "knowing" that things are a particular way (the FDA will make sure my drugs are safe) implies a deep "trust" (rather than "knowledge") that one's world and the

institutions that inhabit and make claims in it are ordered reliably. But when social shifts happen that disturb "normal" forms of experience (gas prices rise to $12 per gallon, for example), collectively crafted understandings begin to emerge (Why is this happening? This is outrageous. Who is responsible?), the status of claims is questioned (Where did the market go wrong? How is "the government" involved here?) (42). Rather than being a state of knowing or not knowing some thing, understanding is a process of orienting, or attuning, to relative degrees of (un)certainty (24).

Unless one has the time, space, energy, and money to produce all of their own food, as a minority of food consumers distant from sites and processes of production and distribution might, the political epistemics of safety for those who eat food produced for the market is like a very elaborate semiotic house of cards. And unlike Glaeser's Stasi police, in this world of institutionalized alimentary claims, the food-consumer interface positions "markets" at the center of political and politicized meaning-making.

Proliferations of rumors around scandalously unsafe foods reflect anxieties that have emerged in the context of Georgia's recent legacy of political upheaval and transition in the 1990s and early 2000s. Both the personalized communicative networks in which these rumors are positioned and their figurations of (dis)trust iconically index the elusive quality, for regulatory expertise, of the Georgian "consumer public" itself, the vast majority of whom must deal with a socio-economic context of extremely high unemployment. Most food consumers obtain many of their provisions (e.g. honey, preserves, fruits, and vegetables) through informal channels of friends and relatives who move between the cities and agricultural sites in the country. Or, they use outdoor, highly unregulated markets (*bazrebi*) that trade in both domestic and imported foods such as fresh produce, meats, dairy goods, grains, legumes, herbs,

spices[more redundancies follow here] but for now I will say that for the most part, my interlocutors during my three years of fieldwork were young and old; male, female, and (rarely) non-binary; and belonging to the former Soviet intelligentsia, some of whom were relatively wealthy. But for the most part I did fieldwork among the socio-economically disadvantaged majority who were unemployed, or employed but struggling to make ends meet in Tbilisi. While I did have several interlocutors who were men, I spent the most time with women. Women happened to comprise the majority of the National Food Agency staff with whom I worked, and also, for the most part, were in charge of regularly buying and preparing food for their families, buying most of their family provisions from green grocers who were also women and whose shops were in the same apartment complexes as their customers, with whom I also spent a significant amount of time. When mothers worked regularly along with their husbands and still had young children coming home from school hours before the end of a workday, women (often Armenian migrants) would be hired for about (40 Georgian Lari (GEL) / ~35USD) to spend a few hours preparing a week's worth of dinners for the children and parents.

Part of the burden that food shoppers in Tbilisi feel reflects a crisis of responsibility and accountability that is unfortunately built into food safety policy implementation in the liberalized context of the EU, the global standards that govern EU food safety regulation, and the political-economic patterns of post-Soviet "reform." By "liberalized context" of food safety regulation I mean that it is (appears as) basically impossible – for experts and non-experts – to point to a legible institution or configuration of actors who can and are willing to claim responsibility and accountability in ensuring the safety of foods. For example, one of my closest interlocutors at the NFA was a woman named Salome who was the Head of Risk Analysis, and during my time working with her in the NFA, I tried to approach this question in different ways, clinging to the

hope that I would eventually get to the truth. She was adamant that as a state agency whose safety codes are being aligned with those of the EU and global standards makers like the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization and its Codex Alimentarius (CA), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), the National Food Agency of Georgia is not ultimately responsible for enforcing food safety standards. She explained that it is up to food business operators to meet standards specified in the safety codes. The NFA sets and administers fines in cases of non-compliance, but this is all they can do.

Similarly, at a conference on the Future of Food Safety in Georgia, which I attended in Tbilisi in January 2013, EU-based and other global organizations organized a public meeting with state and market interests in food safety to discuss anticipated legislative changes associated with the EU Association Agreement, as well as problems in the institutional landscape of food safety governance in Georgia. I was again struck by what appeared as a strange configuration of political-economic alliances at the heart of food safety reform in Georgia, and of the National Food Agency itself as a national "state" institution. Each "side" (state and market) ultimately assigned blame and responsibility on the other for inadequacies in the food safety system. At the same time, the expert stances at this conference repeated the word "association" when speaking of the state-market contingent that comprised the body of expertise in that room that day and in anticipating the process of future reform. The speakers at this conference, in their claims to "associative" governance and open "dialogue" effectively deferred responsibility onto one another.[16]

[16] Uneasy with these blurred and overlapping boundaries of "citizen" and "consumer," of "state" and "market," and the ethical questions of accountability, accusation, danger, and trust that might emerge from these ideological and pragmatic problems vis a vis food, a group of food safety experts (policy, research, and activists) have written an appeal to a constellation of institutional interests connected to the writing, implementation, communication, and recognition of these

For Georgian non-experts, this entire policy sphere is impenetrable if not irrelevant (most of my Tbilisi interlocutors did not even know that the NFA existed), and after the dissolution of the Soviet welfare state and with it, the semiotic, political, and institutional anchors ensuring bodily and biological public well-being, consumers – particularly women who care for their families as mothers and grandmothers – feel the burden of this regulatory absence. Some say that Consumer groups with forums on social media (e.g. momxmarebeli.ge) represent these concerns, and it sometimes seems as though only they are willing to arbitrate and call for accountability on behalf of food shoppers (though such groups complain that they are understaffed and publicly

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laws: Georgian legislative and executive branches of government, the EU, Georgian civil society organizations (CSOs), Georgian entrepreneurs, Georgian media, and Georgian citizens (June 2012). The group interprets these laws as a mechanism for "consumer rights protection" that is not living up to its potential. In their opinion, retailers are granted far too much discretion in facilitating [addressing?] and administering consumer complaints; food safety agencies within the state sector do not have the institutional capacities and incentives to effectively attend to consumer concerns and to regulating food safety across different sectors of the food chain - production, processing, distribution, marketing, and retail; and finally, the Georgian executive branch has the ability to select, implement, and enforce parts of the international food safety standards being passed in this legislation (2012).
The document prepared by this group asks for increased state power and willingness to regulate "comprehensively" and "objectively," across all phases of the food chain. At the same time, however, as an answer to these competing institutional interests of state and market with respect to food safety, "Georgian citizens" are called upon to "defend their consumer rights," primarily in the form of working "with consumer rights protection organizations." The experts who authored this document do not explicitly state that they also expect non-expert consumers to develop a consciousness around these laws and forms of knowledge themselves. For example, the Georgian media are called upon to "more actively and regularly cover the problems related to food safety and consumer rights, ensuring that these issues stay on the agenda...." Instead, institutions of varied forms of political-economic authority (e.g. the document's expert authors, "the Georgian media" and "consumer rights protection organizations") are positioned as advocates, or even proxies, for an imagined, rights-bearing public of citizen-consumers. Here, this group of food safety experts presents itself as an alternative (though also closely related, in terms of a shared goal of future EU integration and a shared commitment to implementing a particular form of global food safety standards and regulation) institutional form for consumers to trust, in contrast to what are (rightly) depicted as questionable intentions and motives of Georgian government (as far as I know, this document has not yet appeared in any form of popular media, though it has been shared among food safety experts and political-economic policy makers).

marginal.

In the day-to-day pragmatics enacting the gendered division of labor in the home, women who provision their families with food or who prepare food for other families and then for their own have their own ways of managing the safety and possible dangers of foods obtained from the usual market places: local green grocers, the large outdoor food market, and, more often now, the two Carrefour grocery stores located in Tbilisi. The obscure world of technoscientific standards and the politics of differentially-scaled institutions of food safety are really some of the last things on shoppers' minds. "Safety" (*uvnebloba*) does not actually figure into the daily conversations evaluating food so much as words like "good" (*kargi*), "natural" (*nat'uraluri*), "delicious" (*gemrieli*), "dangerous" (*sashishi*), or "dirty" (*bindzuri*).

At the same time "food safety" (*sursatis uvnebloba*) *is* a public problem. During all of the time I have spent in the living rooms and kitchens of my Georgian interlocutors, the television or radio was very often on in the background. I would consider it a great ethnographic gift when, on rare occasions, and while I sat in a home or at the grocer's stand, I would see or hear one of my colleagues from the NFA appear on a TV or radio talk show in an effort to publicize their presence as an authoritative regulatory agency. But these segments were never interesting for the person with whom I was talking. People *talk* about what they heard from their mother yesterday when she sent them, on Facebook, the story about Euro-American branded energy drinks containing bull semen, or the story, again sent from a mother on Facebook, about poisoned sugar from China. Rumored dangers circulate quickly; these stories travel. And while the ways in which rumors and gossip create alliances and bonds between people in situations of precarious uncertainty (if not impossible knowledge) is a useful analytic here as well (e.g. Taussig 1987, Gluckman 1963, Hoftstadter 1964), there is, at the same time, something

alienating about being in a food market, there when one has the time and money to take mass transit, or has found a ride with someone, selecting "good" foods for her family on her own.

In the early summer of 2013, one of my interlocutors, a Georgian-born nanny and housekeeper of Armenian descent named Eka, had some time to sit down with me at the kitchen table of her Georgian employer in Vake, and to talk about shopping for food, which was part of her daily life in Tbilisi. She cared for her employer's two toddlers, boys, and she seemed very tired all the time. I suspect she was underpaid and overworked. Behind her back, her employer's mother-in-law would laugh and tell me she is just tired because she recently met and became romantically involved with a man who basically can't walk because of a construction job injury, and so she has to care for him at his home where he lived with his mother. In addition, she had her own three daughters and live-in mother, and of course her employer's children to care for, five days a week from nine to five. She was in her late forties, and she seemed to take a cigarette break every other minute on the balcony, where she was always whispering to someone on her small mobile phone. Her Georgian ex-husband was living and working in Russia. Like every single one of my Georgian friends, even those in their early twenties, she spoke and read fluent Georgian and Russian, and she was always very kind, warm, and welcoming when I interacted with her.

But embarking on an "interview" with Eka, I felt as though she suddenly thought of me as vaguely governmental, and her seriousness made everything feel like an interrogation. It didn't help that the subject matter was something she seemed to think was "unimportant" and taken-for-granted. Our conversation continued for several days that month, and at times, her employer, a young Georgian mother about thirty years old whom I will call Nino, would join us.

> Eka: I live in vazis ubani, navtluxi. I go shopping for food every day. I do major shopping on Sundays, I go to the bazaar, and when I'm at the bazaar I buy food for a week. There are many

choices there, and I buy different things: fruits, vegetables, meat – there are many choices. I buy everything I need there: milk, bread, yogurt.

At the markets/vendors close to my house, I buy bread after I leave work here. I don't have time to go to all the different stores for all the different things I need every day: Smart, Nikora [Georgian supermarket brands]. At these places I get things like chicken, fish, coffee, but at the small shops near where I live, I go to buy sugar, milk, if I don't have it and need it. At the bazaar [larger outdoor market] the foods are fresher, prices are lower, and there is more choice.

I cook for my whole family every day. I usually make soup and cutlets [ground meat patties – usually beef/pork mix – Russian meatballs, fried in sunflower oil].

When I go to the bazaar, I don't go to the same person each time for the same things. I go and see the products so that I can guess/figure out which is best. I see what is best. Visually. I always ask where things are from. I don't want Turkish or foreign produce because there is a lot of bacteria, germs, and things like that in fruit from abroad. If it's from other countries there are a lot of chemicals and it is bad for the organism [organizm, the Russian word used when talking about the body in relation to (un)healthy food and medicine]. They look good, but they are plastic. If it is from Georgia I trust it because it is coming from our people, our land, and it doesn't need any transport [which would require chemicals, refrigeration, and other "artificial" enhancements according to popular understanding.]

If the vendor is a Georgian villager, their prices are always lower and they are always growing their own things. Other sellers, I think they are selling foreign produce, or they say that they are Georgian and they are not. I can guess by the person, whether they are honest or not. Usually Georgian villagers will give discounts and these other people will not. A "normal" seller, who works for someone else, never makes discounts. But a real villager, will make discounts and their products will be fresh.

[At this point Nino, the mother who hired Eka, and who comes to sit with us at times during the conversation, joins in:] These sellers are all middlemen. Not villagers, really.

[And Eka responds:] Well they're still villagers.

So first I see the products and see what looks best. I guess what is Turkish because it looks too nice. I then see the person selling. I ask for a discount. If they say yes, it's a villager, and if they say no, it's not a villager.

What Eka told me is similar to what I have seen and heard during my time with Georgian women (mostly mothers and grandmothers) in Tbilisi. Even if some things about food are not "knowable," there are ways in which rumors and popular lore render the food system legible, understandable: "I…see the products so that I can guess/figure out which is best. I see what is best. Visually." The method of visual inspection is shared across my interlocutors, and determines the answers to a varied but usual set of questions: "Does it look real, or plastic?"

"Are these too beautiful-looking?" "Does this appear to be from Georgia, or not?" "If not, from where?" "If not, that means long-distance transport was required." During my fieldwork, I also spent a lot of time with a trusted and beloved green grocer in a Tbilisi apartment complex, and when these same women go to vendors like her to shop for tomatoes, they ask: "Are these ours?" meaning are these Georgian? And she says yes, and so they buy them.

Figure 1: Definitely not plastic. Keti the grocer. Photo by author.

Many women and men who regularly shop for food pride themselves on knowing which vendors have actual Georgian tomatoes and which are Turkish or foreign, which to them look "too perfect" and "too plastic." But at the same time, the rumor in the kitchen is that these are actually not as good as they were before. Maybe they are "Georgian," but – rumor has it -- they are grown using Turkish seeds.

"There is nothing we can do about it," a matriarch might say as she slices a "Georgian"

tomato that she bought from a trusted vendor. She still feels stuck with the unsettling germ of a thought that, according to an ethno-nationalist reasoning, this is not 100% pure Georgian, that it grew from a Turkish and thus untrustworthy seed, while she prepares our salad. Such food shoppers still hope, however, that their inability to test for or detect contamination levels or chemical residues can be mitigated through long-standing relationships with trusted vendors. Or they might rely on their own experience and ability to know where to shop, from whom, and which questions to ask, in addition to the embodied, sensory knowledge that has been developed over years of being provisioned and cared for, and later provisioning for her own family.

Rumors about tomatoes are common in Tbilisi, and I actually have noticed that tomatoes, in their material instantiation of what an ideal fruit might be – infused with color and nutrition, ripe, sweet, and fragile in so many ways, are often a kind of iconic index of a sense of a uniquely plentiful terroir, itself positioned within an ethnonationalist imaginary. I would be in a *dacha* (a village home) or Tbilisi kitchen, for example, and the women I was with would have just come back from their gardens or a local green grocer they regularly went to and trusted. We would be preparing the summer staple salad, *kitri da pomidori* (cucumbers and tomatoes).

Figure 2: Dacha (country cottage). Photo by author.

Figure 3: Kitri da pomidori on the table at the dacha. Photo by author.

"Wow," I'd say, "I've never seen tomatoes like these. They are just pure red inside when you cut them in half! They are so sweet!" The response, I heard several times over the years and in different kitchens with many different women, of different ages and socio-economic positionings: "Hmph. If you think these are good, you should have had them just two years ago. They were even better. Ugh, now our farmers must use Turkish seeds for their tomatoes. They have chemicals in them, so they can be transported long distances and so that they grow better." Usually the story also includes the suspicion that, "They [here, the Turkish, ostensibly Turkish businessmen, of which there are increasingly many in Georgia] take our delicious Georgian foods and we get their rubbish."

According to these stories, fresh produce like fruit and vegetables (but again, people talk about fruit much more often) are sent to Georgia from Ukraine and its neighbors because they are tainted by radioactivity from the Chernobyl site. In this formulation, my interlocutors have

explained that Georgians have experienced, since Chernobyl, a rise in thyroid cancers and thyroidectomies. I've heard this suspicion linked to conversations in which participants express their suspicions that Georgia is a de-valued geopolitical site of "produce dumping" and value extraction, again with the understanding that "high quality," "natural" Georgian produce is shipped away from Georgia to more attractive geopolitical markets.

Like the narratives of Georgian tomatoes grown with ominous Turkish seeds, or the story that "they" send chemically-polluted and otherwise dangerous foods to Georgia, these rumors of contaminated food products certainly seem to signal popular anxieties around Georgia's place in a regionalized and globalized political-economy: A very small country (~3.5 million people at the time of my fieldwork), positioned in between the EU, Russia, and the Middle East, and with a future geopolitical trajectory that is not certain. Caught between "Euro-American" and "Russian" worlds, my Georgian interlocutors are highly aware of their relative value along varying, historical-institutional axes of differentiation that are scaled in understandable terms.

By "scale," I am mobilizing Gal and Irvine's analysis (2019), wherein the concept might be understood as an ideological framework, or project (219), that models comparisons along shared, "stabilized," and "standardized" "axes of differentiation" (228-232): "[S]calar claims…entail comparisons and connections between sites, connections that, in many cases, are somehow measured" (217). If I say that *this* bottle of water is "better" than *that one* because it is domestically produced, the implied terms of my comparison are geopolitical in scale: "domestic" implies within the U.S. (if that is where "I" am), and the other bottle is implied to have been produced elsewhere, in a different nation. The units of reference are commensurate, and there is an indexical resonance here. If my interlocutor responded with, say, "well actually *that one* is filled with tap water from my kitchen," I would realize that the axis of differentiation I was using

to compare the two bottles of water was mistaken in some way.

Similarly, when I write that the food system is "scalable" for my interlocutors, I mean to say a few things at once: Broadly, that food products are understood to circulate between ideologically-equivalent or otherwise commensurable sites (nation to nation, for example); that actors involved in food systems are situated in terms of commensurability, sometimes across space and time (i.e. in terms of relative authority, function, identification, differentiation in Soviet, post-Soviet, and/or "transition" periods); and that their imagined emplacement in the world (e.g. networks of circulation, or lifecycles – e.g. farm to market to table, or seed to commodity object to consumer body) is somehow mappable, ideologically stable and measurable in some way (e.g. "mass market," "small-scale," "medium-scale," etc.)

When I lived with Ketevan, a single woman in her late sixties who lived alone, pension check to pension check, in the once-prestigious Soviet Khrushchyovka-styled apartment in which she grew up, she would always tell me, while we sat at her dining room table, that Georgia's position – its land, language, and ethnicized identity – within a world of "globalization," as she always called it, in English, is in fact without value. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter Two, but she always praised her relatives and friends who were mothers and matriarchs in their families, telling me that despite the difficulties in navigating the dangerous food market, they really knew how to prepare foods well – They are experts! I always had the sense that she felt her own being, as a Georgian woman who never married and never had children, was somehow inadequate and amateurish compared to the other women in her life. One day she asked me if I know how to cook, assuming I didn't because I am American and because I have no children:

> K: Do you cook?
> N: Yes, all the time. [Ignoring my response, she then proceeded to tell me how to make the Georgian vegetable dish, ajapsandali, which is commonly made in summer when the ingredients are in season]

N: I thought you're supposed to add tomatoes?
K: Tomatoes are terrible now in Georgia.
N: Well tomato season is pretty much over now, isn't it?
K: No it has nothing to do with that. They are shipping bad tomatoes from Turkey and shipping out all the good Georgian tomatoes to Turkey. [She goes on to elaborate on her fantasy that "real Georgians" will have to move onto "reservations" eventually because "everyone" – i.e. foreigners – Euro-American and those from South, Southeast, East Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa – is coming for their land.] People need medications [i.e. prescribed opiates like morphine] to get through everything. There are no jobs. The government keeps changing. There is no stability. Globalization is fine but Georgia hasn't achieved anything yet to fairly partake in it. Sure we are an ancient civilization, one of the oldest. My cousin, you know her, Irina. I will go to her service tomorrow with Tamara [Ketevan's aunt]. It is a tragedy. Her cancer. It is a real problem now. People are getting cancer more and more from pollution – air, water, radiation. Before, we had lifespans of 100+ years, and now they are much shorter.

[At this point her aunt, Tamara, arrived and joined us. She had two packets of instant cappuccino with her, which one can buy at any grocery story or small convenience store]

[Time for coffee/tea/cookies – Ketevan goes into the adjacent kitchen to boil the water and prepare the plate of cookies, setting the table with the Soviet-era blue, white, gold, and flowered china she inherited from her parents.]

N [to T.'s instant coffee packets]: Aaaah, are these good?
T: Yes I love them [laughs at her guilty pleasure]. My favorite are these, you buy a single and put it in hot water.
K: Of course Natalia doesn't like things like that! She drinks Turkish coffee, like me. [To Ketevan, the instant coffee is something "artificial," too sugary, and unhealthy]
T: When I was quitting smoking, I drank coffee all the time because I… needed something.
N: Me too.
T: I am not addicted to morphine or other drugs, just coffee.

[over cookies/tea/coffee]

N: Ugh, I bought this honey [gesturing to the jar Ketevan placed on the table]. It is terrible.
K: Of course it is! You have to just know where to go. Tamara brings me honey. Irina always brought me honey. A large jar and I had it for a very long time. From their village. Now it is terrible [in the stores, including at the bazaar and the grocers']: Chemicals, grape juice, fake sweeteners and who knows what else! [Bringing out the large jar that her cousin Irina brought for her before she, Irina, fell ill] Look!
T: Put it in warm water to get it to liquefy.
K: N do you want some? I can get it from my neighbor. She also makes very good, very healthy churchxela [Georgian hazelnuts or walnuts coated in hardened grape juice syrup].

Tomatoes and honey re-appear again and again in these rumors of falsification, contamination, adulteration. While the adulteration and falsification of honey and wine are envisioned at Georgian origin points, producers resort to these measures because of the ways in which market systems are thought to implicate Georgia and Georgian producers in larger, but geopolitically familiar, food systems. Another woman with whom I was close, a professor of

Georgian literature in her forties at Tbilisi State University and a mother of two children, who was married to a very successful lawyer who was never home, also brought up honey in the context of a legible, geopolitically-mapped food system. I'll call her Mariam:

> M: Now [this time in the season, May], there are no big Georgian strawberries. If there are Georgian strawberries or anything Georgian I ask from where – which region, because different places are known for different things. Carrots: are they Armenian [somxuria?]? Those are the best. Pears –are they from Kakheti [kaxuria?], which is a dry and warm place in Georgia [people talk about this region as where the best wine and fruits come from and they see the people from this region as "down to earth," which always reminded me of descriptors for Napa Valley in CA]. Or the apples, they should be from Kartli, near Gori [Stalin's home town], which has good apples. In Soviet times, they had big orchards there, and the kolkhoz owned them, a big group of people, maybe they divided the land up in the post-Soviet period, or one person bought it all…
>
> If you travel outside of Tbilisi to visit places in the countryside or other cities, it is always better to buy from peasants. Anywhere you go, Georgian wine is basically always good because the peasants who you buy from make it for themselves too, usually.
>
> Before, in Soviet times, they started to put sugar in wine, and didn't pay attention to quality, but quantity. But now, the Soviet market is gone, and everything is trying to sell abroad, or make it for themselves. And there aren't many people who are putting sugar into wine. In this way, the situation has improved. All people/businessmen understand what is "good wine." Georgians know the value of good wine, and their place in the market isn't big, and foreigners know the value of good wine, so there is no reason to make "bad wine." It's not worth it now. Now, it is not possible to buy bad bottled wine [where is she shopping?! I'm thinking to myself]. Before there were strange things in the bottles.
>
> Same with honey. It is very easy to make fake honey. You have to be very attentive. You have to taste it. If it has the flavor of special trees, for example, it is fine. You have to know where to get it. It is not gifted, usually, because it is very expensive. 12L for one kg of good honey. People know that pure honey is good, smells good, and is good tasting.

In these narrations, there is a sense of resignation and a lack of control against a vast political-economic configuration of food production and distribution that positions Georgian consumers as destination points for contaminated or otherwise adulterated foods. In these discourses on dangerous foods, contamination is a symptom of a larger system of food distribution that is imagined to somewhere, somehow, at some source or through an imagined network of national or trans-national institutional interests, make the valuations and decisions as to who gets what in a popular rendering of regionalized and globalized food chains and food

markets. The fact that, as my interlocutors have expressed, cases of thyroid cancer and other malignancies are on the rise, is symptomatic of Georgia's vulnerable positioning. According to this narration of food systems, patterned understandings of relatively "good" and "bad" sites of food origin (Georgia as best and Turkey/ "other places" as worst), though they are not labeled as such at the outdoor bazaars and smaller shops near apartment buildings, are still rendered recognizable, legible, for Georgian women occupying different positions in Tbilisi socioeconomic life. Eka, the overworked, tired, and relatively "uneducated" (in the eyes of her employers, Nino and her mother in law with whom she lived), and Nino, whose parents were part of the Soviet intelligentsia/bourgeoisie, like her husband's parents, and who lived in London for several years while her husband did his graduate degree in digital design, share an understanding of food markets as mapped onto geopolitical units of origin, destination, and relative quality. An evaluation I've heard many times in Tbilisi kitchens and living rooms: "Turkish fruit is fake." "It is plastic." "It all looks the same." "In America, your food is all plastic. It is fake." Georgian fruit, for example, does not all look "the same" or "like plastic," but it "looks ugly" and is "sweet inside." It does not contain chemicals and pesticides to keep it good during long transport routes and so it is "good for the organism:" "It contains vitamins." "I give it to my children" because it is pure and good for them.

Within the ethnonationalist core of this narrated food system, there is a fear that Georgia, and Georgian bodies, are somehow, by someone or something, deemed without relative value, such that "bad" food (i.e. depending on the story/rumor, contaminated with chemicals, pesticides, radioactivity) is more likely to be directed there, while "good" Georgian produce (i.e. "natural," "pure," "with vitamins," "good for the organism") is exported to nation-states and bodies deemed higher in value. Like Glaeser's Stasi as the window on the political epistemics of

state authority in crisis during the late socialist period in the DGR, I think of Tbilisi food markets as similarly useful in how they, too, reflect a crisis of authority in the precarious situation of liberalization in this post-Soviet border zone caught between "Russia" and the "EU."

In relation to Eka's rendering of the food system, mentioned earlier in this section, and its ethnonationalist assertions of purity (Georgian "natural" produce), pollution (the Georgian food market polluted with impure, plastic-y foods tainted with chemicals and pesticide residues from Turkey), and contamination ("bacteria, germs" that attack fruits and other forms of produce and then spread to their Georgian hosts), we might ask who and/or what acts, or tries to act against threats to Georgian bodies? Earlier in this section, I cited Nana, who, like many of my interlocutors in Tbilisi, shrugs her shoulders and expresses a sense of hopelessness ("Cancer is rampant," "you need drugs to deal with life"), but there is something about the legibility of this cause/effect relationship (tainted food results in diseased bodies) that allows for a familiar form of encounter with "it," the food system rendered legible: Women (and sometimes men, especially when buying meat is concerned in Tbilisi, as this is commonly thought to be their "domain," and they are urged on by themselves and their womenfolk) have ways to navigate the market (see e.g. Jung 2009 and Klumbyte 2009).

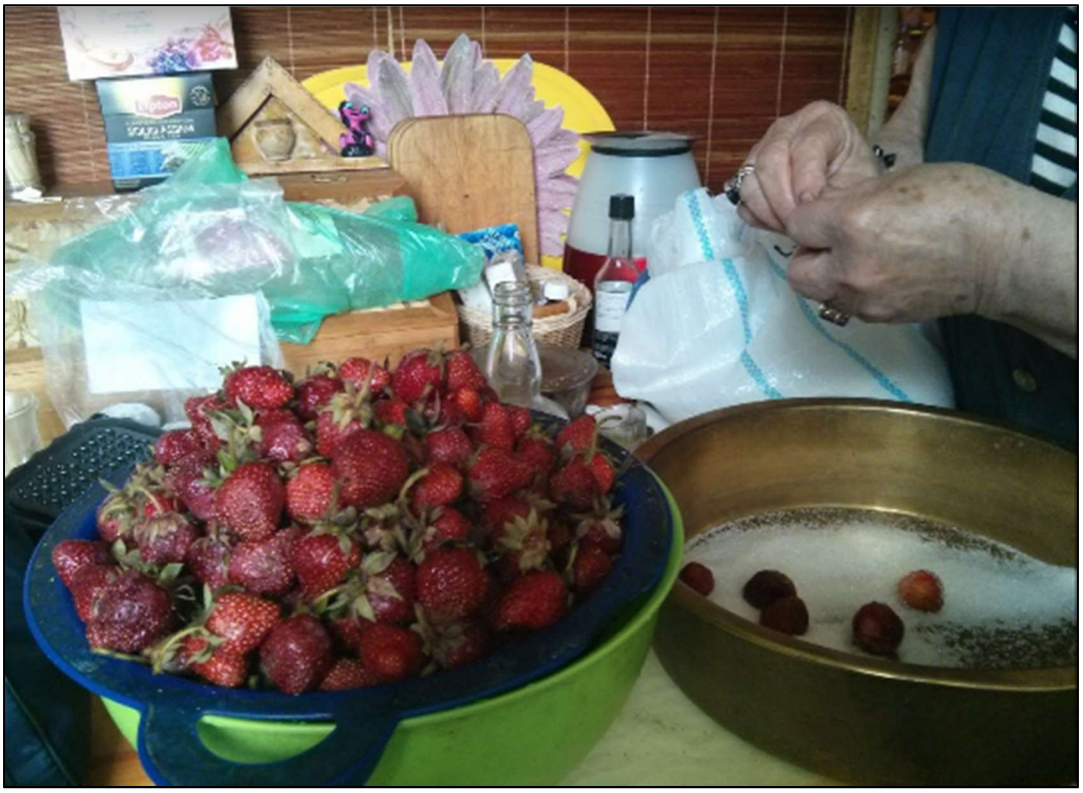

Figure 4: Definitely not plastic. Georgian strawberries in season and prepared by a real neighborhood matriarch, one of my closest grandmother interlocutors. Photo by author.

For mothers who see themselves as more "sophisticated" in their approaches to understanding dangers in the food markets navigating the food system becomes a matter of knowing how to curate information and news itself. Eka's employer Nino, for example, prides herself on harvesting information, and as she describes it, she deconstructs the very distinct categories of "rumor" and "news." These two things overlap for her when both kinds of sources are trustworthy; the information is useful to her, either way. As long as it isn't "fake," like a Turkish plastic apple, she listens, and she is the one who decides on whom and what to trust:

> N: Everyday, I was giving my kids Nesquick, but then the BBC [a story that circulated on Facebook] said it isn't healthy, and I trust this source. My friend doesn't/didn't believe this story, and is suspicious of the BBC, but I don't know why, I trust them.
>
> If I saw the same information on Georgian news, no, I wouldn't trust it because I don't trust Georgian TV. But if there is visible evidence, yes. It depends on the source (of news): Rustavi channel, you don't watch if you are part of the opposition party [even though at that time, "the opposition," Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream coalition, had already won the parliamentary

elections], because you are thinking that they are always saying something good about Saakashvili and the United National Movement.

Pirveli Archi [Georgian Public Broadcasting, since 1956]: a lot of people watch this. It is on everywhere. I don't watch it and I don't like it because it doesn't have real programming. Older people watch this – tv and read newspapers. . Other TV channels where you don't need a satellite for them to come in/national TV news: Maestro – it is opposition, Imedi now – opposition, Rustavi – it is Saakashvili's party's [UNM], and Pirveli, metxriarxi, and the Patriarch's TV channel. You need a satellite to see the Russian channels.

I have an iPhone and I look at Facebook pages that I like. The best way to check if a story or something is good is if I get it from my friends. If I want to know about art, I look at Mariam's page. Her grandfather and father are artists/painters. If I want to know about politics I look at Dimitri's page.

I trust interpressnews.ge, consumer.ge, and mediamall.ge – where they collect info on food and other products.

The epistemic burden of understanding that one doesn't, and maybe even can't "really" know what they "think" they know ("IS this tomato really from a Turkish seed? What difference does it really make? Who cares?") doesn't seem to be the point here, in so far as my interlocutors' concerns and strategies for managing these fears are concerned. Rather, these patterned stories share a confidence that the food market – though inscrutable – should also be manageable. This professed ability to manage is grounded in knowing – in Glaeser's sense – *trusting*, or presupposing, that the "ordering" to existing social life is and continues to be "reliable." The process of understanding how the market works rests in a working ideological infrastructure that is not only familiar, but taken-for-granted. This ideologized infrastructure rests on a familiar scaling – territorialized geopolitics (e.g. nation-states, capital cities, rural/urban difference) govern the origin and destination points for a "globalized" food system that was once Soviet, and is now post-Soviet. Within this ideologically legible system, there is also some authority (who or what they are is not completely clear), or some way in which valuations are made in terms of relative worth, or prestige (e.g. "Georgia" as low in value and "Germany" as high). This is evident in my interlocutors' repeated use of "they" when referring to arbitrations

?assessments? of relative value.

Moreover, within this particular idealized infrastructure, there is some kind of governing authority positioned in relation to Georgia and Georgians that, while it is no longer the Soviet welfare state, is now *still* sensed to be "there," grounded in bureaucratic procedure and reliable standards. At this point in my conversation with Eka, she really seemed to be getting frustrated with my questions when the vague presence of this authority was so obvious and yet too obscurely distant for her to consider. She really didn't have time for this and couldn't understand why it mattered to me.

> E: Yes, I also buy meat at the bazaar.
> N: Ah, really? Do they have good meat? How do you choose?
> E: I check to see if it is stamped.
> N: So that makes a difference.
> E: Yes of course.
> N: What does the stamp mean? What does it say? Aren't they all stamped?
> E: [Shrugs] Ugh I don't know, it's stamped!
> N: Okay but do you know who stamps it? The seller?
> E: IT'S JUST STAMPED! How do I know who stamps it? That is how it always has been. I trust it is good if it is stamped. I do not know what the stamps say/mean. But they are strongly controlled. In the Soviet period they had these stamps. And when I was a child, small shops near where we lived were always selling and we always bought frozen meat. Most of the time you had to go to the market for fresh meat. There was very high control and they can't lie about it to the customer. We had to always buy frozen meat because my parents were always working and didn't have time to go to the markets.

"It is stamped." I heard this passive construction many times when someone voiced some kind of "authority," especially when the speaker was in their thirties or older. One of my interlocutors, a sixty-plus-year-old woman who lived alone in Tbilisi, would always back up a claim by citing a vague authority "out there": "It will be windy today. It was announced." I have always thought this has something to do with the way official authority was cited in daily life during the Soviet period, and I will discuss this in subsequent chapters. Here, the material icon of bureaucratized, technoscientific authority in the stamp, and Eka's exasperation with my

questions about it, indexes another (il)legibility in the imagined food system, though how "it" is positioned in relation to, for example, pernicious sites of food origin is not articulated as such. More importantly, as an experienced shopper, Eka knows to buy meats that are properly stamped, as this, for her, is some indication of trusted safety. Again, the point is not that this authority "actually" exists, per se, as that "its" presence is invoked and mediated through lived experience; stories circulated within personal, transgenerational (grandmothers, mothers, daughters, granddaughters) networks; and claims of knowing how to navigate the food market.

How to scale uncanny multiples? Life as contamination

In contrast to rumors of epistemically scalable, understandable food systems for those skilled enough to manage the markets, rumors associated with GMO foods imply a food system that is both distant and emergent, but too specifically private and secretive (like the glassle) to legibly map. If living *with* contamination suggests an experienced understanding of navigating, or at least dealing with, threats of the foreign, life experienced as contamination – after all, genes are units of "life" – threatens life with the possibility of unwanted and uncontrollable proliferation stemming from the very self.

Food safety experts from global organizations laugh at what they see as popular fantasies of "GMO dangers." In January 2015, during a break at a one-day conference in Tbilisi on the "Future of Food Safety in Georgia," I was standing in the hotel lobby with a FAO Director from the Food and Agriculture Organization, a Russian woman named Viktoria, and a UK economist from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBR0D. Citing a conversation between representatives of a Georgian dairy brand and government regulators during the conference, we were talking about the fact that in Tbilisi, the price of fresh milk was relatively high (~well over 2 USD/L or 7.40 USD/gallon), and I was asking about the quality of imported

powdered milk (often from Brazil) that is reconstituted in Georgian factories and then sold as Georgian-branded milk products. I said that isn't it interesting that my friend, a woman sociologist in her thirties, prefers this kind of milk to "fresh" milk, because it reminds her of her childhood and to her it tastes better and richer. To this the woman responded that "exactly, the powdered milk is fine, and it is too expensive to produce milk from cows in the mountains and then transport it to the city." She likened valorizations of "fresh" milk over powdered to irrational, popular fears of GMO foods: "It's not dangerous. Scientific opinion is that there is no danger, and people think it is a catastrophe, and what, they think strange things- you drink or eat something with GMOs and then maybe in 20 years you suddenly wake up in the middle of the night and start chewing your bedsheets like a crazy person? It makes no sense."

In this conversation, global and regional representatives of official technoscientific expertise posit the stereotypical non-expert as extreme in their fantasized fears: Chewing bedsheets versus, say, having a vague allergic reaction is – in this expert's own fantasies, voicing her imagined non-expert – a nightmare of unconscious actions in the privacy of the dark, straight out of a V.C. Andrews novel.

In these discourses, GMO food products, undoubtedly a product of elite and foreign science, are also compromising Georgian food safety and security. Below is one manifestation, an article from the Georgian tabloid called *Georgia and the World* which my colleague at the National Food Agency sent me, and which was inspired by a Greenpeace report on GMO foods, which she also sent me.

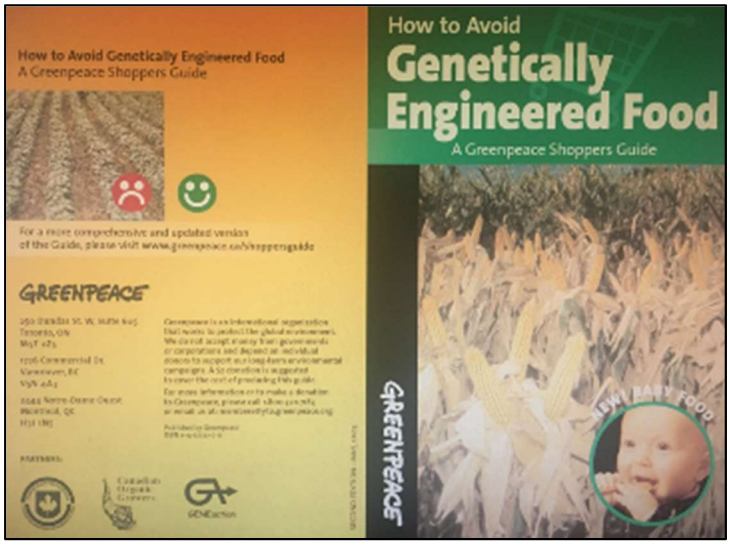

Figure 5: Greenpeace Canada pamphlet on which (my colleague explained) the Georgia and the World story was based and below, its recirculation on the momxmarebeli webpage. Image courtesy of momxmarebeli.ge

Figure 6: A consumer rights scientists explains to readers that the information in the tabloid's list actually came from Greenpeace Russia (not Greenpeace Canada), and that she contacted Greenpeace Russia and Canada, on Facebook, for clarification of discrepancies between their lists and that in the tabloid article. The response she received from each was effectively a non-answer (Thank you for letting us know and we have not updated these lists). She then lets the Georgian audience know that momxmarebeli will be testing products themselves for GMOs. Image courtesy of momxmarebeli.ge

Here, however, the entire global food supply is potentially tainted, including "Europe's." The effects on the human "*organizm*" organism are unknown, but are taken to be? something like, but not quite, a virus infection, or contamination, in that the mutation, or the non-natural core, occurs at a level more elemental and precursory: "…rats raised on a diet of genetically-modified foods had a compromised ability to conceive…Genetically modified products, causing their users irreversible modification on the genetic level, results in complete sterility (infertility), dangerous allergic reactions, food poisoning, mutations, and a resistance to antibiotics – which means that in the future, such medicines could no longer protect us from dangerous diseases." Here, GMO foods are imagined to be everywhere, potentially. Furthermore, because "they" are everywhere and not labelled as such, the "normal" channels of remedying an inability to detect actual danger – shopping at trusted vendors, relying on one's own expertise and experience in navigating the food market – are rendered insufficient in addressing the problem at hand. "GMO products look no different from healthy, natural products. In supermarkets and markets, it is difficult to know whether the bread, butter, fruit, vegetables and other food products are genetically modified… There is no difference in taste. However, the genetic difference is at a catastrophic level, leading to a number of anomalies in the body." Later in this piece, the reader is called upon to stay away from a list of US, European, and Russian branded products that are marketed to children, part of "Greenpeace's blacklist," which are not labelled as GMO and which are said to originate with "unscrupulous manufacturers.

The narrated "now" of the "SOS" piece calls upon the reader (most likely a mother, in Georgia at least, since the information presented here concerns food products marketed for and popular among children) to face an impossible task in the "now" of her world: To make the right

choice for herself and her family, when buying not these branded products, but the other food products mentioned here and most likely not labelled at the food vendors where she most likely shops for them: breads, butters, fruits, and vegetables. But how is she to decide? How could she detect "the good" from the dangerous food?

Figure 7: "How to choose products without transgenes." Image courtesy of momxmarebeli.ge

Just past the edge of the margins of this narration's "now," as well as of the "now" of the reader, Tbilisi is experiencing the rise of branded supermarket chains, which are where one would buy these blacklisted, branded products. Independent vendors do not sell these, and while small independent convenience shops and stores might also have them, the properly vigilant shopper will know to stay away from these items. More relevant to the chapter and more specifically, the discourse of GMO foods like breads, butters, fruits, and vegetables, and their undetectability no matter where they are sold, I am beginning to read an anxiety around (1) an emergent form of commodification that unbranded food products are imagined to embody (here, an object that emerges from a production and marketing process that hides its laboratory origin

and the morally problematic conditions of its reproduction, or perhaps even proliferation, in relation to an imagined ethnos, much like the quality of the rumor itself); and (2) the uncertain emergence of a form of food-consumer interface that might be able to felicitously handle this problem. To put this another way, how can the Georgian mother ensure a healthy materialization of ethnonationalist reproduction when she, standing in a marketplace, cannot detect a "natural" food object from one that is "genetically modified," or that is outside of the limits of the "natural"? Why must she carry this burden, framed in this particular way? And what does this envisioned shelf of potential evil multiples have to say for the ways in which Georgian national futures, along varied axes of differentiation and identification, are imagined and configured?

The epistemic burden on the food shopper is made worse by the fact that she or he is ultimately responsible for bringing complaints and grievances to the attention of the consumer-interest group, momxmarebeli.ge, online. The process of getting foods tested for the "presence" of genetic modification insofar as GMO foods are concerned, is time and energy consuming to say the least, let alone dealing with, for both experts and non-experts, the back and forth related to what constitutes "scientific" vs "popular" definitions of acceptable limits, and how GMO foods differ from their discursively-articulated opposite, "natural foods."

On the popular Facebook page of consumer.ge's (*momxmarebeli.ge*) food section, the consumer-advocacy organization momxmarebeli,[17] momxmarebeli.ge defines GMO foods in one of their posts, "What are GMOs?":

[17] The site and organization are run by the civil society organization (CSO) Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia (CSRDG). The site and Facebook page belong to the Consumer Rights Protection Program of CSRDG, which is sponsored by various donors and not primarily by Eurasia Foundation.

Figure 8: "What does 'GMO' mean?" Image from momxmarebeli.ge

Not all organisms whose genes have been modified in some way, for example by breeding or hybridization, are "genetically modified". The term "genetic modification" is used only for the technology of organismic change that involves the transfer of finished genetic material (genes) from one organism to another. Other technologies change the genetic material of the organism in a more "natural" way, such as hybridizing, or identifying individuals with desired unexpected traits (mutations), often leading to increased variability (mutagenesis). Irradiation or chemical exposure are other possibilities.

In contrast, genetic engineering finds the desired gene (for example, the gene for resistance to frost, drought, or agrochemicals) in any organism, isolates it and converts it into a completely foreign organism by various technologies. Since genetic engineering technology is quite new and the food consumed by this technology has been consumed by humans for only 25-30 years, it is possible that we are unaware of any contraindications to its use (for example, the impact on the viability of human genetic material. This will be revealed only after a few generations, or more). Therefore, the consumption of GMO products is somewhat risky and the legislation of various countries, including Georgia, GMO labelling on GMO products.

It is impossible to determine the GMO origin of any organism by analyzing its genetic material…It is also impossible to determine whether an animal or bird was fed GMO seeds with meat, eggs or milk.

It should also be kept in mind that if the product / organism of GMO content is less than 1% in the product content, the indication of GMO on the product label is not mandatory. So we are likely to receive a small amount of GMO products in all of us. In recent years significant steps have been taken in Georgia to regulate GMOs.

In response to these posts from the staff at momxmarebeli.ge, users commented that the possible dangers of GMO foods are simply the fact that they are not known. For example, one self-identified woman wrote:

> Scientists discovered a frost gene in flatfish, isolated it from flatfish DNA and transferred it to tomato DNA to give it frost resistance. As a result, tomatoes became more resistant to frost, and therefore have a longer cultivation period. New "varieties" of potatoes, soybeans, strawberries, peaches and other plants were derived through genetic engineering. GM foods can easily mislead us. We may think it is fresh and healthy, but in fact it may have been harvested a few weeks ago. Although such tomatoes look very red and healthy, they have very little useful substance left over because of long storage or have already been degraded or transformed into other substances. The DNA of an artificially-derived genetic organism can be broken down and reconstituted incorrectly may also be linked to other genetic material. As a result, we get new, dangerous combinations, and who knows what this will look like in the future!

The focus on unknown (un)intended consequences is magnified by the fact that at the same time, momxmarebeli.ge, explains that although there was a newly-accredited lab in Tbilisi (as of 2013), GMO food testing was very expensive and complicated, and that it would be easier for them to send samples to Germany to be tested. The delays on results frustrated consumers using the page, and these frustrations were made worse when they found that although results showed some genetically-modified material, the amount did not meet the threshold to be considered illegal according to Georgian food safety law, which is harmonized with that of the EU.

Before the NFA accredited Georgia's first lab to test the presence of genetically-modified organisms in foods, there were a few small boutique stores and labs that claimed to carry and test for GMO foods. One, located on a corner of a very busy intersection in Tbilisi's pricey Vake neighborhood, had large posters in its windows that were captioned collages of extreme experimentation with deterritorialized life itself:

Figure 9: *From the window of the Bio Market I. Photo by author.*

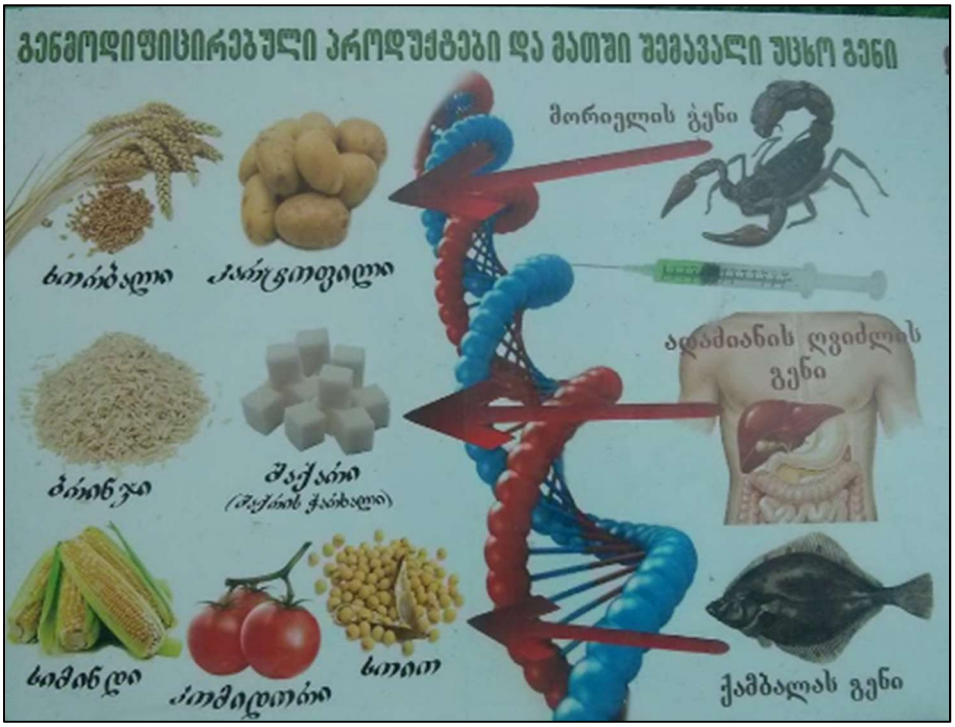

Figure 10: *From the window of the Bio Market II. Photo by author.*

Figure 11: From the window of the Bio Market III, the part blocked by the cars in the first photo. Photo by author.

The first part of the poster is titled "Genetically modified [food] products and the foreign genes within them": *Wheat and potatoes contain the genes of scorpions. Rice and sugar – human liver genes. Corn, tomatoes, and soybeans – genes from fish*. Next to this, the sign reads: "Today all of us are being experimented upon!" Below, the text explains what this hybrid shop/lab does, exactly. The site itself was always empty and did not seem to really catch on during my time there. This was not the same lab as that which the Georgian Ministry of Agriculture had accredited through the EU's ISI/IEC 17025:2005 standards in 2013:

> There are troubling results following experiments performed by foreign scientists on living organisms. Mice that were fed genetically-modified products produced first-generation offspring that suffered from terminal cancer tumors whereas the third generation was completely infertile, about which the scientists could do nothing.
>
> Bio Test Laboratory decided that they should do their own experiments on white mice, and that they should let the public know about it. One group was fed completely natural products and the other group – genetically-modified foods.

> In light of these [literally: today's] findings, Bio Test Laboratory in Georgia analyzes and tests the safety of genetically-modified foods.

Unlike the sensationalist "non-understanding" of science that my expert interlocutor dismissed at the food safety conference in Tbilisi, the popular anxieties and rumored effects of GMO foods lie in a rendering of the food system wherein GMO foods are possibly everywhere. Even if a vigilant mother or father made sure to buy foods labelled correctly, there is still an unsettling thought that there might still be very troubling fear that it doesn't matter because the product might contain traces of GMOs anyway, and then there are the unintended and unknown consequences in future generations. In this particular epistemic world, unlike that described in the geopolitically-mapped food systems in the first set of rumors discussed in this chapter, such a highly privatized, inscrutable system that is thought to generate GMO foods expects consumers to make the right choice in the market place through informed purchases when such an awareness is completely impossible. Furthermore, the fact that these rumors of GMO foods co-exist with those of geopolitically-legible systems (e.g. Georgian farmers having to use chemically-laden Turkish seeds to cultivate tomatoes) might further exacerbate fears of illegible food systems, such that if the food consuming world is a giant laboratory with unknown ends in addition to "profit," as cited in one of the stories above, Georgians and similarly "interstitial" national zones are even more in danger. The implications are overwhelming for anyone. For those tasked with ensuring the health and wellbeing of their own families, what is the epistemological anchor for scalable images of reproducible, collective being and belonging in the future?

The quality of this anxiety was articulated once in a different kind of conversation I once had with some Georgian friends of mine, two recently-married Georgian women in their late twenties, who knew one another from graduate school in Tbilisi while completing their PhDs in

psychology. My closer friend, Tamriko, was a very kind, open-minded and soft-spoken clinical child psychologist. She and her husband were experiencing difficulty conceiving. The three of us were talking about various forms of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), to which my friend seemed very open. Again this was somewhat early in my fieldwork and I was surprised when her friend, who had two young children herself, commented on how she disapproves of in vitro fertilization (IVF):

> I don't know [she said in mock embarrassment, since she must have suspected we did not agree with her]…I just don't think it's right…It's not normal. I can't imagine if my son was at school and met one [an IVF child], he wouldn't be able to tell the difference!

In this comment, which echoes concerns over (a) (in)fertility that GMO food tests appear to demonstrate and (b) the fact that GMO foods might be anywhere and are impossible to "really" detect (i.e. even if not labelled as such, their "presence" might still be there), the anxiety over "unnatural" proliferations of life across generations (including her son's inherited burden of "telling the difference") leaves her uneasy, as a (Georgian) mother. Her fear of losing control over national reproduction (as if she ever had such control in the first place) and identification with something entirely different and unfamiliar manifests as fantasies of clones – uncontrolled proliferations of "life" that break down the boundaries between natural and non-natural. When my friend imagines her son encountering what popular Tbilisi discourse, including the overwhelmingly popular and trusted Orthodox Patriarch Ilia II in his televised sermons,[18] calls "unnatural" and a product of a "sinful" process, she is envisioning an uncanny encounter with a living double, an icon of life proliferated in an uncontrollable way. Co-existent with the first set

[18] In his 2014 Christmas epistle, Georgian Patriarch Ilia II stated that children born through surrogacy and ARTs are "problematic." While still christened in the Orthodox Church, this "does not mean that these methods are acceptable. Let us note that almost all the traditional religions oppose it and consider [these methods] to be a sin. The Georgian Patriarch and the clergy are obligated to warn the parish and generally the society about it. The Church respects free choice of any person, but it also points at what it deems to be wrong. This is the duty of the Church…"

of rumors discussed here, these kinds of rumored GMO effects (undetectable doubles and multiples, infertility in subsequent generations, wild proliferations of cancerous tumors) are positioned within a context of extreme de-valuation, somewhere between "Europe" and "Asia," leaving Georgian bodies feeling especially vulnerable in an imagined but illegibly-mapped world-as-laboratory.

The shock of the illegible life is jarring. Wilf, citing Schelling, Jentsch, and Freud on the uncanny (1835, 1906, and 1919 respectively), writes that as a category of aesthetic experience "the uncanny" is an unsettling disruption of that which in everyday modern life is taken-for-granted. He follows Garfinkel's and Suchman's theories of interactional order maintenance (human-human and human-machine respectively) as a process of sense-making and, stemming from cybernetic theories of the early 1980s, maintaining a communicative homeostasis throughout the interaction: "mutual intelligibility in interaction is the product of strategies or ethnomethods of sense making that interactants enact during interaction. Those methods include, for example, turn-taking conventions that produce an orderly background on the basis of which interactants can make sense of and mutually orient to the interaction's contingently emergent referents" (2019:204). "For Garfinkel," Wilf writes, and much in line with Glaeser's discussion of the epistemic orderings that constitute modes of understanding, "people's worlds remain organized as long as their experiences meet the criteria of continuity, consistency, compatibility, temporal continuity, and clarity." When an encounter disturbs the sense of continuity, or does not meet its "criteria" in a very particular way, the effect can be called uncanny. Importantly for Wilf, this uncanny feeling occurs in relation to the "materiality of semiotic forms most intimately linked to the self," such as homes, bodies, voices, and language. Dominant ideologies of living bodies, for example as biologized animacy, is shocked into sensed experience when one

encounters, or as in my example imagines an encounter, with a body that is animate, but whose status as a biologically living being is somehow brought into question. Here, Wilf quotes Vidler (1996): "The uncanny…revolves around 'the fundamental propensity of the familiar to turn on its owners, suddenly to become defamiliarized, derealized, as if in a dream" (211). Similar to, but not necessarily the same as Glaeser's account of the Stasi's failure in political epistemics, the uncanny effect that GMO food rumors index suggests a specific kind of public critique in the making. In her concept of "civic epistemology," Jasanoff critiques a mainstream, biomedicalized knowledge politics that posits a condescending dichotomy of un/educated and expert/non-expert dichotomy while ignoring the political potentials of "public reasoning" and, I will add, its lived mediations. Her framing calls for a move away from a priori definitions of what publics "should know" (252), to an attention rather to how publics know. In this spirit, stories of GMO foods (rather than their existence or "science" per se) signal a political epistemics wherein the very structures of national reproduction, being, and identity and the conditions of the radical privatization of their regulation – framed in these narrations as "life" and "nature" in general – is called into question.

Conclusion – the work of "murk"

Mobilizing Glaeser's concept of political epistemics and popular understandings, this chapter sought to make sense of the rumored fears of foods that I tracked during my time in the field. Voiced mainly by my women interlocutors responsible for provisioning their households, these fears offer a lens into anxieties around ethnonationalist identity and belonging in precarious conditions of post-Soviet reform, just as much if not more so than they are about food itself. Through comparing what I classify as two genres of rumor – one in which voiced fears of pollution and contamination index a legible food system and the other in which GMO foods

index a deeply uncanny effect of an unfamiliar food system positioned in what I am currently thinking of as extreme privatization – I sought to demonstrate the stakes of food anxieties, as narrated modes of understanding, in post-Soviet Tbilisi.

Chapter Two
Hungry for a Body: Inhabiting a Missed Body Politic in post-Soviet Tbilisi

For all the Georgian talk about and enactments of a famed Georgian hospitality, elaborate rituals of crowded feasts and toasts (*supras*) and unconditional loyalties to family, to lifelong friendships, and to the maintenance of intimately familiar relationships –embodied in the food shared at the kitchen table carefully curated by, most often, a family matriarch – memories of the early post-Soviet 1990s – a period of extreme scarcity, political violence, and precarious urban living – were just as present in daily life during my time in Tbilisi. The 1990s often reappeared in my conversations, an ironic presence inhabiting worlds of familial, domestic, and food provisioning life in Tbilisi, times when food was not necessarily scarce, but money and employment were. More specifically, when I or someone else would bring up food, a topic which never required much prompting, my interlocutors often invoked the scarcities of the 1990s. Yes, they were extremely difficult times, but there was a magnified sense of shared sustenance during that trauma as it was remembered, such that something about that shared experience was now felt as missing.

In what follows, I present several ethnographic accounts centering on different interlocutors, or subject positions in the world of Tbilisi food provisioning. Not all interlocutors were "matriarchs" and some, though not many, including men, lived alone. Of course, given the elemental nature of hunger and nourishment, every person I spoke to was a food provisioner, in some way. The chapter argues that narrations of the 1990s and of the ways in which women were remembered to feed families and effectively make something from nothing reflects what "good life" means, in the form of moral sustenance through foods. The discernable, experiential conditions of a good life becoming, and/or (im)possibility matter. These food objects generated through the medium of maternal care, in the instance of popular memories of the 1990s, are

understood to embody good, vital, life-giving qualities in relation to the body (*organizmi*)[19] that encounters and ingests it. These stories attest to a valuation of food objects in the present – whether a grape, bowl of soup, or even the color of a Russian-produced vitamin purchased in a Georgian pharmacy – which are understood to be uniquely "good" and vital objects that carry and sustain life.

Together in their interactions with the human conditions of their becoming, these food objects, I argue, materialize a morally authoritative popular sovereignty, one that lives *with* the popular authoritarianism (Mazzarella 2019) of Georgian "strongman" politics. Emerging from within an uncontested assemblage of matriarchal authority that presents itself as "natural;" of gendered, domestic spaces that are often claustrophobic and violent in their affective demands; and of deeply felt situational intransigence, precarity, and helplessness in relation to mobile and wealthy elites, morally authoritative popular sovereignty is not exactly a utopian counter to the masculinized world of Georgian politics. The question, here, is how a popular body politic navigates, manages, and constitutes itself within and between these worlds of masculinized, authoritarian spectacle on the one hand (analogously embodied in the toastmaster of the funeral *supra* that I discuss in a different chapter), and matriarchal (not necessarily feminized) authoritative discretion on the other (the women serving food and tending to the table at that same *supra*).

Because of the chapter length, and my decision to focus primarily on what the ethnographic material itself says, I will outline the main theoretical concerns of the argument here. First, in writing about a "body politic" and the ways in which such a figuration is or is not

[19] In Georgian, a cognate of the Russian *organizm* and the word used to name the body when talking about dangers and safeties regarding the ingestion of food and medicine.

possible for my interlocutors, I draw on literatures that focus on "everyday ethics" (e.g. Lai 2016) and, as Lai writes, citing Long and Moore (2013), the ordinary enactments and co-constitutions of "sociality as a dynamic matrix of relations[…] [that] always contain both ethical and political dimensions" (113). Lai mobilizes Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "planes of immanence"[20] in her discussion of "immanent sociality/community" in daily life for Shang villagers in contemporary China (2016). She writes that there is something unconscious and "taken-for-granted," "unarticulated" in a "sense of shared well-being" (112), wherein family and community, "kith and kin" (111), relations constitute the body-structure, as it were, of sustained daily life. I wish to build on this concept of an immanently structured kind of sociality, and posit here that for my Georgian interlocutors the daily socialities that constitute food provisioning (and their ethnographic documentation) are lenses into a felt anxiety and crisis around figurating this "body-structure" as a legible, contemporary body *politic*, i.e. in the political dimension.

Second, in conceptualizing the forms of moral-ethical practice that constitute the provisioning worlds of my interlocutors, I invoke the category of a "matriarchal" authority as managing daily encounters with material scarcity, hunger, nourishment, and sustenance. With this analytic, I am loosely (for now) drawing on literatures that focus on, and, in more critical iterations (e.g. Gal and Kligman 2000; Haney 2002) question, the categorical distinctions between "(welfare) state," "economy," and "family" on the one hand, and between "socialist" and "post-socialist" on the other, or at the same time. Through its lens on food provisioning and materializations of "goodness" and moral sustenance, this and other chapters recognize that

[20] I am also cognizant of the critique of the deliberate "purity-eros" (Mazzarella 69) of the concept, its non/anti-dialectical surrender to an ideology of non-conceptual emergence (and hence its covert dependence on that which immanence is understood to exist against, *always in valorized relation to*).

moral economies (and ecologies) of provisioning, as enacted every day, are co-constitutive of forms of both popular and state sovereignty, as well as of matriarchal forms of authority which, like food, might also work here as a kind of metaphorical analytical presence, though that idea is not developed and only implied, at times, in these pages. In the everyday world of provisioning practices, memories, vendors, strongman images, recognized food objects, absent states, ideologies, and manifestations of *terroir* constitute the conditions of possibility, or grounds of being, for the kind of shared, legible political *being* that my interlocutors are hungry for.

Last, in terms of thinking the relationship between bodies and food, Solomon's work on absorption, stemming from work on "metabolic living" (cf Landecker 2013) is helpful in the ways it mobilizes the term "absorption," the material pulls, fusions, attractions, subsumptions, and co-constitutive transformations of bodies (e.g. humans, fats, environments) – as an analytic and "ethos" (227) in rethinking the ontological and epistemological assumptions structuring global health approaches to diagnostic categories like obesity and type 2 diabetes. Ethnographically focusing on the varied, counter-intuitive, and otherwise unexpected (to mainstream public health expertise) metabolic lives and absorptions between foods, bodies, and surroundings, rather than, for example, the Euro-American-centrism and moral value judgements implicit in quantified models of "overconsumption," Solomon is able to ask questions like "when is food 'life' and what counts as 'food' in the first place?" The work builds to an understanding of "food" as "substances humans ingest or absorb" and that "have past and potential metabolic and political activity themselves" (226).

This chapter similarly deals with the vital materialities and ontologies that are presumed by many Georgians to give life, and which appear paradoxical and contradictory to commonsense technoscientific approaches to food safety and hygiene. I will discuss an EU- and

globally-governed "technoscientific" orientation in much more detail in the subsequent chapters that focus on my time at the National Food Agency (NFA). The "excess potential" that emerges at the interface and in the very making of object-life / life-object worlds (e.g. absorptions of and between bodies, per Solomon) literally matters, politically. As Mazzarella writes: "In Durkheim's *Elementary Forms* mana is, for the societies he is describing, a palpable emanation of constituted authority only because it is *also and at the same time* the chronically unstable constituting substance that strains against all containment" (65-66). For now, I will say that it is this stabilizing/de-stabilizing quality of that which lives where authority and authoritative potential meet– vis a vis food provisions, and the possibility for my Georgian interlocutors, emplaced as they and their bodies are in the family/state dichotomy, of thinking about vital sustenance itself as a public, political problem of moral authority (and of course authority-*making*), that motivates much of this chapter.

The chapter starts with a discussion of popular memories of food provisioning in the 1990s. This section includes a discussion of matriarchal authority in Georgian homes and the concept of "provisioning," as I am using it. I also provide an enthnographic account of popular Georgian references to "Georgian land" (*mitsa*, or mother land – *deda mitza*) as sustaining, plentiful, and healing. Like the land, which I argue is understood as a uniquely giving *terroir*, providing sustenance, matriarchal authority is understood to be able to sustain households despite the very limited means to do so. Next, I consider how these memories of matriarchal authority in the 1990s express anxieties about maintaining a shared sustenance and an adequately fed body politic in the present. The ability to find and make something in conditions of precarity, and through that food sustain familial selves, suggests in its repeated invocations an articulation of the ability to locate and provide a form of meaningful sustenance (it does not

simply exist out there in the form of an unrecognized object) across sites of a body politic that is at once familial, intimate, traumatized, and hungry for some concrete form of steadily sovereign existence. The last part of this chapter will reflect on what good food means for practices and rituals of procurement, why categories like "consumer" and "consumer choice" do not easily map onto this world of food objectification. Centering on my time with one of the independent food vendors scattered all over the city, always considered an unhygienic and unsafe site of exchange by national and municipal governmental actors, I will discuss her emplacement as a trustworthy, authoritative site of "good" food supply.

Provisioning Matters in the 1990s

At one point during my fieldwork I lived for several months with a woman in her late sixties I will call Ketevan. Ketevan, an aunt-figure of many years for me, lived in the once-prestigious Soviet Khrushchyovka-styled apartment in which she grew up, an only child of her father, a medical doctor, and her mother, a professor of English literature. It is primarily Soviet-era intelligentsia like her who inhabit the enormously wide, eleven-story building, with their children and grandchildren. In contrast to the multitude of still-uninhabited architecturally minimalist luxury apartment buildings being developed in the same part of town, buildings like Ketevan's appear intransigent and weighty, thick and heavy as material reminders of a Soviet afterlife still there in the city, and breathing. Ketevan lived alone there with the memory-object(s) of her once-bustling home; her parents' furniture, wallpaper, curtains, windows, rugs, bedding, plants, kitchen utensils, china, paintings, appliances, doors, parquet floors, bathroom tiles, and old-fashioned décor occupied every corner of the three-bedroom dwelling, a shrine to her past lives as a beloved and spoiled daughter, popular socialite, and professional translator. She was a retired German-to-Georgian interpreter in the Soviet Georgian Ministry of Culture, and now

lived on her monthly pension checks, occasionally either renting rooms of her apartment to foreigners, or offering the spaces to her friends who needed a place to stay for whatever reason. Her friends and family sustained her with talk, food, care, and a sense of togetherness – even if at times she felt peripheral to these friends' and families' everyday lives, occupied as they were with their own husbands, wives, children, and grandchildren.

I stayed with Ketevan for months at a time during different periods of my fieldwork. At one time, I moved in to the usual room to which she assigned me: a small bedroom that was once her mother's office. She always told me that this room had a very good "aura;" over the years, her mother wrote books and academic articles in this room which was small, but not uncomfortably so. Adjacent to the other bedroom, then Ketevan's, my room's large window and patio door opened to the long narrow balcony where Ketevan grew her flowers, and where we hung our clothes to dry. She always complained how dusty the very busy intersection and all its traffic outside our side of the building made everything, and she would always nag me to bring my clothes in right after they dried. In the late spring and summer, after waking up and taking the bus to Laguna Vere, the Soviet-era outdoor public swimming pool for a swim, a good part of her mornings were spent mopping the floors of her apartment, including the small square tiles of the balcony in an effort to keep her lungs and belongings clean.

She was proud of her home, her past, her ability to maintain her very thin frame, her relative health, and her sense of connected independence and moral righteousness – This all despite the fact that in her constant comparisons of herself with other women that she knew, she placed herself below them in a scaled sense of matriarchal responsibility. It was as if, because she lived alone and maintained her own home, she somehow did not embody the same kind of sovereign authority over it as, say, the memory of her mother might have. Yes, she knew how to

shop for honey (*tapli*), but she never actually did, because her aunts and women cousins, in their practiced provisioning for their own families, always remembered to gift Ketevan with a few kilos of it. She knew how to make preserved fruits (*muraba*), because she watched when her mother and when her "gifted" cousin Nino made it, but she never actually had to do it herself, since someone would always bring a few jars from each new supply over for her. One of Ketevan's favorite things to talk about was watching Nino and her assiduous labor of grinding down walnuts (*nigozebi*) or hazelnuts (*txilebi*) bought from a trusted grocer or from someone selling good quality produce at the outdoor market for a reasonable price. Nino would then, "by hand" (*xelit*), remove the stone from each white cherry before stuffing them one by one with the walnut paste, later covering them with cups of sugar, a splash of cognac, and let them sit before cooking. Folded into these stories of beloved alimentary labor, Ketevan reminded me that her cousin worked hard and that it took a toll on her body: "Can you imagine her hands, moving so quickly and making so much of this *muraba*," as she gestured and pretended to be handling each cherry one by one.

The implied tediousness and strain of this work translates into a food object of luxurious if not decadent material presence – a ripe fruit that absorbs added sugar and expands its own sweetness and, on top of that, filled with the thick texture of walnut paste – an added flourish that is not common to other *muraba*, homemade or store-bought. Ketevan's craft accrues a special meaning and ontological status when narrated as something she did, for the most part, when her children were young, and her household was filled with their and her husband's demanding presences during the hardships of the 1990s.

During my fieldwork, among interlocutors of varied ages, when people talked about food objects in the present, stories of extreme scarcity in the 1990s were very often invoked. These

stories of scarcity were inevitably told with some memory of mothers and/or grandmothers being able nevertheless to provide for their entire families, as if they had been able come up with food, as a source of meaningful sustenance, from their own craft and expertise as matriarchs rather than, or in addition to, an ability to manage exchange relationships and networks. Yes, a matriarch's connection to the countryside and/or personal networks and exchange (*blat*) relationships helped, during the 1990s; sometimes, mainly when I talked to older women who were once part of the Soviet bourgeoisie, the memory of the state as embodied in the figure of the former Soviet official-turned-Georgian-President Shevernadze was central. According to these narrations, the Shevernadze regime made moments of provisioning and middle-class normalcy (kerosene for heat, street lights that worked, produce there at the markets) possible during that troubled time. These women remembered the world of apartment living at that time as one in which neighbors knew and cared about other neighbors and would share, trade, give, gift, take, borrow, and return food objects – raw ingredients like sugar and salt, as well as finished foods - as needed. In these stories, these circumstances of sociality almost invariably invoked the figure of the matriarch who, remembered through the eyes of her intimately familiar, if not captive, audience, ultimately found it within herself to keep her family from going hungry. What is this commonly-recognized and uniquely embodied quality of being able to produce something from nothing, to materialize at least sustenance if not complete well-being, unless it is some form of legibly embodied, authoritative form of sovereign power?

Matriarchal authority, the life force of food provisioning, bears the burdens and glories of managing the excesses and shortages of the proverbial table. If men are expected to "provide"

for their *families* as patriarchs,[21] women "provision" the *bodies* that constitute families and thus the very substance of their livelihood(s). Providing for a family (*ojaxis uzrunvelyopa,* where *uzrunvelyopa* is the verbal noun including the indirect object marker "u" - "the providing for" and *ojaxis,* genitive singular for family) is assumed to be a man's responsibility, but can be used, though it not often is, when talking about a woman. In contrast, the word for a woman in charge of provisioning for the household is *diasakhlisi* (manager of the house(hold)), and while Georgian does not have gender distinctions, *diasakhlisi* is exclusively female. Moreover, *diasakhlisi* is more capacious in its meaning than *ojaxis uzrunvelyopa.* If someone says "she is a good manager of the house" (*kargi diasakhlisia*), this phrase can and usually does means several things at once, but it is always specific to a woman and to her home. It is something like the English word "housekeeper" or "homemaker," but less bourgeois, enclosed, and anachronistic in its implications: She is organized. Her house is clean. Her kids are fed. She is a good cook. Her home is not chaotic. She manages everything and everyone, time and space. She works hard. Her matriarchal authority is discretionary and does not necessarily call attention to itself while it *acts* within the worlds of the home and market.[22]

In their public theatrics, as *tamadas* and strongmen, men-as-patriarchs are allowed, if not expected, to be excessive; it is understandable and often even good if they eat and drink too

[21] The Georgian expression, *ojaxs kargad uvlis* (S/he tends to/cares for his family well), can refer to either a man or a woman, and the verb *uvlis* (s/he tends to) is also commonly used to refer to caring for non-human animate beings, like dogs (*dzaglebs uvlis*).

[22] A woman who is not a mother or wife can also be a *kargi diasakhlisi,* though she will most likely refer to herself in that way, rather than being recognized as such by women who have families and who consider themselves, and those like them, to be "real" *diasakhlisebi* (plural). Providing for one's family (*ojaxis uzrunvelyopa)* or taking good care of one's family (*ojaxs kargad uvlis)* implies a more specific kind of interface, more akin to the English "breadwinner": S/he provides *things* (food, money, medicine, a roof over their heads, a yard) for their family; s/he raises the family (but again, it can also be a dog, or a garden) so that it can physically grow, develop, and, if they do it "well," flourish.

much, or collect mistresses, or overspend at the casino once in a while. As Metzo argues in her work on alcoholism in contemporary Russia (e.g. 2009; see also Petryna 2003 and Raikhel 2016), it is different for women, especially for matriarchs. Women-as-matriarchs must manage excesses while they themselves cannot visibly or publicly embody them. In other words, they must manage shortages and negatively-valued excesses, within and in relation to both themselves and others.

The quality is something Ketevan does not fully embody, as is implied in her stories valorizing those women who do. For example, when I first arrived for one of my stays, Ketevan's friend, a fifty or sixty-something year old named Manana was staying in the bedroom next to mine. She had been there for a month already, and she would stay there for several more. When Manana was not present, Ketevan often said that her friend wanted to lose weight. Ketevan herself, who was dealing with post-menopausal osteoporosis and, I suspected, some form of malnourishment that came with living on a very small income, was hyperaware of her thin frame, something that she seemed to assume her friends, all heavier than her, envied. In turn, some of these friends/frenemies, a few of whom I was very close with through other networks, would roll their eyes when I suggested they come to visit Ketevan more often, sometimes telling me that she is "so annoying" and suggesting that they have better things to do. Manana was not one of these frenemies. I did not see her very often, as she was usually at one of her now-married children's homes or country cottages (sing. *dacha* – the Russian word is commonly used in Georgian for this), but she seemed very kind and enjoyed Ketevan's company.

About a month into that stay in her home, Ketevan and I were at her dining room table, eating some tea cookies she or I had bought at the local convenience shop, which she referred to

by the owner's name, *Zurastan* (lit. Zura's place). I was drinking instant coffee and she was steeping some herbal preparation in a ceramic mug, a glass saucer covering the top to keep the nutrient-rich steam in. Her small radio was on in the living room, set as usual to a station that played her favorite classic jazz and R&B music. Within a description of herself as the beneficiary of the generosity of others, she told a story about Manana's heroic self-sufficiency:

> My friend in the Ministry of Culture has the tickets for me for 30 lari and they sell for 200 easily, which is impossible for me. I love jazz. We went to Warsaw, me and my friend, in 1988. To see Stevie Wonder. We screamed, sang, and danced the whole night. About 10 years ago, my friend she surprised me with Ray Charles tickets at the Opera. Shevernadze was there with his wife. We had so many parties at our home, when my parents were alive and when I worked at the Ministry. In the 1990s, now and then the table was excellent: *lobiani* [stewed beans], *khachapuri* [cheese-filled bread], wine… People would bring whatever was needed. During Shevernadze's time it was a lot better, there was a middle class.
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> You just have to see Manana and how she cooks. Wait until she is here again, she is just now at her daughter's house helping her. She goes to her kids and grandkids and comes here to stay with me for quiet and to relax, while they are renovating her home. She cooks Megrelian style [northwestern region of Georgia], with all the special spices. She learned to cook so fast, because of all her kids and responsibilities. She was eighteen when she married and her husband was ten years older so she had to learn fast.
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> She cooks and chops onions so fast it is something [laughing], I just watch her, I cannot believe it. Her life story is extraordinary, she had a very. tough. life. It is a story made for a screenplay, because there is a lack of good plots now and everyone now is looking for a good story. This was in 1992. Manana and her family were ordered one day to leave Gali [a town in southern Abkhazia] in three hours. She had three kids and had to leave in, three hours! Three hours, and she had three kids. They had a life in Abkhazia what could they take with them in three hours? They can't take the house. They can't take the ground. Can you imagine? You have everything you WANT: tangerines, apricot trees, and then they had to go to Moscow. [At this point I kept trying to ask who "they" were, exactly, making Manana flee? The Russians, but how would Ketevan describe this? She wouldn't say and kept talking over me as was her wont. At the moment this point did not seem to concern her, and I was expecting this to be a narrative about Russian aggression at least in part. It was not at all.]
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> They went to Moscow and everything was okay because her father could make his dairy products still [*matsoni* – yogurt, which Ketevan buys for a lari per kilo, in glass jars, every few days from an old lady who comes to her door and collects Ketevan's used jars. It was night and we had just finished eating a bit of this, which Ketevan says she craves all the time but cannot eat too much because it is very healthy, but it is not good to eat too much of it]. So they got by okay. They lived in the suburbs of Moscow.

The trope of life uprooted in Abkhazia is common in Tbilisi, with all my interlocutors knowing and/or identifying with the remembered process of forceful displacement during the

early 1990s. Abkhazia figures as a lost, beloved, and ever-giving land remembered as "home;" lush and green, on Georgia's northwest border with the Black Sea. Displaced Abkhazians who identify as Georgian and live in Tbilisi share a way of talking about their lost homes in Abkhazia in terms of the gardens they once had. Many spoke of their orchards, vegetable gardens, and vineyards as well cared for and tended, but more so as abundant, colorful, delicious, and fragrant materializations of vegetation natural and specific to Abkhazian land. These narratives of hardship perhaps not surprisingly include family troubles and disorder – mainly in the form of wives losing husbands to either death or to migrations out of the country, most often Russia, for work. Women were often left having to find ways to work outside the home and care for their children in Tbilisi, and many independent grocers, which I discuss more below, share this story.

Of relevance in Ketevan's invocation of disruption is the way in which she describes Manana and her family as having lost their materially abundant homeland, and, through her family's resilience, in part thanks to her father's yogurt business, being able to start over. Ketevan's focus is on Manana and her skilled ability to "learn quickly" the responsibilities of being a wife and mother, evidenced in her food practices, which, through the metonymic trigger of us sitting at her dining room table over food objects that Ketevan did not make but bought, form an undercurrent for this entire story, in that Ketevan herself did not have such an experience.

In addition, narratives of now lost Abkhazian land as plentiful, fertile, and unique, the *terroir* of Georgia's plentiful land frequently figured in other ways, in my conversations with matriarchs and other Georgians, as a source of food materializations that nurture and sustain a shared body politic. This Georgian collective is more like an elemental *human organizm* than an ethno-nationalist identity. I have many ethnographic examples of this, but for the sake of space

and time I will limit my discussion to two and a half.

On New Year's Eve, after I visited Ketevan for a supra she prepared for us, and then after she and I visited her neighbors for a more elaborate supra with their family, I visited my next-door neighbor and good friend Nino, on my way back home. It was around one in the morning, and she was home with her six-year old son Sandro, who was sleeping. Her husband, Tornike, was out with his friends. I explained that I was stopping by to thank her for a bottle of *tkhemali* (a savory, sour plum sauce and condiment that goes with many foods, and one of my favorite foods) that she had left near my door.

> Here, have some ideali [a cake made with condensed milk and one of my absolute guilty pleasures in the field]. I got this from Khatuna [one of the sisters who works in her parents convenience food shop at the apartment complex]. Sorry, my apartment is such a mess. [It's okay, I told her, you should see my place.] Here, sit with me at the table. [There were many plates, and leftover food from her New Year's supra of about four people.] Years ago, there would be so much more food on the table. Like five times what we have now. People prepared much more food. My mother made roast pig, turkey, so much. Now, the younger generation is trying to get rid of our traditions and religious life. I want Sandro to have religion. Not to be a fanatic, but to have some sense of respect.
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> [She offered me tea or coffee.] What is your preference with coffee, Turkish? [Instant, I said.] I quit smoking right when I became pregnant. It was easy for me. I prepared for pregnancy my whole life and as soon as I found out I was, I just wanted to take care of my baby. I breastfed for three and a half years [she says in a bit of an embarrassed way.] And I just couldn't smoke then either. And now, I don't want to. I want to be able to breathe. Have you been to Surami? It is where my village is [i.e. where her parents and/or grandparents are from and live, most likely.] We go every summer and the air there is…something special. You have to be there for at least twenty days to get the full benefits. Especially in May, there is something, in the pine buds, some special substance that is green and falls on the ground. People collect it and eat it. The air is full of it – The air is very unique there. Parents take their babies there, with eating problems, skin problems, and you can SEE that they get better with some time there.
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> I was in Latvia in the 1990s, I was in medical school there. I would call home and talk to my mom and I could not believe the nightmare that was happening. It sounded like a horror story…

I have heard this formulation of terroir and *organizm* many times during my fieldwork and from many different positions. The pattern points to a shared understanding of the Georgian body as a biological human body, an *organizm*, that finds sustenance, health, and vitality in ecologies and felicitous conditions of interrelation and intersubjective being. The land and its

unique properties are understood as healing, giving, and generous.

One Georgian man who was a taxi driver once told me that rather than eating out or buying processed foods, he and his family prefer to "eat food at home":

> I tell my wife and kids that if we have a choice, natural is better. It is better when you know what you are getting, when you get all the ingredients yourself. My wife prepares for me a glass of honey and water at night, and in the morning I drink it cold. The honey is good for the organizm, heart, everything. In May, is when we get our honey. It is hard to find good honey in most places, in Tbilisi. I get it from my village near Borjomi in May, when there are certain flowers blooming and bees fly. The honey from the flowers is excellent, very special, very healthy, and great for the body. I know Arabs who come here, and get a big block of honeycomb, and eat that, and supposedly it has so many benefits for health and the organizm. When I am there, in the summer, it is 28 degrees Celsius, and when it is sunny and not windy, I like to breathe in the air.

Similarly, one of my colleagues at the NFA, a young mother named Maiko, once told me and some other colleagues that she had just returned from spending several weeks with her husband and children in her village, in the region of Borjomi and Bakuriani, which is famous for its mineral waters and mountains. Georgians often complain that Borjomi water is bottled in both glass and plastic bottles, but that the glass-bottled water is exported to Russia, where it is sold in pharmacies, ground zero for medicinal foods, at very high prices. Georgians, on the other hand, are said to be the target market for the plastic-bottled water. Maiko was there visiting her extended family, and while there, took her daughter to one of the Soviet-built sanitariums at a mineral spring. She told us a story about the healing properties of this *terroir* as if it had just happened yesterday:

> To sell these mineral waters, and say they are good for therapy, you need a certificate from the Ministry of Health and from the National Food Agency. There are many waters like this in Georgia, but not in bottles and not sold. People in villages use it all the time: In Borjomi, Likani, Nabeglavi – It is deep in the ground, between ground levels and comes up with its pressure. And it is the purest, the cleanest. It naturally comes from the earth.
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> When I was younger, I went to a spring because I was being treated for allergies and skin problems. I saw a girl there. She had skin that was being treated because it was like…the same thing as fish scale. It covered her whole body. The only thing…'human'-like was her eyes and lips. No one was allowed to touch, or interact with her. I saw her three times over the years, while she was being treated.

The body-as-*organizm*, when it travels outside of Tbilisi to the salubrious sites of Georgia, finds healing and health in its proximity to *terroir*, or local qualities. In relation to Georgian lands, it absorbs, ingesting, breathes in, and drinks from a generous and plentiful land. In the context of Tbilisi, the body similarly exists and lives in relation to what this chapter has thus far argued is a moral-material, or ontological ecology of primarily matriarchal, authoritative practices that, like Georgian *terroir*, bear the qualities and burdens of sustaining, nurturing, and giving life. The world of food provisioning, here, constitutes materializations of sovereign reckoning and redemption on a daily basis, an ecology and horizon of moral sustenance in relation to an otherwise existentially vulnerable body politic.

The fusing of matriarchal authority and the ability to bring food sustenance into being during times of extreme precarity echoed across ethnographic situations in my fieldwork. For example, one summer afternoon, I met one of my best friends in April 9 Park (*9 aprilis baghi*), one of the smaller, airy corners of greenness hidden between the boxy modernist Rustavi movie theatre and stately, important buildings like the National Library, the Georgian Opera House, the National Museum, and amidst the often overwhelming heaviness of car exhaust, and crowded sidewalks where pedestrians had to maneuver around parked cars. During her break between Georgian language lessons for Euro-American students, we sat on one of the park's long wooden benches and she lit a cigarette. She told me that it was good that I did not smoke, and I said that I used to, and then, when New York City banned it in restaurants, bars, and clubs in the early 2000s, I smoked much less. She marveled at the federal structure of the United States:

> In America, different states have different laws. In some states, you can still smoke in places? I can't imagine. Each state is almost like a different country. It would be so nice to choose the place that agrees with you and how you live, and to live there. Here, it is depressing and everyone has the same…lifestyle/culture. Everyone is conservative and religious, and you have no independence. You have to be married, or live with your family. How can you know if you should marry someone if you don't live with them first? [This frustration with the popular

> conservativism of family life echoes conversations I had had with other informants in their thirties and twenties. One, a woman in her early twenties, explained to me that "You are not an adult unless you are married, here."]
>
> This park, do you know what it is called? [No I don't think so, I said] It is named after the 9 of April, 1989, there was a [political uprising – not clear in notes] against Russian [Soviets?] and Georgians were killed. Can you imagine in this place, that happening. Those days were very dark. [the Soviet period? I ask] No, the 1990s. The 1990s were like, ANOTHER WORLD! I can't imagine.
>
> I don't know how people survived. Many people didn't make it. People relied on their families, and villages [i.e. village family members, e.g. her grandmother] saved the cities at that time. The villages saved the cities. My grandmother in the village was able to provide food; if it wasn't for that they would not have made it. I don't know how my mom did it. She had 3 kids, ages 14, 7, 4: girl, girl, boy.
>
> If I was in my mom's place, we would not have survived. Because there was just no control, no certainty about the most basic things; electricity, no one ever knew when it'd go off, for how long, and when it'd come back.
>
> [Towards the end of our conversation I asked her, "Is it okay with you if I write this all down?" And explained how helpful and insightful everything she says is. She seemed surprised (but happy) that I asked this, as if she was expecting this, like, why wouldn't I write all this down?]

This memory of the 1990s was echoed on a mass scale a few months after this, when the popular Georgian film, *grdzeli nateli dgheebi*[23] (lit. Long Bright Days but it was marketed abroad and to English-speaking audiences with the English title of "In Bloom") was released and shown in Georgian movie theatres in 2013. Directed by Nana Ekvtimishvili and Simon Gross, the film takes place in 1992 in Tbilisi, during the first Abkhazian War with Russia and several months before the Georgian Civil War. It follows the daily life of two fourteen-year-old Georgian girls (Eka and Natia) as they navigate family life, romance, and friendships during this period of instability. Many English-speaking reviewers interpret the film through the filter of its English title: The film's depiction of these two girls is a coming-of-age allegory for a newly-independent Georgia: early post-Soviet; a "young" democracy.

I went to see the film on an October night with my friend Irina, her husband Giorgi, and another friend of theirs, a lawyer named Temo. Twenty years after the events of the film (my

[23] Georgian does not have capital letters.

friends had been around fourteen years old at that time), I was very interested in how they might identify, or not, with the story. The film was popular, and the eight pm showing we attended was eventually sold out. The story takes in the dark realism that captures daily life in Tbilisi seen through the lens of young female teenagers and their physical proximity to a masculinized context of casual urban warfare (e.g. the girls steal and nonchalantly carry around a gun; the "street" fights of their male counterparts carrying knives lead to lethal and tragic ends) and material scarcity (e.g. bread lines, electrical outages, shivering cold indoors). So I was taken aback that my friends and the other viewers in the crowded theatre did not seem distressed.

After the film, at Irina's house, I asked my friends what they thought of the iconic 1990s scene: a bread line. I was expecting another conversation that agreed: Yes, those times were awful, and here is what we remember. My friends, though, were disappointed with that scene, which, they felt, failed to capture the extreme uncertainty, trauma, and hunger of that time. Irina said that "this movie was more about [Georgian] families than about the '90s." Temo agreed: "It was a LOT tougher in the '90s, but this was more a story about these girls' experience." I wanted specifics: What neighborhood was it, exactly? My friends refused to give it much thought. "It was just a typical [*zogadi*] neighborhood." The family, the characters, they're just "typical": "Alcoholic father, grandmother cooking, and so on." Irina continued:

> Really the only thing there about the '90s was that they focused on bread and bread lines in the movie. [Irina and Temo get into a long and emotional argument about how hard food was to come by in those years, and whether one could in fact count on the regularity of a bread line, as the film implied. Irina argued that the availability of food, back then, was far more uncertain than Temo and the film were saying. Irina continued, repeating the story she had told me in the park:] My mother had three kids then: I was thirteen, my brother was seven, and my sister was three. This was a dark time. How she survived, I don't think I could do it. [Temo nods in agreement, that this was a dire situation for young families in particular]. My grandmother lived in the village-
>
> [Temo finishes the story:] Yes, because everyone knew and knows someone in the countryside, they were okay with food. [Irina finishes the commentary:] Now, outside of Tbilisi, in the villages people eat their own food. They don't need to go buy it. My grandmother, maybe she buys flour. But meat, dairy, fruits, and vegetables – she is all set. And on the weekends, out there, there are

> bazaars [indoor and/or outdoor markets of independent vendors], where people sell or trade their things – food and other things.

The experiential and historical specificity of the 1990s, as my friends remembered that time, was felt to be missing from this film, which, in its advertising and storylines, had been self-conscious in its being a depiction of the 1990s, ostensibly connected to a popular form of 1990s nostalgia believed to be present in Tbilisi at that moment. In my friends' co-narrations of the film just after seeing it, though, they were not particularly moved or impressed, and shrugged the story off as "typical" and ahistorical, insisting that the film's primary narrative machinery centered on social roles chronologically synchronic to ordinary Georgian life, rather than the experiential specificities of living with extreme shortage and uncertainty – an ontologically different situation than the present, a world in which the ability to "make something from nothing" translates to a situation where food objects are not necessarily scarce, but money and employment are. I will discuss this translation of the present into memories of the past in the next section. For now, in the present, "making something from nothing" vis a vis food objects constituted an act of generating and giving sustenance, of giving life to a shared body politic understood to exist in conditions of existential threat (outlined in Chapter 1) while intimately bound to both the opaque contingencies of elite political-economic interests and the intimately familiar but discretionary ability of familial (figured as matriarchal) authority to provide sustenance in conditions of extreme uncertainty.

The conversation on the film *grdzeli nateli dgheebi* moved so quickly from the still image of a crowded bread line, to an image of matriarchs scrambling to make ends meet, to an idealized pastoral of the present, wherein villagers are self-sustaining and "do not need to shop" for they have everything they need through self-provisioning and/or barter and other forms of exchange. Is this a kind of utopian dream of self-sustainability, like an underground bunker with

hoarded supplies in the middle of a prairie in the Midwestern United States? What do these memories of Tbilisi matriarchs scrambling and improvising to make ends meet, coupled with the image of a self-sustaining countryside, have to do with the predicaments, desires, and needs of those voicing these stories in the present? Living in the shadows of big personality, strongman-dominated political spectacle, as described in other chapters in this dissertation, and living with the existential threats like rumors of food dangers and the effects of geopolitical de-valuation, and feeling the absence of a sustained, coherent body politic like that remembered for the Soviet welfare state, those who tell these stories voice a predicament of legibility as far as a body politic is concerned. Imagined to exist in worlds of making something substantial from conditions of precarity, the present no longer includes the sense of acute shared experience of an absent state as in the past, and as traumatic as those times were. The present body politic, illegible as it is, exists between the family and the strongman, and the conditions of its being and becoming are a matter of a remembered subjection to and reckoning with a matriarchally-mediated, improvised repertoire of embodied ontological (re)production practices.

Reckoning with the present

Ketevan living alone in her Tbilisi apartment told me stories of near existential annihilation and redemption in the 1990s, especially when talking over, about, and in some relation to food. Manana's traumatic past of being forced out of Abkhazia, for example, was folded into Tbilisi's history of material shortages during the Civil War and its political traumas. Her own food practices, provisioning for herself, are of course just as ethnographically present, inhabiting the narrated "now" of Manana's past. If, in hers and other's narrations of the 1990s, matriarchs like mothers and grandmothers found ways to provide for their families in impossible conditions, present-day conditions of political and material impossibility leave those living in the

aftermath of the 1990s similarly in search of material sustenance, sovereign ontology, and vitalized bodily presence. But the grounds of these actions appear to my interlocutors as somehow incomplete, inadequate, and not fully of a recognized matriarchal character and authority.

For example, while Ketevan insisted that she did not have the skills and experiential memory of women like Manana and other matriarchs who had been able to sustain themselves and their families through impossible conditions of scarcity, she did enact the role of a kind of Georgian matriarch when she hosted younger Georgian and non-Georgian guests such as myself and my good friend Natia. Natia would visit Ketevan once every few months. She once stayed with Ketevan for several months, at a time when she was uncertain whether to marry her boyfriend, Ioane, Ketevan explained to me. When Natia would visit while I lived with Ketevan, Ketevan would seat us at the dining room table, and serve us coffee, tea, and cookies in the Soviet china she had inherited from her parents. (About a year or two after that, Ketevan would sell that set of china for extra money, when her medical expenses necessitated that decision.) When Ketevan first introduced us, she explained that we reminded her of each other, as we both appeared, as she put it, like deer caught in headlights and somehow fragile, but also educated, professional, and "good girls," as people in Georgia like to say about women they do not find disagreeable in various ways. It was clear, because she told us repeatedly, that she saw us as somehow in need of her guidance in matters of life, even if I for one did not really pay much attention to her aunt-like advice, for better or for worse.

Sometimes, in her enactments of provisioning experience and relative expertise, Ketevan would take me to shop for food in her neighborhood. As is common for most Tbilisi-based Georgian consumers, food shopping is not usually a one-stop thing to do. Rather, most

provisioners regularly (usually daily or every few days, depending on the product) and selectively visit different shops, shopkeepers, and street traders with whom and with whose products they are already familiar.

In this particular case, Ketevan and I stopped at a medium-sized grocery store that had recently opened on the ground floor of another apartment complex neighboring hers, where she heard, from close friends who lived nearby, that the prices were "the best around" and that the food products (especially dairy) were good quality, fresh, and "Georgian". Since this store was larger than the smaller independently-owned shops she also frequented, she did not know any of the sales staff, and there was a relatively large selection of inventory and branded goods to select from. We came to the yogurt section. Plain cow's milk yogurt (*matsoni*) is a staple of the Georgian diet. Recently at that time, shops of all sizes were carrying the popular Santa brand, which was marketed and labeled as "pure," "healthy," "natural" and "made in Georgia." During that year, a different brand of dairy foods, called "Eco-Foods," had joined the market and was also carried in these same shops, with the same kind of claims of wholesome goodness as Santa, but with a more overtly self-referencing image of "ecologically pure," "Georgian-produced" food.

Without a familiar shopkeeper to consult, Ketevan turned to me and asked which brand is better. I mentioned that I personally don't know about either, though I had my suspicions, based on things I had heard about these particular products from food safety friends who had lived in Tbilisi for a while. It was "common knowledge" to many experts and expats that these branded dairy goods were made with milk powder imported from Brazil, and then chemically reconstituted as liquid in Georgia (since that was much cheaper than transporting fresh milk across Georgian regions).

We did not buy yogurt there, and deferred the decision to a later time in our shopping trip. When we got to the smaller, local shop on the ground floor of her apartment building in the same complex, she followed the shopkeeper's advice and tried the Eco-Foods yogurt. In this instance, Ketevan, in contrast to a (neo)liberal ideal of a sovereign choosing consumer, recognized a "quality" food object mainly through the mediation of a trusted grocer. In the last section of this chapter, I will discuss this relationship between food shoppers and Tbilisi green grocers in a bit more detail, but for now, I wish to highlight that even though Ketevan valorizes someone like Manana as a matriarchal authority in provisioning, she herself can, and does, in her own way, embody this ability to provision and to locate "good" food objects according to the pathways of her well-traveled and familiar food networks. When she is hosting guests she considers "less than" skilled in this art of provisioning (e.g. Natia and myself), she provides food, hosts, and presides as a kind of a matriarchal figure, at the dinner table.

When provisioning is not always selfless: *Supras* in the present

Much academic writing and classical Russian literature focusing on Georgian and/or Soviet culinary history has centered on the ritualized institution of the *supra*, or feast (e.g. Manning 2012, Goldstein 1993). In her classical work on the topic, Goldstein writes:

> The Russian poet Alexander Pushkin once commented that every Georgian dish is a poem…Pushkin likely appreciated not only the transcendent flavors of Georgian foods, but also the fervor with which they are savored. Georgians display passion in both the preparation and consumption of a meal. And to the uninitiated, a Georgian feast, or *supra,* can be overwhelming…Many first-time visitors are unaware that participation at the Georgian table calls for the skillful exercise of moderation in the face of excess. 13

When experientially and representationally captured in all its elaborate materialization, as on a formal occasion (a high holiday, funeral, or wedding, for example), the ways in which food is expected to be eaten, and wine drunk, can be overwhelming for people, including for Georgians.

There were daily occasions of meals as social events, on a less grandiose scale, almost

every day I was in the field. My interlocutors referred to small gatherings, most often over dinner and sometimes involving just two or three people, often at someone's home but also at restaurants, as *supras*. The adherence to classical ritual structure tended to vary generationally and according to socio-economic positioning. Gatherings of the generation of the former Soviet bourgeoisie, for example, were regularly peppered with toasts informally led by a *tamada* (toastmaster). If such an occasion consisted of all women, one woman (not necessarily the hostess) would take the initiative to act as *tamada*. Even in a small, informal, and often drunken gathering of men and women, and depending on the histories and relationships between the participants, a particularly extroverted woman matriarch would initiate and administer the rounds of toasts. *Supras* with my younger interlocutors, those in their forties, thirties, and younger, however, rarely involved toasting. But even so, I have heard these meals referred to as *supras.* The term invokes a shared sense of "event" and intimacy through the pleasures, the shared pasts, and the implied co-inhabitations of time, space, and moralized embodiment. The medium of experiencing particular foods together infused these meals with a sense of ritualized meaning-making in the time-space of hungry, ordinary life.

In what follows, I will offer a few accounts of ordinary *supras*. Structured around the varied positions and articulations of matriarchal authority as articulated through stories of the 1990s, I demonstrate what "making something from nothing" means, in practice, in the present. In contrast to a maternal ideal in which provision of food enacts selfless care, claims to a moral authority that stands in some relation to the matriarchal sphere can be an infantilizing burden. As Ma writes on the struggles involved in privatized, domestic care (*guan*) of mental health patients in China, such maternal provisioning can even be cruel, at times (2014). Across these enactments, the claimed and/or demonstrated ability to "make do with" very limited means is

shared while also radically varied across different positions.

Ketevan's depiction of herself as less skilled and lacking in matters of provisioning and authoritative matriarchal femininity, in comparison to someone like Manana, was reinforced when women of her social circle who were her "frenemies" showed that they did not respect her. One of these frenemies was another "aunt" figure for me of many years during my fieldwork, named Salome. Salome knew Ketevan because the latter had once worked with, and was friends with, Salome's ex-husband. Maybe a certain mutual distrust and hostility structured the friendship from the beginning, but Salome certainly did not help matters with her present behavior. She only visited Ketevan when, she made it clear, she had some spare time; and when she was there she gave the clear impression that she did not want to be there and that Ketevan was somehow "boring" her. This implicit criticism of Ketevan recurred in encounters I had with Salome when I would prepare a Georgian dish. If Ketevan was there too, the situation would be even worse, because it was a chance for Ketevan to enact matriarchal authority by aligning herself with Salome's critiques of my cooking ("Oh, see, she doesn't know how to boil water.")

At one point in my fieldwork when I was not living with Ketevan, Salome came to visit me in my studio apartment. I prepared the seasonal Georgian dish, *ajapsandali* (stewed eggplant and tomatoes) for her. She knew that Ketevan had tried to show me how to prepare several easy, day-to-day Georgian dishes such as *ch'aadi (*corn bread), *lobio* (bean stew), and *kitri da pomidori (*cucumber and tomato salad), and, of course, I was certainly no Georgian matriarch. Still, the dish I made was not bad, and I was, by that time, no stranger to making it. Salome tried it, and I knew her well enough to see that she did not find it very distasteful. "So this is your own little creation, isn't it?" she said. I responded that, yes, I guess maybe I don't follow the recipes precisely, but I've never seen anyone prepare this with a recipe, and doesn't everyone have their

own special "craft" (*xeloba*) in making it? "I don't like that you added potatoes to this. In my family we do not do that because everyone knows that potato is 'cheap filler.'" Well do you like it or not, I asked. "Yes, yes. But it is just not how I make it."

She then pointed to the glass jar of salad that she had brought for me, and bragged that it was a special recipe, her daughter-in-law's family's recipe, for a beet, potato, " This is an excellent salad," she said, "and it is very special. I have this left over from our supra at their home, and wanted to bring it for you." I appreciated this because I could then have the recipe in my repertoire, as the salad was delicious. At that time, combining fruits and animal products like meats, cheese, and honey indexed a cosmopolitan approach to eating amongst my Georgian aunt-figures and their families.

More significant, here, is the fact that bringing me a glass jar of leftover salad was, for Salome, not so much an act of generosity or particular care, as it was something akin to how Ketevan, despite her very limited monetary means, always found "her own way" to prepare dishes and proudly share them with me. Ketevan told me that she likes to share, and this is how everyone survived in the 1990s. I will discuss this concept of "sharing" and "giving," and what it means for a political ontology of constituting the body politic soon, but the production of what are recognized as *quality* food objects from limited means (whether a special portion left over from a particular dinner party and the accompanying story to frame it, or produced from the kitchen of a nearly impoverished woman living alone) are not necessarily acts of selfless care or personalized affection (though those elements need not be absent). This kind of sharing demonstrates that the ability to provision tends to demonstrate a form of sovereign control – vis a vis matriarchal authority – rather than some simpler kind of motherly loving care.

Claiming her own matriarchal authority in the voice of a present-day mother of two sons

remembering her experience during the 1990s, Salome would similarly, on many occasions throughout the years, tell me about the "dark years" of the nineties, when she was a young mother to two sons under ten years of age and her husband had just left her to marry another woman. Maintaining her household alone, she found ways to make "good food" for herself and her sons when it seemed impossible to get enough to eat at all. In the summers, I would travel with her and her other women friends to the Black Sea coast or to one of the mountain regions in northwest or northeast Georgia (Svaneti and Kazbegi, respectively). There she often procured chicken or fish from one of the large bazaars, and negotiated with either the owner of the hostel where we stayed or with a local restaurant to arrange for the meats to be cooked in their kitchens.

She loved to organize and control these excursions through her contacts. The trips usually consisted of eight to ten women and one or two men hired to drive everyone from Tbilisi to the location in a minivan, or *marshrutka*, since, in the Georgian vehicular division of labor, driving for long distances (i.e. over half an hour outside of Tbilisi) was something that men could do better, and were supposed to do. At the seaside, we would sit on the hot patio of whatever guest house she found for us, most likely next to Russian, Ukrainian, or other Georgian tourists, and eat, for days, the leftover roast chicken or grilled and breaded fish that she managed to procure for us at the best possible price from the bazaar: "See, you don't need anything, to make such a delicious meal! I can make an excellent meal, with just eggs, cheese and bread. I fry it and it is delicious." She wanted us to see that she knew exactly what it meant, and what was required, to provide for her family at that time, and to be a source of sustenance: "At that time there was no work, and no money. People walked for miles if they did work because the buses and trains didn't work. If it was winter, there was so little kerosene to heat the home. *If* you had 5 lari, that would be 2 days of surviving for a small family."

The boundaries between a "purely" market exchange (Salome buying the fish at the market in which she was a stranger), gift exchange (Salome offering us the fish through her spirit in the gift object, the special way(s) in which she worked to find us the best piece of fish for the best price possible, and then to either prepare it, or negotiate to have it prepared, for us), and a kind of *blat*, or *guanxi* relationship (theorized as relationship-making more so than an "exchange," in the (post) Soviet and Chinese worlds, respectively, and as if these distinctions are relevant to, or helpful in understanding these practices as they unfold.[24] Farquhar and Lai make a similar point in a paper on soups: Embodied in the market-stall food that a craftswoman in the culinary arts offers, sells, and gives, all at the same time, with her uniquely special dish, when she really doesn't *have* to, is a sense that that she *wants* to, as if she were "a generous giver of quite unexpected and unsolicited gifts" (2014, 2). Certainly, in performing and claiming authority through provisioning, various forms of exchange and inferred intentions constitute a single act. But the point here is the discretion with which a person recognizes and shares alimentary goodness.

This ability to make something from nothing, repeatedly invoked in the present, is not limited to women. A few weeks before my meeting with Irina in April 9 Park, she and I met Natia, who by coincidence turned out to be a mutual friend of ours, at the apartment Natia had just moved into with her new husband, Ioane. Ioane, a medical sociologist like Natia, baked a large trout with lemon and vegetables for us. We all sat in the living room of the small, one-bedroom apt they had inherited from his aunt. We sat on the couch and chairs around the coffee table, as we helped ourselves to the fish, homemade Georgian white wine, and fresh store-bought bread. The topic of the 1990s came up over dinner, when Ioane explained how he learned to

[24] See, e.g., Ledeneva 1996/7 and Kipnis 1997.

cook fish. A conversation of shared memories and experiences from my friends' early teen years in Tbilisi unfolded as Ioane explained that he had learned how to prepare fish because, for once, at his insistence, he rather than his mother had gone out to the store in the midst of the scarcity and violence of that time:

> In 1993/4 [not clear in notes], there were tanks going up Rustaveli Avenue [Tbilisi's main street] and they were just shooting everywhere. During that time there were so many governments and so much war. We had Gamsakhurdia, Kitovani, Ioseliani, in like one year, and they all had their random interests. Finally they all appealed to Shervernadze, who was in Russia, to come here and lead. [Discussion about Shevernadze's strange appeal as a postsocialist political identity: While he was a "real Soviet bureaucrat," the media and political elites in "the West" still liked him and found him sympathetic, including in Poland and Ukraine].
>
> At that time there were still these strange Soviet type stores, with random things in them: some frozen fish, maybe, and other things. So that is what I got…
>
> [either Irina or Ioane remembers that there was never any electricity, or kerosene for heat. They listened to the radio to tell them when/if the electricity would arrive. The others remember this too, very well:] It was announced on the radio, [laughing]: "Box number 9 has power." And no one ever knew where this box was, but it was some place on the electricity grid that always had power! Then, the term "Box number 9" came to mean in general something opaque, mysterious. Everyone would use this to describe something that exists but stands in like a black box for unknown sources, variables, influences.

In this narration, Ioane, whose actions are still done in some relation to the matriarchal authority in his home (his mother should not go out into the dangerous streets so he does), finds some frozen fish amidst the "strange Soviet"-type shops and then, in contrast to his father, who ostensibly already knows how,[25] he tries his hand at preparing the fish, and teaches himself. The juxtaposition of familial provisioning / strong man leaders / black boxed power availability "out there" – a narrative form that emerged in the conversation between Ioane, Irina, Natia, and me at a living room coffee table – figures one of the great existential puzzles of the contemporary

[25] For knowledge of procuring and preparing fish and animal meats is the man's domain, per themselves and their womenfolk, especially when the meats are roasted or barbequed and served outdoors, not at an ordinary family dinner at the kitchen table, or prepared using sauces and all the elaborate table settings of the *supra,* which would fall under the domain of the feminized matriarch.

Georgian "body politic" and its search/desire for some form of vitalized self-figuration, or a livable collective self-understanding, a *modus vivendi*.

Ioane narrates himself as something like the opposite of the *tamada* presiding at a *supra*. In this story, he is not the masculinized authority figure sitting at the head of the table and reciting classical, well-formulated, practiced toasts that work to encourage, regulate, and calibrate the consumption of food and drink around the table. And unlike the standards and protocols of EU- and WHO-designed food safety regulation, materialized in the "expert" (i.e. politically "neutral") stance of the Georgian National Food Agency (NFA), these narrations of provisioning in times of trauma are asking: How is it possible to be "neutral" when food and sustenance are involved, given their inseparability from moral economies? While the four of us at that table embodied, perhaps, a non-normative version of Georgian sociality, and though Ioane's story of finding his own way to roast fish might also be read as a meta-commentary on the fact that at this dinner party, *he* rather than his wife prepared the food for us, there is something in the way that the 1990s is invoked here as a situation of extreme scarcity and uncertainty that echoed across ethnographic contexts during my fieldwork. Narratives of past Georgian survival exceed those that assert progressive, cosmopolitan identities. National identity, in the form of a coherent sense of "Georgianness" in its varied meanings, is not exactly the articulated end of this sustained body politic, either, though this quality of nationalized identification does of course appear in these conversations, as it does in the world of the food vendor, which I will discuss in more detail in the last section of this chapter.

Recurrent memories of a violently chaotic 1990s and the trope of making something from nothing, a metonymic articulation of present-day practices in the narrated "now", point to a shared sense of a redemptive, sustainably healing potential in the public body, constituted of

shared sites and valuations of provisioning, even if a public body *politic* – a legibly collectivized and living body in relation to political power – is felt to exist, but beyond legibility.

Ioane was being a good son in bravely venturing outside to find food in a time of civil war and existential threat, and he was being a "good" husband/friend by preparing the meal for us, all women. His comments echoed Ketevan, in her story of Manana, who did not narrate the story as one of Russian invasion or Georgian survival but rather as a tale of an intimately familiar sociality and matriarchal ability as generative of ontological being and existential sustenance itself. Ioane's, Irina's, and Natia's co-narration of 1990's precarity centers on the food object itself that sat before us: a roasted trout that embodied the act of sustaining life and being, a food that Ioane – through his positioning in relation to his mother, who could not venture out – had found and cooked despite the impossibility of "normal" markets at that time ("strange Soviet style shops") and in the context of a politicized, governmental authority like the once-Soviet welfare state.

This instance of Ioane's ability to provide alimentary sustenance, in a relatively masculine version of making something from nothing and finding the materialization of not just living, but sustained, morally-substantive survival-as-"good" living, stands in jarring contrast to another gathering, or supra, that I attended at the home of one of my aunt-figure Salome's male friends of several decades. Tengo, a freelance taxi driver and self-styled "businessman," at least partly exemplified what a different taxi driver once told me was a crisis of employment and livelihood among Georgian men: "There are only three options for Georgian men to find work: taxi driver, construction, and selling at the market (*bazari*)." I tended to take mass transit – buses, subways, and *marshrutkas* – wherever I went, to the point that I knew the *marshrutka* routes better than many of my Georgian friends, much to their delight. But when I did take taxis,

it was so common to hear, as in much of the post-socialist world, that the driver was actually an engineer, or historian, or sociologist, or some other kind of expert among the former Soviet intelligentsia.

As my women interlocutors would have it, Tengo was, as it were, eaten alive by the 1990s, and perhaps had suffered decades before that. He had long been something of a "street guy" figure: hyper-masculine in his self-identification with the rebellious, "dark" side of Tbilisi life. He was known for his drug use, his aspirations to either rock-stardom or racecar driving, and his quick-to-anger, knife-wielding persona, angling for a good fight only governed by the anything-goes, intoxicated, and chaotic "rules of the street." At the time of my fieldwork, Tengo was about sixty years old. He lived alone (usually), in a small and un-renovated two-bedroom Khrushchyovka apartment, which he had inherited from his parents, in the Saburtalo neighborhood of Tbilisi. Men like Tengo struggle to find the money to put gas in their cars, pay their bills, and maintain their homes, but they often have two mobile phones. They say it is because they have so much "business" to take care of, but of what this "business" consists no one knows, and is really anybody's guess. When I met him he was going through a major depression because in addition to his car being broken down and his not being able to afford its repair, he recently spent some inherited money on a second car, a used luxury brand which he could not afford to maintain. In addition, he could not find work that he deemed worthy of him, he was alienated from his family, and he was dealing with a worsening addiction to alcohol and to prescription opioids.

In the beginning of the evening, Salome, her best friend from childhood, Gvantsa, and Tengo's life-long friend Givi were all sitting at Tengo's dining room table. Givi was living with Tengo at the time, having also recently spent money on a second car after selling an apartment he

inherited, so now he was not able to afford his own place to live. The table was empty, except for Soviet-era crystal shot glasses being used for the wine that Salome had asked me to bring. Sitting at the table, our host Tengo appeared to be falling asleep. He was preoccupied with the music playing in the background, his CD, DVD player and plasma television, connected to an elaborate sound system, alternately blasting a Pink Floyd performance from the 1980s and other music this group of friends had hung out to in the 70s and 80s, including Lionel Ritchie and Michael Jackson. The hopelessness that filled the room certainly marked a "low point" in my several years of knowing Tengo. Remembering this gathering, it reminds me of an occasion when a different aunt-figure of mine, an older matriarch named Ludmila, would look out her window at several men who congregated and drank all day on the road near a convenience shops. "Look at them! And their '*supra*'!"

That evening at Tengo's Salome led us out of the apartment and we went scrambling to all the food stands on the street level of his apartment complex. We had to find food for the supra: tomatoes and cucumbers, bread, cheese, prepackaged deli meat, fresh fruit, and Georgian chocolate. Salome was frustrated and disappointed, but obviously not surprised, with the dearth of provisions and preparation in the apartment. As overbearing and demanding as some of her friends and relatives found her, she had decades of experience picking up the pieces after disappointments, "having her heart shattered," as when her husband left her. Many times after that she found ways to support herself and her children, especially through her enterprising and charismatic ability to find loyal Georgian language students (not necessarily including myself) from the former Soviet world and Euro-America who paid her well for very little actual language learning. She also negotiated and worked within her network of contacts to organize larger purchases. And, as she always put it, she tried to "build people up," men and women both, by

"supporting" them with what she described as not only a "positive energy" (i.e., loving support and seeing the best in people and situations) but also monetary loans and other forms of material support. Her self-identification with a "positive energy" may have been a recent development in her life around that time, but this was not just self-congratulation; others who knew her well would say that her energy was a steady-burning and enviable inner will and strength that could make impossible situations work, though often, no doubt, somehow to her advantage.

In terms of food objects and the crafting of moral authority, what does it mean that Salome and even Ketevan can find and know a "good" food object, when someone like Tengo and the alcoholic men in the courtyard with their "*supra*" can't?[26] As a materialization of (potential) social and emotional sustenance and nourishment, food objects engage in an ontological politics. The provisioning of which Salome and Ketevan were proud realizes the sovereign authority to sustain life, and all sorts of bodies are sites of a shared, living, vital will not only to survive but to live "well," as Ketevan says she does, and according to a shared sense of authoritative discretion in recognizing what constitutes a "good" food in the first place.

Liveligoods

As the discussion up to this point has demonstrated, providing quality sustenance with food is a practice, or quality itself, that is embodied in varied forms of matriarchal authority (e.g. Ketevan, Manana, and Salome) and its storied ability to generate something from nothing (or very little). The forms and contexts of exchange in which provisioning happens are not limited to barter/trade (i.e. via the Soviet socialist institution of *blat*), gifting, or shopping. The last

[26] Floundering is not just province of men, just as provisioning is not solely the domain of women – Of course I have overheard judgements over alcoholic / drug addicted women, but those conversations were too limited and specific to a very few interlocutors in my fieldwork for me to speak in any depth about them.

section of this chapter will consider the ways in which a particular form of food market – the independent green grocers at their street stands and also in zones at bazaars – is, compared to also-popular large grocery chains like the French Carrefour and the Georgian Smart – a site of co-constitution in this morally charged world of embodying a body politic. This section will discuss "bodies" (those of my interlocutors in relation to food objects and foods in relation to my interlocutors). How might "they" relate to, and constitute, the sense of a somehow illegible, unfigurated body politic– rendering Georgian society as a collectivity of shared moral vitality/sustenance –while at many times figured according to the structuring differentiations, identifications, and subjectivities of nationalism and Georgian nation-ness, still lives in an unsettled way, somewhere between the spectacles and public personas of strongman politicians and intimately familiar domestic life?

The improvisational way in which those claiming and embodying a form of matriarchal provisioning authority actually do recognize qualities of goodness and worthlessness, or even danger, in food objects lends itself to contradictory and paradoxical formulations across ethnographic situations and sites of provisioning. For example:

1. As discussed later in this chapter and in other chapters, the regular, impassioned assessments of tomatoes and other fruits – here, I argue, expressions of a perceived vulnerability and fragility of the masculine and feminine Georgian body and the body politic itself. These assessments are mapped according to geopolitical modes of relative valuation, wherein "Georgia" is understood as without value, or with very little value, in comparison to other sites like Russia, Europe, or the U.S. In such formulations, often occurring in the same kitchen and in the same conversation, my interlocutors would value recently-purchased in-season tomatoes as "Georgian" and

"good," pointing out that they were "not pretty" but "not plastic,"' and "natural." And at the same time, the same person might lament that these Georgian tomatoes were much better years ago, before "our farmers" were forced to cultivate "our tomatoes" by using Turkish seeds, thus bringing the very ontological status of the tomato as "Georgian" into question. Or, someone might later say that s/he does not actually and completely believe it, when vendors claim that their tomatoes are "truly Georgian."

2. Identification of "medicine" and "food" with one another (see e.g. Farquhar and Lai 2013; Solomon 2016). Both ingestible objects embody – in this world of morally authoritative provisioning – the potential to either harm or nurture the body-as-*organizm*. Like a fresh fruit still hanging from or just picked from a tree, the delicate fragility of bodily exposure to varied ecologies of exposure, difference, similarity, surrounding, absorbing, sustaining, poisoning, threatening, multiplication, and maintaining the living body is somewhere between growth and decay.

   One might say that the "highest" or most valuable form of food, in this world of valuation, is of the medicinal kind: raw garlic for flus, onion for colds, "good" mineral (and even tap) waters for sustenance, mother's milk for maternal nourishment and love.

   Still, in these formulations, the categories of "natural" and "unnatural" often bleed into one another if they are not completely reversed, or negated in their usage. For example, when giving and/or talking about a pharmacy-bought medicine for ailments like a stomach flu, a few of my Georgian friends would explain how safe the

medicine is "because I gave it to my own children" or grandchildren. I don't have the space to discuss this in detail here in this chapter, but the child's body vs the adult's body vs the senior's body are invoked as differentiated materializations of vulnerability/absorption/sustenance/compromise. In this way, the ingredient list, legible to and often read by my Georgian interlocutors, might contain "non-natural"-sounding ingredients, but, in its seeming dominant constitution as "natural" or "safe," the medicinal object will be described as "natural."

3. As the potential effects on the body-as-*organizm* are varied according to the food objects at hand, the same word (e.g. cancer and "cancer"), as a name for what the bodily effect is, is often used in the same way but with different denotational meaning. In the previous chapter, this happened when, in the first group of rumored food dangers that were mapped to geopolitical zones of threat and alliance (danger and safety, respectively), supposedly radioactive fruits from, for example, Ukraine, resulted in higher than normal rates of thyroid cancer in Georgia over time. Cancer "2" then appeared in the second set of rumors around GMO foods as a more vague threat of organic growth in the form of tumors or illegible life itself, but with the same word – "cancer" – naming the perceived threat.

   In differentiated renderings of bodies and their relationship to ecologies of threat/safety, and/or threat/living sustenance, the potential effects on the *organizm* are – depending on the authoritative stance in which they are claimed – themselves multiple and can appear contradictory or even irrational in their voicing.

4. Finally, for now, a similar paradox in invoking sites of origin as dangerous but then, in the same conversation sometimes, as the source of "good" food objects, emerges. Again to take an example from Chapter One, my Georgian interlocutors dismiss Turkish produce such as tomatoes and tomato seeds as harmful in their chemically-laden composition for purposes of long-distance transport and varied climatic ecologies. At the same time, they assign a positive value to Turkish coffee, as when my aunt-figure Ketevan exclaimed, to her aunt Manana, that she and I both prefer Turkish coffee to instant.

   From the authoritative position of the person making the claim, what matters, literally, is not that this is "true," per se, but that, in that moment, the food object at hand is a materialization of "goodness" or not. What constitutes a "good" object is not standardized, or apparently consistent, exactly, in relation to the categorization used ("Turkish" in this case).

For my Georgian interlocutors, especially those claiming a matriarchal authority in food provisioning, you can know, even when "knowing" is, perhaps, impossible in other ways (e.g. *Are* those tomato seeds *actually* Turkish? *Is* that medicine *really* natural?). The authoritative matriarch's knowledge of and ability to procure food objects, is an embodied practice of providing sustenance to other bodies (families, close friends). In a period of pervasive unemployment, (geo)political uncertainty, and in the wake of a biological wellbeing remembered as ensured by the Soviet welfare state, a body politic is kept alive through the sovereign materializations of "good," nurturing food objects.

As materializations of sustenance, "food" and "medicine" objects, and the political-economic distinctions between them, get blurred. In a conversation with Ketevan and her aunt

Mariam in the middle of December, Ketevan found ingestible quality sustenance in the "blue" of a vitamin capsule:

> [Manana asked me if I was cold. I responded that I was not.] Ketevan: Of course she is not cold! Natalja is never cold.
>
> M: in the 1990s it was so cold inside all the time and we didn't have anything to heat us. I wore my coat and hat in the house. At that time I was working with French translators-
>
> K: She is a FRENCH EXPERT.
>
> M: They always asked me if I was coming or going and I said this is what I wear at home and when I go out I wear a different coat! [laughing] [We then somehow arrived at the topic of Mariam's friends] We have been friends for life, since elementary school – first grade. In the 1990s we really had nothing, there was a war in 1991 and then there was no electricity, no food, or water. We had bonfires outside. One person brought vodka, another brought water, another brought muraba, and then we'd mix it all together and drink, and we wouldn't be cold anymore.
>
> [M. massages her leg, which had been causing her pain for weeks at that point. She starts talking about an ointment she has been using:] Everyone goes to this one guy who has a shop in Saburtalo, across from the Sports Palace and near the Holiday Inn, to get a special ointment for horses! For horse legs, but people are getting it for themselves, not for their horses.
>
> [I asked what it contains. M. and K. take turns responding] It is all natural! All herbs.
>
> [K. started to open a small plastic bottle and took out a capsule. M. asked what it was:] What is that, is it medicine?
>
> K: Yes medicine. I have to take it for my eyes, eyesight. Lutein. [The Georgian pharmacy] GPC has a sale every Wednesday. [She looks at the bottle and reads it – in Russian] It is lutein, in it. It is a blueberry supplement. [She reads the ingredients, in Russian] All these long words I can't pronounce, chemicals. [she laughs as she tries to pronounce the long words] Anyway I bought it because of this blue in the capsules. It contains many vitamins.

Ketevan might not, in her and in others' estimations, embody matriarchal authority in the same way as someone like Mariam or Manana, but she is still able to locate an object source of healing and nurture in an object as technoscientifically vague as the "blue" of a vitamin supplement (which in all likelihood is artificially colored). But at the same time, in all its simultaneous technoscientific specificity (the purchase of it at a pharmacy, with its medical categorization and prescription for her as medicinal, and with the Russian techno-pharma text that accompanies it), this is a blue that materializes some form of nutritious goodness for the body-as-*organizm*. This despite the fact that it is not necessarily "natural." The blue pill is still

not a totally unnatural goodness. ("It contains many vitamins." This is a phrase that is often heard in relation to, for example, fruits in season as they are being eaten. One Armenian housekeeper once told me that when raspberries are in season, she eats a certain number of kilos, and that is enough Vitamin C and other vitamins for her body to store and have for the year.)

In relation to the body-as-*organizm*, and through the embodied reckoning of authoritative matriarchy, Russian technoscience (and inseparably, that of the remembered Soviet welfare state) and Georgian *terroir* have a lot in common. In other chapters, I discuss the trust with which my Tbilisi interlocutors approached their municipal tap water (vs bottled Georgian spring water, which they felt was not a necessary expense for daily hydration): The networks of Soviet-designed infrastructure that carried tap water (imagined as pipes and plumbing) were, according to different women and men with whom I spoke, of a "good quality" and the Soviets "knew what they were doing" when they designed these systems, such that the tap water is very "good" and "safe."[27]

[27] Similarly, in a long-standing source of tension between a number of us (younger and older Georgians, one Ukrainian woman, and myself) who cared for the local street dogs and worked very hard to spay, neuter, and find homes for them and their puppies, and the majority of apartment complex dwellers who hated the street dogs and constantly threatened to poison them, threw rocks at them, and otherwise found ways to assert their anthropocentrism, some of the older women would always tell me that in the Soviet period, vaccinations and care of street dogs was excellent; rabies, fleas, and other infectious and biological threats were successfully mitigated. At the same time, it was a chronic source of great stress and disappointment for me when, in the face of many of my neighbors' hatred of the dogs, they would simultaneously object, morally, to the neutering (not spaying) of them (not that I ever pressed the issue, for it was not my place to do so). One of my neighbors, the very educated, cosmopolitan, and politically progressive son of one my of closest matriarch interlocutors, explained to me that it is the female dogs who are in heat, and cause the male dogs to chase them around. I explained that since they have puppies to care for they are harder to catch, and anyway the surgery for spaying is far more invasive than neutering, he replied that "it is against natural law" to neuter the males and anyway, they just follow the females. I could write a separate ethnography on these interspecies dramas, including discussions on all the wildly varied dog shelters that I volunteered at over those years.

What is significant here, recalling Ketevan's recognition that the blue of her lutein capsule is a form of nutrition, is the way in which, in the *absence* of something like a Soviet welfare state, forms of an intimately familiar and confidently expert matriarchal memory and voice find, or otherwise recognize, "good" food objects (e.g. elements in a capsule, tap water in plumbing). These qualities are positioned in some kind of sustaining, vitalizing relationship to bodies and, in the implication that it was a Soviet, or Russian brand of technoscientific welfare, some form of figurating a body politic.

Conclusion

In this chapter a political ontology materialized in food is introduced as a memory of both extreme scarcity and hunger, and an appreciation of improvisation in food provisioning. As an indictment of the present that, like the 1990s, is heavy with the felt absence of a Soviet-style welfare state, widely remembered to have guaranteed at least biological well-being, contemporary provisioning practices locate a form of sovereign authority in self-identified matriarchs who, themselves often hungry in many ways, continue to find and procure forms of sustenance under conditions of extreme privatization. Although the "immanent socialities" of these provisioning worlds are valued for their timeless familiarities, there is a sense that bodies themselves, as materializations of sustained well-being, and including those of provisioners themselves, must subsist without a fully sustaining political collective. These worlds of provisioning do not so much constitute a turn away from state elites, or regulatory agents, or large retail stores toward familiar relations or survivalist food nationalism, so much as they express a shared feeling of co-existence with power (both "public" strongman and "private" familial).

Part II: Crafting Trustworthy Authority: The National Food Agency

Chapter Three
Righteous Reform: Standardizing Biomoral Authority on a National Scale

One night in December 2013, I visited one of my primary interlocutors, a matriarch in her seventies named Marina, at her small apartment in the Bagebi neighborhood of Tbilisi. Her home was as usual crowded with family members and their friends. Like many unmarried Tbilisians, Marina's divorced 43-year-old daughter Tina and Tina's teenage daughter lived with her, and Marina's fifty-something-year-old divorced son, Sandro, lived with her as well. Marina seemed to enjoy caring for her children, granddaughter, and her kind housebound husband as she always has: positioned at the center of the household universe, absorbing all the secrets and dramas unique to each family member's life. She maintained her uncontested reign over the epicenter of that universe, the kitchen, controlling the recipes, provisions, and the very intimate comforts of a transgenerational domestic familiar. When I entered the apartment, the family was occupied in an unusual panic of cleaning. Sandro, a filmmaker and professor of film directing at Tbilisi State University, explained that his daughter, eight-year-old Masho, was coming to visit from Kiev, where she lived with her mother, Sandro's ex-wife. He hadn't seen Masho in six months. At that exact moment, violent clashes grounded in Ukraine's troubled geopolitical orientations – to the EU, to Russia, and within itself – in Kiev were leading up to the "Euromaidan" revolution, and the family thought it would be safer for Masho to stay with her father in Tbilisi until things calmed down.

The family was apologizing to me about the disorder of their apartment and their being distracted with getting everything ready for Masho. I asked if I could help and Sandro said that even they didn't know what they had to do, that they had no plan in place for these preparations. He then added that having no plan is "just like Georgian democracy. They improvise and see

how things go, try different things, and have no plan." He likened the Georgian political system to the experience of Georgian ritual feasts (*supras*) at funerals: "You're an anthropologist so you know about Georgian funerals." I answered that no, I hadn't been to one yet, even though I hear about people dying all the time – from cancer, drug overdoses, and car accidents. He explained that the funeral *supra* is exactly like Georgian democracy: One man, the toastmaster (*tamada*) leads the meal – its toasts, its mood, and the administration of alcoholic drinks. "People are looking to him, and then at a different meal another guy is leading it, and all these people just come and follow him. I was never religious or interested in religion but I realized at a funeral I was at that this is something essentially Georgian. Everything is a performance."

Sandro's likening Georgian democracy to a series of ritual feasts with different performing *tamadas* is the perfect formulation for how I've heard many of my interlocutors in Tbilisi express their experience of post-Soviet Georgian electoral politics: A series of "strong men" who promise to make life better in Georgia and who then let everyone down with their selfish agendas and secret allegiances to Russia. For the purposes of my dissertation, the *supra* analogy is doubly salient in that *tamadas* are regulators of drinking throughout these very long ritual meals; per traditional protocol, guests only drink when a toast is voiced, and by deciding on the pacing, spirit, and content of the toasts (formulaic and poetic speeches that experienced and sometimes professional *tamadas* have been saying for years: e.g. for Georgia, for Georgian women, for the dead, for our mothers, for our children, for friends), the *tamada* is the acting authority figure in this event of food consumption. The conceptual poetics between this masculine authority of *tamadas* and that embodied in regulatory state bureaucracy vis a vis Georgian National Food Safety (NFA) food regulators could constitute a multi-chapter dissertation in themselves.

In this chapter, I will focus on this formulation of how Georgian democratic politics are experienced. Leaving aside the implication that the Georgian public is comprised of "followers" who just move through the ritual passively and as though enacting a natural and timeless need to be led, the image of a series of strongmen in the executive branch (whether as presidents or prime ministers), twenty-five years after the Soviet period officially ended, is very different from the image of democratic reform promised throughout the post-socialist years. Georgian political scientist Irakly Areshidze, writing during a period of increasing popular disillusionment with Mikhael ("Misha") Saakashvili's administration, describes the series of post-Soviet presidents in Georgia, including Saakashvili's internationally-praised Rose Revolution (2007, 5), as a series of "revolutionaries" who arrived at power through "extraconstitutional means." According to this analysis, what appeared as a popular movement resulted in events unfolding in "an extremely undemocratic manner" (9). Shevardnadze resigning and calling for new parliamentary elections in the Spring of 2004 turned out to be a brash result of Saakashvili and his coalition ignoring the democratic constitutional process and hijacking the possibility of a legitimate, "legal" (3) democratic succession (though many believed that scheduled parliamentary elections could have resulted in his being voted back into power anyway). In addition, foreign interests like the US and the Bush Administration were rumored to be pushing for these practices that compromised national constitutional processes:

> The [early Rose Revolution] protests that eventually brought down Shevardnadze[this too is a different spelling form earlier]…had been months, if not years, in the making. As early as the fall of 2002, activists at several [NGOs] advocated using revolutionary tactics…These groups wanted to emulate the example of Serbia, where the dictator Slobodan Milosevic was overthrown through public protests…By removing Shevardnadze through extraconstitutional means, revolutionaries were able to grab 100 percent of power and authority, even though the majority of the country's voters had just voted for parties that opposed Saakashvili and his allies. (Areshidze 9)

If this is a "Georgian" experience of politics – a never-ending cycle of leaders who claim authority and promise to be different from those before – how do state bureaucracies and regulatory agencies like the NFA claim their authority? Is their claim rooted in the assurance that they are "neutral" and "expert" and thus distanced from the politics of personality and, not expressing a revolutionary state of exception, not part of any coup d'etat? Do they claim to care more about public health and safety than other branches of government, and is this stance a part of establishing trustworthy, legitimate authority? How do these claims echo the promises and policies of the Soviet welfare state, which is often missed and spoken of in nostalgic ways in this particular context of market-valorized reform?

This chapter will address these questions by examining some of the processes through which the NFA re-branded itself as an authoritative state agency in the wake of Saakashvili's libertarian-leaning policies and during the first term of his successor Bidzina Ivanishvili's administration's policies of reintroducing transparent state authority to Georgian public life. I suggest that this ethnographic case is a useful lens through which to rethink the models of post-socialist "transition" and "transformation" that continue to influence visions of political-economic change. These models discuss (and critique) those ideologies of transition that seem to presume two abstract, ontologically different, modern industrial worlds – one liberal democratic with a capitalist technocracy and the other a relic of the collectivist Soviet past – must reckon with one another in a historical process wherein intransigently stubborn habits (material infrastructures of the Soviet period, traditional small businesses, the Russian language as a regional lingua franca) will ultimately be affected by processes of reform, and the "other world" of neoliberal reform will likewise "accommodate" (Collier 2011) the particularities of local circumstances.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate that in contrast to implementing policies from "elsewhere," with the goal of *meeting* them, even while acting within the context of an EU Association Agreement and EU-based foreign finance, the NFA engaged in a process of (re)establishing a kind of trusted state authority through food safety reform in the wake of Saakashvili. This effort materialized as an exercise in appealing to a Georgian public within a larger context of national statecraft and national standard *making*. Authorities invoked the image of consistent, confidence-inspiring, state welfare management (though within limits in the context of liberal-capitalist "Europeanization"), which was a more "Georgian" aim than it was about instituting some kind of master reorientation towards European and global technocratic standards.[28] In their alignment with national public health policy, in their attentiveness to Georgian bodies and food provisioners, and working through daily rituals of national identity and reproduction, Georgian state agencies like the NFA– vis a vis food safety reform and connections to the Ministry and Agriculture and the Ministry of Health – work to position themselves "outside of politics" and yet at the center of Georgian biomoral life on a national scale. [Ok, but it was hard work to get here.] This project of re-constituting regulatory authority is, ultimately, positioned within the drama of national electoral politics and the series of charismatic/strongman leaders that have come to occupy elite political offices. Similar to Saakashvili's anti-Shevardnadze political coalition formed in 2003, Ivanishvili's political party,

[28] Furthermore, in comparison to other post-socialist states on track for EU membership, policy makers in Georgia are considering different political-economic models in planning for its future (Anderson 2009). Geopolitical contexts such as financially-successful, highly-liberalized economies located in the United States, the Middle East, and East Asia present alternative paths for reform (Eurasianet.org 2010; "Forbes" 2009). In contrast to other post-socialist national contexts wherein regulatory and marketing efforts have solicited sentiments of trust in local consumers according to an assemblage of global and EU-derived regimes of food safety (Dunn 2003, 2004, 2008), Georgia's geopolitical experimentation complicates both food safety policy making and public perceptions of security and vulnerability.

the Georgian Dream Coalition, was constituted by smaller political parties with disparate ideological agendas, all similar in (a) their allegiance to their party leader and (b) in their opposition to the political party/strongman in power. While Ivanishvili's "center-right" (pro-business, anti-"big state" but pro-executive power, nationalist but also pro-NATO integration) agenda was, like Saakashvili's before him, ever vague, shifting, and constantly under public criticism for its possible secret loyalties to Russia, the governing dynamic of political affiliation and policy-making has shown a repeated orientation to individual leaders:

> In addition to fragmentation, another characteristic of the Georgian political system is the orientation towards a strong leader. Political actors often change their preferences according to the decisions of specific charismatic leaders. Accordingly, the process of party reorganization is rather dynamic. It would be fair to say that, in Georgia, we encounter political groupings that are based more on charismatic leadership and clientelistic approaches than on concrete ideologies and programmatic plans. (Lortkipanidze 2016)

This and the next two chapters of this section on the NFA will demonstrate that *through* processes of EU-guided reform, Georgian state agents position EU technocracy as a morally problematic and ontological "other," asserting claims about the current administration's and Georgian nation's distinctiveness. These distinctions are made in terms of the Georgian nation's long-standing love/hate relationship with Russia, its self-consciously ambiguous geopolitical position between "east" and "west," and its ethno-nationalist identification with Georgian Christian orthodoxy rather than Euro-American secular liberalism.

The first section of this chapter will discuss "transition" as a process that my interlocutors, Georgian food safety experts at the NFA, considered –on a day-to-day, aspirational basis – as a nationalized process of state-building centered on trustworthiness and biomoral authority. At the very beginning of a new political leadership in office, reform meant investing in and legitimizing the state –the NFA in this case – as the recognized regulatory authority, albeit

within well-defined limits, given the globalized market-valorizing context in which these reforms ultimately take place. The second part of this chapter will examine two ethnographic situations in which assertions of nationalized, biomoral authority take place: First, in calls for an increased state presence in regulating the food safety system across all the Georgian regions, which I heard from Georgian food safety experts at various Tbilisi-based NGOs in a series of interviews toward the end of Saakashvili's administration. In this perspective, state regulation – in contrast to the "corrupt" and "inconsistent" "self-regulation" of private enterprises – is represented as potentially reliable, vigilant, and authoritative. I will then focus on a series of training sessions that I attended with the NFA during the first years of Ivanishvili's administration and just after the Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU had been signed. These training sessions, which took place in the regional centers of Kutaisi and Borjomi, were on newly-instituted protocols for veterinary inspections of slaughterhouses throughout Georgia. In these cases, Georgian food safety experts are locating a form of biomoral authority within the office of the NFA. I argue that it does this by articulating a good/bad dichotomy within which it represents a "good" caring stance positioned against the potentially "bad" and "unchecked" morals of global? markets and distanced technocratic standards. The project in turn positions the Ivanishvili administration as somehow redeeming the selfish and corrupt political elites that have characterized the electoral cycles of Georgian politics. At the same time, in its project of establishing authoritative presence and standard-making on a *national* scale, biomoral authority claimed by the NFA also distinguishes itself from that of the EU and other transnational, globalized forms of technocracy.

Who cares: Politics of personality and the political economy of food

"We had a road police which was doing nothing apart from taking bribes. So one day all these policemen were fired. For three weeks there were no policemen in Georgia. People asked 'ah what will happen?' Well nothing happens because it is a dysfunctional institution. If I switch off the light in the room with no light, nothing will happen. There was no light before and no light after." – Kakha Bendukidze, Georgia's Minister of Economy, 2004[29]

This quote of Bendukidze, Saakashvili's Economic Minister during his first term, expresses a popular post-Soviet critique of bureaucratic state institutions, thirteen years after similar revolutionary sentiments had been voiced elsewhere in the post-socialist world. During the 1990's, Georgia was dealing with a civil war between political elites warring for and against the first democratically-elected post-Soviet president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The civil war was followed by violence surrounding his successor, former Soviet leader Eduard Shevardnadze. Furthermore, for many Georgians, the country itself was at that time, and has since been, existentially vulnerable to Russian-backed separatist movements across the countryside, especially in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. By the time of Saakashvili's rise to power in 2003, state institutions like the Ministry of Justice, under which the police operated, were publicly viewed as deeply corrupt and ineffective. I will discuss this in more detail in the second half of this dissertation, but the period of the 1990's in Georgia is remembered and invoked on a daily basis as traumatic, dark, hopeless, and full of scarcity – privation at that time was much worse than in the Soviet period, as it is popularly remembered. This quote of Bendukidze, a Saakashvili-era political-economic elite figure who ultimately sought a wholesale dismantling and disavowal of state institutions in the name of the self-regulating power of markets, is just an earlier echo of this general sentiment of hopelessness in state institutions that my interlocutor Sandro voiced ten years later (and quoted at the beginning of this chapter), at the *end* of Saakashvili's time in political office.

[29] European Stability Initiative (ESI), "Georgia's Libertarian Revolution," 10 April 2010.

In addition to this disillusionment with political personalities, popular memories of the Soviet welfare state itself are often indexes of anxieties and uncertainties around the security of life itself. Many studies (e.g. Dunn 2008; Manning 2007; Manning and Uplisashvili 2007; Suny 1994) have analyzed how post-socialist Georgia, like other formerly socialist states in Central and Eastern Europe, experienced a jarring and prolonged collapse of a semiotic regime of state-governed, industrialized forms of production and distribution in the wake of the Soviet socialist state. This context of political-economic change in Georgia has marked a dramatic shift in the public semiotics of power and security, marking an absence of a tangible, publicly-recognizable power that could ground its legitimacy in ensuring a reliable, sincere source of material and biological well-being.

Over the course of my fieldwork, from the end of Saakashvili's administration to the middle of Ivanishvili's, I overheard a few differently iterated futures of the National Food Agency as a state institution, as it was situated within the political-ideological agendas of these different administrations. First, in a vision of total market regulation through consumer vigilance, the NFA was removed from the regulatory landscape along with many other state agencies. Then the NFA's mission changed with the newly-elected Ivanishvili government and the signing of the EU Association Agreement in 2014; the Agency needed to introduce itself to Georgian audiences as a trustworthy regulatory authority with a legitimate, national presence. The "transition" and "reform" that I track in this ethnography of food safety and trust is just as much constituted by Georgian national politics and a general sense of never-ending disillusionment in the politics of personality and state authority as it is about transnationalized forms of reform in relation to the EU and globalized organizations.

In the first iteration of the NFA and its future that I witnessed, the state agency was

ideologically and institutionally positioned within the context of Saakashvili's anti-state, pro-market policies. For many senior NFA managers placed within this project, the NFA constituted a site of potential bureaucratic excess and corruption. At the same time, it is by now "common sense" – among both non-Georgian policy experts and my Georgian interlocutors – that Saakashvili's reforms, though effective in addressing some of the more severe daily needs of Georgians, were at the same time part of a larger political program of solidifying executive power, of "state-building at the expense of democracy-building" (See Wheatley 2005).[30] From its beginnings, the spirit of the Rose Revolution and its elite protagonists modelled themselves on the kind of "utopia of pure capitalism" fictionally instituted by the engineer John Galt, in the mountains of Colorado, as depicted in Ayn Rand's book, *Atlas Shrugged* (1957?).[31] The former Finance Minister, Kahka Bendukidze (2007-09), in voicing his faith in the "self-regulating" mechanisms of markets, has also said that it is up to consumers to protect their own rights, calling upon them to protest unsafe foods by telling friends and family, boycotting vendors, and thus regulate safety "through the market" (*Financial Times* 2007).

Over the course of Bendukidze's reforms, and perhaps as a result of his close personal ties with Moscow during a period of increasing hostility between Russia and Georgia, rumors

[30] One example of this kind of state-building occurred in the fall of 2007, when Saakashvili's government sent police out to attack protestors in Tbilisi, announced a state of emergency, and then shut down Imedi, the sole opposition television station (cite). It was events such as these, broadcast internationally, that caused another round of foreign expert assessment and rankings of Georgia itself, wherein, for example, Freedom House (US-based think tank) found Georgia to be "partly free," just as imperfectly democratic as it had been before Saakashvili's rise to power. Likewise, the *Economist Intelligence Unit*'s Democracy Index ranked Georgia number 104 (out of 167), wherein it was one of 36 "hybrid regimes," together with Armenia, Russia, and the Kyrgyz Republic (www.eiu.com/democracyindex2008).

[31] See "John Galt in the Caucasus," ESI report, Part one: Georgia as a model". See Oliver Burkeman, "Look out for number one – America turns to prophet of self-interest as crash hits" *The Guardian* 10 March 2009.

circulated (and continue to circulate) among Georgians that Saakashvili was somehow secretly colluding with Putin and the Russian oligarchs, selling out Georgian industrial interests (especially energy concerns) for the sake of his own business ties with Russia (it is, at the same time, public knowledge that these business relations around energy were in place before the Rose Revolution, and that the largest stakeholder in Georgia's electricity industry was AES Silk Road – a US company, which was purchased by Russian investors in 2003).

I first met with a manager, Zura, at the NFA in the summer of 2012. At that time, Mikhael Saakashvili was at the end of his second and last term in power and his ruling United National Movement was in a lot of trouble; by this point, the majority of Georgians (urban and non-urban) were disillusioned with him and his party's early promises of democratic reform. For my interlocutors, he had turned out to be just another narcissistic and venal power holder who did not care about ordinary Georgians and about making Georgia a better place to live day to day. Among Georgians, there were suspicions that he was a pathological liar, alcoholic, drug addict, and that he had secret dealings with Russian and other foreign interests.[32] He was often viewed as unfaithful to his (non-Georgian) wife and to Georgian people in general. The parliamentary elections were immanent (autumn 2012), and my Georgian contacts at various NGO's predicted major shifts in the upper levels of government ministries.

During our conversation, Zura, who had been in his position as the Head of the Food Safety Division at the NFA for several years, still spoke of the NFA and its immanent

[32]All *while* Russian political elites had also accused Saakashvili of being "mentally unstable" and a "drug abuser." For example see then-Russian president Medvedev's 2008 quote that "'The Georgian head of state is not just a man we won't do business with. He's an unpredictable pathological and mentally unstable drug abuser. Western journalists who interviewed him not so long ago know it! A two-hour-long interview on a high – that's over the edge for a head of state. If NATO needs such a leader – go ahead'" (quoted on RT.com, accessed 3/13/2019).

subsumption under EU regulations within the policy framework of Bendukhidze and Saakashvili. At that point, the future role of the NFA in relation to Georgian food consumers and the food market was not completely clear, but looking back on it now I can recognize in things said there an orientation to markets and to modelling, using the kind of vague, aspirational MBA-speak that circulates within market-valorizing contexts like those of political-economic elites in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe since the early 1990s.[33]

Giving me an overview of the "series of ongoing reforms" at the NFA, Zura offered a timeline that his successors would later dismiss as not reform, but as part of a larger political project:

> Starting in 2006, especially after the Rose Revolution, there have been major changes**.** Before, there was the Soviet-era system. It was creating a lot of confusion for the private sector: Duplicate inspections, and there was a lot of redundancy. Inspections were a source for corruption and bad influences of private entrepreneurs. [It was decided][34] to abolish the old system. It was important to build trust with the public, and our competencies had to be coordinated and streamlined: food safety, veterinary, and phytosanitary plant protection. We modeled this on the Baltic states, and the UK. We learn from the experience of eastern European countries: Estonia, Poland, the Baltics; it took a while – ten to twelve years – before their food safety systems worked, it depends on the local situation.
>
> Phase Two reform started around 2010, working with consultancies and more with the European Commission. The structure of our agency changed. The name used to be the Food Safety Agency and then it changed to the National Food Agency and changed its legal status to a legal entity under public law, to be more independent from the [government] ministries. In compliance with the EU we have a new registry system and the client has the opportunity to pay extra to get their documents reviewed in one day instead of seven. This gives opportunities for entrepreneurs to open businesses without too much documentations.

Articulated as a source of "corrupt" influence on "private entrepreneurs," the NFA must "build trust with the public" and act as service center to its clients, some of whom simply pay a

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[33] See e.g. Yurchak 2003 and Oushakine 2000.

[34] This passive construction is very common when voicing something some kind of "authority" says. One of my interlocutors, a sixty-plus-year-old woman who lived alone in Tbilisi, would always back up a claim by citing a vague authority "out there": "It will be windy today. It was announced." I really think this has something to do with the way official authority was cited in daily life during the Soviet period, and it will appear in subsequent chapters.

bit extra to get the clearances they need. (Later in my fieldwork, I would see my managers at the NFA reject this line of reasoning, citing the very image of monetary transactions between business interests and the NFA as indexing corruption to Georgian audiences.) In his explanation of what the purpose of the NFA ultimately is and should be, Zura describes a "legal entity" independent of state government and curbed in its bureaucratic reach and excesses, functioning in legally accommodating relation to what he implies are efficient, not corrupt, and no nonsense business "entrepreneurs" (i.e. very small businesses) positioned within a "developed" political-economic system modeled on the EU and expected to be materialized in about ten to twelve years' time.

In this account, the emphasis on meeting standards applies to both (a) the system of safety and geopolitical standards toward which the NFA is oriented ("We modeled this on the Baltic states, and the UK"; "Phase Two reform, working with consultancies and more with the European Commission"; "…changed its legal status to a legal entity under public law"), and (b) according to "business management": constant and vague references to cutting costs, etc.: ("… a lot of redundancy"; "…abolish the old system"; "…coordinated and streamlined"; "…the client has the opportunity"; "This gives opportunities for entrepreneurs…"). As a possible effect of this being a one-time meeting in which my interlocutor clearly did not trust me,[35] the overview of the NFA as undergoing a wholesale refashioning after the "Soviet-era system" impressed me as vague, like the reformist image of the transformed agency.

[35] He refused to allow me to work at the agency, citing his and his staff's general "busy-ness." Despite my explanations that I simply want to do ethnography, he hurriedly classified me as an NGO worker or journalist out to expose the NFA and/or whatever else he was worried about. I was very worried after that meeting but LT, my contact at a Georgian consumer advocacy organization, assured me that he most likely would no longer be in charge when I come back for my fieldwork after the autumn of 2012.

At the same time that summer, when I started to build my network of contacts and develop a sense of the institutional and policy landscape in Georgian food safety in Tbilisi, my Georgian expert interlocutors were mainly positioned in the Georgian and international NGO sector. I had not yet established a relationship with state agencies, and private food corporations were even more defensive and secretive. In meetings with food safety experts at NGOs in Tbilisi, these experts told me that they expected different kinds of changes, and expressed dissatisfaction with the then-current state of food safety and state regulation within Georgia. Throughout these conversations, two themes emerged in relation to the NFA as a state agency in the Saakashvili administration. First, there was a sense that market interests within the food chain (production, distribution/marketing, retail) were out of control and that there was a felt need – on the part of Georgian experts – for increased state presence as some kind of check on this corporate greed. Second, there was a sense that the food safety system was simply not working; for these experts, the problem was not that they didn't trust the state to regulate properly, but that they didn't trust market actors to insure food safety standards would be set correctly in the first place ("correctly" here meaning, meeting EU and other global standards), enforced, and met. The assumption was that only a state agency could embody the kind of objective and constant stance necessary to regulate and ensure a standardized and compliant national food safety system.

Similar to the opinions expressed by Georgian managers at other NGO's with varying interests and stakeholders in the food policy landscape (e.g. Georgian consumer rights groups, independent working groups on verifying food safety systems, and international organizations funding and administering food safety reform across the food chain according to EU and global standards), in 2012, a Georgian manager at an international NGO specializing in humanitarian

projects in "transitional" contexts explained to me that the responsibility for ensuring a safe food system lies with the governmental NFA. However, he said, NFA "representation" in the Georgian "regions" (i.e. outside of the capital city of Tbilisi) "is very low." He described a national political-economy of food wherein large, powerful Georgian food business operators (e.g. food producers such as the dairy firm Sante) were not held accountable for ignoring legally-defined standards that had been introduced over a year before our conversation. The reason, he stated, was that the NFA simply was not "present" in the countryside outside of Tbilisi, where food production takes place ("to implement law, you must have proper representation.")

At the same time, he said, depending on the food sector, Georgian agricultural production is largely small-scale and comprised of individual family farmers. These "small business operators" stay in business only because standards are not enforced (see e.g. Dunn 2004): "Georgian agriculture is based on small-scale [production] and if the standards are imposed this will push these farmers out." Despite my interlocutor's support of small-scale food producers, the underlying implication in this line of reasoning, often repeated when discussing food safety reform in Tbilisi, is that small-scale farmers are in fact operating in a potentially unsafe way by virtue of being non-compliant with and outside of international standards. Regardless of whether this is "true" (I have heard of and witnessed production practices that would validate both this claim and its opposite), the call for a regulatory state presence that enforces legally-binding standards signals a belief that such oversight is (a) desired and (b) would in fact lead to a "safer" food system.

In a similar way, a different manager at a small Georgian food safety and quality consulting firm explained to me that Georgian agriculture consists of a few dominant production, processing, and retail companies who operate independently of legal safety standards, because

they can, and a number of small, independent farmers / farming families who exist outside of legal safety standards because they must. Small and many, they are undetected in surveillance and inspection practices (of which there are very few, a problem commonly voiced in my early interviews) and yet they comprise a large part of the Georgian food chain which, according to this and other interlocutors, is a "short" one, wherein farmers and other food producers tend to sell to "informal" markets in Georgian cities directly. She explained that since the end of the Soviet era, "there has not been a working food safety system for twenty years – no legislation, no rules, and the [Soviet system] was replaced by other instruments." At that time, in 2012, the signing of the EU Association Agreement was a few years away and it was not clear, even to these industry experts, which policy path Georgia would eventually follow.

In this woman's narration, small agricultural producers not only exist in a zone spatially outside of legal safety norms; they index a temporal and material intransigence that has, since at least the Soviet era, served as a trope for "Georgia" and "Georgianness" itself in relation to other post-Soviet nation-states (see e.g. Mars and Altman 1983) and to now increasingly popular debates over "real" Georgianness versus that coopted by foreign (most often EU and global), liberal, and secular interests. According to this trope, Georgia is insular and family-obsessed, corrupt, and rooted in "informal" networks of long-standing relationships rather than modernist, formal systems of rational law.[36] "Georgians don't plan too much in advance…[They] were not really good at following rules in the Soviet Union either. They have their own rules," this interlocutor complained, in relation to her unsuccessful experience of pushing reform in the Georgian countryside.

[36] During the 1990s and into the 2000s, Georgia was regularly ranked (e.g. by the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index and in internationally-recognized public forums such as The New York Times) as "one of the most corrupt countries on earth" (cf Manning and ESI).

She explained to me that part of her organization's work was, with the help of foreign funding and institutional guidance, to "modernize" Georgian agricultural production across food sectors. At that time, her organization's latest project had involved funding and oversight from the government of Sweden in order to enroll small-scale dairy producers into regional "associations."

These associations, she suggested, would contribute to a more interconnected food system and could ultimately help smaller farmers by collectivizing resources and successfully meeting production standards requirements. She then explained that this project was a failure in Georgia, and in contrast to other sites where similar projects were administered (e.g. Estonia): "They [Georgians] have a very short food chain. They are not good at marketing. They don't know how to plan. They only care about themselves and their own families and they are not interested in associating with neighbors."

Across these conversations, the Georgian food chain is depicted as stuck in the past and characterized by various modes of intransigence: stubborn "local" practices and attitudes, provincial small-scale farmers, and ineffective state institutions, for example. It is this kind of intransigence that Collier (2011) notes when writing about Soviet-era infrastructures in Russia, in his argument that contrary to critiques that articulate and misrecognize "neoliberal policies" as monolithic and uncompromising. He writes that on the contrary, neoliberal policies are varied, adaptable, and able to "deal with" Soviet intransigence. (His example is "*partially*" rather than entirely "reprogram[ming]" Soviet-designed heating systems in urban housing developments that were not physically equipped to deal with "reform" individualizations of metered settings, choices, and pricing variations (26)). He argues that neoliberalism as it has been understood in the post-socialist context – large-scale and hasty privatizations; foreign finance with its self-

interested conditions; a wholesale devaluation and destruction of Soviet socialist-era welfare frameworks; and a mass-mediated valorization of individualism vs. community relations – is actually a "marketized variant" of economic "structural adjustment" emergent in the 1990s through the Washington Consensus (131). Collier traces how "structural adjustment" was in fact conceived as a general term referring to various kinds of "corrections" to modern governmental problems in the mid 1950s to late 1960s, used by US and European economists dealing with reconstruction and development after World War II (140-41). In order to understand this particular marketized variant, Collier argues that "we need ways to constitute neoliberalism as an object of inquiry" (135), since in his view "[c]ritics of neoliberalism" are ultimately "confused" as to what neoliberalism "is":

> It is coherent to associate these policies with neoliberalism but we are not justified in reducing neoliberalism to them. We need to specify the circumstances in which they took shape, and move beyond them, because new situations, new problems, and new responses have emerged. 136

For Collier, the value orientations consist of modernist forms of economic governance that try to "accommodate the reality of scarcity…[which] requires meticulous calculation of citizens' norm-defined 'needs' in order to determine appropriate budgetary distributions" (25)]). As Melissa Caldwell has argued in her work on religiously-affiliated organizations and the work of work of social justice and care in contemporary Russia: "Within this politically-charged field [that of "international aid workers and donors" working to "bring their own particular vision of democratization and neoliberalization to life"], Russia's own history as a development agent was ignored and obscured…" (2017, 94). I want to take what Caldwell is saying in terms of historical processes being generated from and within the Russian context as something useful here in the Georgian world.

Furthermore, in the contemporary post-Soviet context, the administration of "neoliberal

policies" has been institutionally mediated and remediated so many times that binaries such as Soviet/post-Soviet, local/non-local, expert/non-expert are as problematic as ever. Russian-speaking food safety experts from Serbia, Estonia, and Ukraine are mobilized to administer training and information sessions on EU and global safety protocols to Georgian food safety experts. The "models" for "successful reform" are in these cases post-socialist (not necessarily EU) national contexts against which Georgia is compared as an aspirational case.

Of course, even thirty years after the post-socialist transition period "started," nation-states positioned at the edges of "Europe" and "Russia" are expected to orient themselves to one or the other superpower (see e.g. Borocz 2012, 2011). In this sense, EU-structured food safety reform in Georgia assumes some kind of political-economic alignment with the particular capitalist, liberal-democratic norms in which such safety systems are embedded. However, as this and Chapter Four demonstrate, there is a difference between "meeting standards" and "making standards" as food safety reform unfolds in Tbilisi, Georgia. In contrast to implementing changes to the Georgian food system so that Georgian food products might meet safety and quality standards for EU markets, when positioned in relation to (re) writing laws and implementing policy designed with Georgian food consumers and bodies in mind, reform at the same time is a process of standard *making* and nationalized state building. I consider this orientation towards the Georgian nation and statecraft as an unexpected consequence of globalized, transnational processes of governance such as those of EU Association and assumed future EU integration.

Strong science and claiming authority

When I started my long-term fieldwork after these initial conversations with NGO managers in Tbilisi, the Saakashvili administration and his United National Movement had been

voted out. Ivanishvili and his Georgian Dream coalition had recently been voted into government. The attendant changes in managerial positions and policies at the upper levels of government ministries created the possibility for the NFA to accept me as a long-term ethnographic presence. Many of the former managers (including the person quoted above) had been replaced. Those who greeted me in the fall of 2013 were more open to "foreigners" in their midst, and perhaps more importantly for my fieldwork, seemed to have a better understanding of my role as a researcher, and the kind of dissertation I was hoping to write.

In other words, part of the new regime's plan was to reintroduce state agencies into regulation and governance, mitigating some of the libertarian policies of the previous government. It is important to realize, though, that this was not a turn to the other extreme; Ivanishvili – an oligarch made in Russia but born and identifying as Georgian, was not anti-market, though his administration's liberalism was different from that of Saakashvili's. In relation to the NFA, the form of liberalism in the post-Saakashvili iteration leaned more towards that of EU-sponsored capitalist technocracy: As Jasanoff (2005) writes on biotech expertise, food panics, and the (im)possibilities of deliberative democratic publics in Euro-American national contexts, regulatory policymaking is a site through which political bodies constitute themselves: "[T]he EU's own political identity was…under negotiation, so that policy making for biotechnology became one of the channels through which the EU sought to constitute itself" (39). At the same time, in relation to industry markets, the actual authority to enforce standards and exercise direct power is, in practice, curtailed and written into legal standards themselves ("the alliance among Western science, capital, and the state" (37)). (This is why Salome, the head of risk analysis at the NFA, insists on the distinction between "regulation" and "enforcement," a matter discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. This was often so frustrating

for me, as I wished for some kind of corrective check on the self-serving spheres of private enterprise. She told me: "The real responsibility of food safety is with the food business operators, per global protocol. In the Soviet period, it was only the state. Now, the NFA just inspects and monitors." It does not enforce.)

In February 2015, around the time of the NFA regional training sessions I will discuss in this section, Salome, the Head of the Risk Analysis division of the NFA and one of my primary informants, explained to me that she was working on paperwork for an EU-sponsored "twinning" program between Georgia and Sweden. Calling upon Georgia and other countries that had recently signed Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements and/or Association Agreements with the EU, such as Moldova (DCFTA and AA) and Armenia, the EU assigned member states (not necessarily post-socialist) with "successful" compliance in food safety codes as "twins" to those approximating theirs at that time.

Salome explained that this was a process of general "development" and "change" in the NFA; they were hiring 250 new employees and had received 6000 applications for their call, a large proportion of which would be assigned to offices in the animal origins food division. In addition, the offices were going to move into a new space. During my first year with the NFA, between the summer of 2014 and the winter of 2015, the Food Safety Department was located in a two-story office building constructed during the early 1990s, and located directly behind the building of the Ministry of Agriculture, a stately Soviet-era governmental building. This office space housed an "early" post-Soviet iteration of the NFA, after which it moved into the new building behind it.

In that first office, the Food Safety Department's office was on the second floor of the building, the interior design of which reminded me of office space in the late 1980s, early 1990s

U.S., parts dark and glossy (e.g. the hallways and corners) and the newly-renovated parts airy and white (e.g. the common-space lobby, always warm and humid because of the clear plastic ceiling and a very large fish tank, at the center of the first floor). In a corner of the building after ascending one flight on a broad and gradually inclining spiral staircase, the Food Department was in a very large room with about 10 desks (three on each side, facing each other), two of which belonged to the Department Head (Temo, whom I discuss in the next chapter) and a Supervisor from the Water Division of the NFA (a woman in her fifties named Mari).

The building the NFA moved into in the winter/spring of 2015 felt much more light and airy inside; its construction consisted of steel and a lot of glass. In the old building, getting past security was simple. Over the months there, I developed a familiarity with the guards and the actual lobby space was small and enclosed, so that whenever I arrived a guard unlocked the turnstile for me to enter. Once I had walked up the winding staircase and into the NFA office, the large one-room office that housed my colleagues always felt like the ideal place to do fieldwork in a bureaucracy. If I wasn't sitting with Salome, Temo, or Mari at their desks, I was at the table in the middle of the room working on something for them or taking my own notes. I was in the middle of office life and could overhear so many conversations both professional and personal.

But once the NFA moved to the new office space, the more senior-level managers (Salome and Temo) each had their own office on the second floor, while the other staff members shared offices on the first floor. It was an entirely different kind of space to navigate for the purposes of fieldwork. The hours I spent with Salome in her office made me feel as though I was missing out on interactions happening downstairs. The much less time I spent with Temo in his office, after having to first chat with his new secretary in her office adjacent to his, always

made me feel as though I had to be more focused in my questions and notetaking. Everything felt very disconnected, which I think is the opposite effect the designers meant to have. Rather, I suspect that the interior and exterior designs were meant to offer an image of transparency and "EU"-ness. Along one wall opposite the wide and white central staircase at the center of the new lobby hung a huge EU flag and, next to it, Georgia's. Security was much more strict and impersonal in this building; I eventually had to have my own visitor's pass to enter.

Within the context of an electoral politics of personality and cyclical disillusionment with politicians and their respective governments, the aesthetics of transparency and impersonal security (not to mention the giant EU flag hanging front and center) reflects an orientation to the EU and globalized (i.e. FAO and WHO) regimes of technocratic expertise. This institutional stance presents itself at a disinterested distance from the messiness of politics, everyday life, and images of dated bureaucratic time-spaces (such as the office the NFA moved out of). In this sense, according to the literature on post-socialist state-building, the NFA was presenting itself as a "neutral institution" (e.g. Sajo 2004; Ackerman and Rose 2004)). Claiming to be "non-partisan or neutral" and grounded in professional organizational networks that comprise "independent expertise," regulatory state agencies in broadcasting and monetary policy are two similar types of neutral state institutions, according to Sajo (33). Within a parliamentary government structure like that of Georgia, although prime ministers nominate the ministry heads, parliament then votes on these nominees. Regulatory agencies like the NFA, which functions as part of the Ministry of Agriculture, are thus protected from executive authority but, subject to the changes that come with shifts in governing parties. Neutral institutions are key to "depoliticizing the political" (33) in post-socialist contexts wherein legacies of authoritarian government have engendered popular distrust of state institutions in general.

But at the same time, in crafting its stance of neutral authority, the NFA works to display consistency and strength. Positioning itself within a good/bad dichotomy of caring/not caring respectively, the NFA explains that it is present, and works to make its presence felt in particular ways.

Towards the end of December 2013, my manager, Temo, invited me to join him, his boss the (Director of the NFA), and a team of NFA staff with whom we shared an office, in travelling by car to the regional centers of Kutaisi and Borjomi in central Georgia. The NFA was scheduled to offer a one-day training session at each site on new standards of meat inspection in slaughterhouses to local veterinarians. Primarily at issue here is the historically-particular gold standard of food safety, HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points). Whereas the socialist GOST system (*gosudarstvennyy standart* – state standard) of food regulation, within which Georgia had been positioned, focused on the quality control of food products after they were produced and ready to hit retailers (Dunn 2005), HACCP, espoused in most OECD countries that trade in food with one another, claims to render the entire lifecycle of a food product legible ("from farm to fork") (Dunn 2008, 2005). According to this system of food safety regulation – and of course against its actual implementation across different food sectors and national political-economic contexts (see e.g. Dunn 2008) – a given food chain is rendered into recognizable stages according to a narrative of a life cycle with beginnings and endings: seed and soil content, raw material transport conditions, preparation and processing, packaging, and distribution. As a regulatory mechanism, the HACCP is thus kindred to the spirit of the EU's European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan (ENP), defined, in relation to Georgia, as a commitment to "ensure effective cooperation in order to establish and strengthen in Georgia a modern institutional system of technical regulation, standardization, accreditation, metrology,

conformity assessment and market surveillance."

Slaughterhouses constitute a uniquely defined point on the official EU-technocratic food chain; farmers must pay to transport and have their animals processed at these sites, where veterinarians are responsible for inspecting animals and meats and stamping them for Georgian markets. In this model of meat production, "slaughterhouses" are distinct from the private enclosures in which most Georgian farmers slaughter their animals ("backyard slaughtering"[37] – in Georgia, mainly cattle and sheep) before selling the meat directly to vendors in Georgian markets. Standards for slaughterhouses related to transforming "animals" to legible "food products:" modernization and hygiene (e.g. requirements for refrigerated and frozen storage, stabilized temperatures, sterilization and the handling of meats); biological hazards and contamination; and constituting market legibility (e.g. through mandatory registration policies) and traceability.

On the way to our first training session in Borjomi, I shared a ride with an American woman who had been living in Tbilisi for several years as a "researcher" affiliated with a project administered through a U.S. university and funded by the U.S. Department of Defense. For several years, she had been living in a very nice hotel in the "Armenian quarter" of Tbilisi. She did not speak a word of Georgian; her translator travelled with us. She described her project in Tbilisi as a surveillance of "bioissues," primarily zootropic infectious diseases, and cited a 2008 outbreak of swine flu in the Georgian countryside as one of the reasons she was sent there. She explained to me that the NFA's audience at these training sessions were to be private veterinarians who work as "gatekeepers" to animal/meat inspectors within slaughterhouses.

[37] See for example Alliances Caucasus Project (ALCP) report, "Meat Sector Development in Georgia." http://alcp.ge/pdfs/afcea95ceda9ef825dcd83c3aa855df3.pdf

Echoing what I had learned earlier in conversations with food safety experts at different NGO's, she explained on the way there that most farmers in the Georgian countryside cannot afford to take their animals to slaughterhouses. Instead, according to Soviet legacy, most farmers do this themselves at their own properties, and pay for the stamps for their meat, which they sell to individual market vendors and, I have heard, to more officially and popularly recognized Georgian national food retailers such as Nikora and Goodwill. The very idea of such a training session seemed futile and improbable to me, and the veterinarians at the training sessions repeatedly voiced their senses of impossibility and frustration.

Each training session took place at a medium to large-sized Georgian hotel in the center of town. The hotels were equipped with conference rooms and catering services, as well as a restaurant on site, where we had dinner after each session. The setting of these training sessions was different from larger conferences or other meetings that included or were run by EU delegates in Tbilisi, where more expensive and foreign-branded hotels were used as meeting locations. The reason I bring this up is that one thing that struck me about these training sessions was the way in which they were designed for and administered to a Georgian audience, by Georgian food safety experts. Each veterinary audience consisted of about fifteen people (men and women) based in areas relatively proximate to these meeting sites. The meeting presenters were Georgian NFA managers and staff who specialized in standards related to animal meat products. Unlike other training sessions that I attended during my fieldwork, this session was conducted all in Georgian. Around the same time as these training sessions, I also attended a HACCP training series at a hotel very close to the NFA offices in Tbilisi, which was also run by Georgian NFA staff and which was addressed to municipal food safety inspectors. As mentioned above, the primary presenter of this session was an Estonian woman in her 40's or

50's who worked in Estonia's equivalent of the NFA; these training sessions (including the printed materials in binders) were in Russian, which the Estonian presenter and the Georgian audience knew fluently.

A sense of mutual familiarity was expressed at the meetings in Kutaisi and Borjomi. Veterinarians clearly knew one another from past professional gatherings, and NFA managers like Temo also seemed to be familiar with several of the meeting attendees. Much of the interaction before meeting sessions felt like any other gathering of a relatively small circle of professionals with shared pasts – catching up, asking about family. This also means that most attendees seemed to be in their 50's, and they had experienced the many different iterations of "state regulation" in relation to the political-economy of the Georgian food system over the years. It also seemed that this particular sense of professional affiliation facilitated sidebar conversations, questions, and critiques between participants seated close to one another throughout the presentation, which I will discuss in more detail below.

Introducing each session, Temo's manager, the Deputy Head of the NFA (hereafter "DH"), started not with an overview of the technocratic standards to be discussed throughout the day, but with an appeal to the assembled veterinarians to recognize the NFA and themselves – rather than as "businessmen" or the owners of slaughterhouses – as "important" to "our [Georgia's] health." He said that "everything: policies, public health, and food – is dependent on the (food science) professions." Implied in this message seemed to be that (a) veterinarians felt a sense of powerlessness in relation to private business interests in the food system and (b) the NFA itself felt the need to assert itself as a regulatory authority within this context. He explained that veterinarians "should have good relations with the *state*, rather than with slaughterhouse owners," and asked the audience to "please consider yourself more important than

slaughterhouse owners. You are responsible for public health."

After this assertion of the "new" regulatory landscape, different NFA staff members presented information on the newly-drafted, EU-harmonized codes for inspections of slaughterhouses, which the Ministry of Agriculture had recently submitted to the Georgian Parliament. The basic outline of these presentations was as follows:

- Codes for Inspections (Inspections of living animals should occur before transport to slaughterhouses):
  - Sanitary codes for slaughterhouses
    - Slaughterhouses should be built higher on slopes.
      - Photos of ideal, modernized, industrial slaughterhouses
    - Required material infrastructures for slaughterhouses
      - e.g. temperatures, building material
      - Modes and paths of transportation to and from slaughterhouse
      - Sewage systems
      - How to organize the space in and around these sites
      - Photos of what and what not to do
  - Specifications for allowing animals into slaughterhouses
    - Terminology for meat types (e.g. poultry, beef)
    - Standards for how to cut animals
    - How to cut and inspect different organ meats
      - In case of suspicion of infectious disease in a given animal, there is a need to additionally inspect animal lymph nodes for infection.
    - How to inspect different animals
    - Which animals can and can't be slaughtered
    - How to separate by meat type
      - HACCP protocols for processing meat types and the points assigned to each type (e.g. pigs 5 control points; sheep/goats 3 control points; poultry 2 or 3 control points; rabbit 2 control points)
    - Marking / Stamping meats
      - Meats must only be stamped by veterinary inspectors
    - How to store meat types
      - Refrigeration requirements
      - Freezing requirements
- Documentation of Inspection
  - Slaughtered animals should have reports containing:
    - Why the animal was slaughtered
    - Status/Information on veterinary inspectors
  - Meat products must have documentation:
    - Whom is the meat going to ("Don't just say 'to the market.' You must include a name and address.")
- Descriptions / Definitions of different animal infectious diseases relevant to Georgian agriculture:
  - African swine flu
  - Rabies
  - Anthrax
  - Tuberculosis
  - Brucellosis
  - Listeria
  - Salmonella

("meat with salmonella can be boiled and then used for sausage")
Trichinosis

Throughout the training sessions, I was overhearing conversations veterinarians were having in response to some of the information being presented. Many of their concerns centered on the impossibility of [is this right?] both complying with these requirements and ensuring that there would be officially recognized reports of such compliance. Ultimately, there were serious concerns with implementation of plans for a "fully" transparent, traceable, and consistent food safety system connecting, as the EU and WHO literature phrases it, "farm to table." There were too many places in the food commodity chain for things to go wrong, these workshop participants felt. and these were not really related to the anticipatory schemes of HACCP protocols per se, but in what they observed was already regularly going wrong in the process. There was a sense that the mandate being presented to them was impossible.

For example, in the processes defined in the new safety codes, cases of infection must be documented and verified by laboratory reports from accredited institutions. If an infection is documented properly, the meat cannot be legally sold. As this instruction was being explained, one veterinarian explained to the few around him that he has witnessed cases wherein chicken eggs meant for Georgian markets contained salmonella, but that discovery was not officially recognized because the laboratory in that region was not properly accredited. It was thus possible for the food producer to sell them. His neighbors nodded their heads and shrugged in hopeless agreement. At that point, he asked the DH what they should do in cases like this: "How can we document this when the labs aren't even accredited? Who is responsible for this? Who will pay for this to happen?"

Another man from the now-Russian Abkhazian region asked in Russian what the veterinarians should do in Georgian regions where the wages are very low, such that they feel it

is simply not in their paygrade to even care about any of this, considering the money that could be paid would have to be spent to just get meat products stamped and approved for selling. The DH answered that in the new year, "we will have a better system of official stamps and we will be able to control where and what is stamped." The vet answered that by the way, "where there are no laboratories at all, in the Georgian regions, how can people transport meats and other animal products to be tested, for example to small towns like Akhalsixe" in southwest Georgia. The DH explained that "this is a very expensive process, but the new government should be building labs and other safety-oriented facilities, so that not everything will be concentrated in a few places in Georgia."

Another concern was the opacity of differently-positioned business interests at various points in the food chain. For example, when presenting on new protocols for documenting reports on meat from slaughtered animals and their inspection, veterinarians brought up the other possible places in the food system that they didn't trust. Food vendors at outdoor markets and their relationships with farmers were one such site. The "black markets" or "food bazaars" within cities and towns, and constituted by independent food vendors, had long been suspected by Georgian and non-Georgian food safety experts to be problematic sites lacking proper hygiene and dominated by vendors whose sole aim was to make money and to not even think about safety – let alone properly documented chains of food commodity distribution and exchange. "Under the table transactions" between different types of food business operators (farmers, processors, and vendors) were brought up as obstacles to all the work that the veterinarians wanted to do (but could not).

Related to this, one veterinarian brought up the problem of traceability and tracking. He explained that he knows of meat products that had been meant to be distributed and sold in the

Black Sea port of Batumi, but then tested positive for anthrax. Ultimately the meat had been distributed anyway, and because there wasn't a paper trail, it could not be traced back to its origin. He suggested that there should be one form that travels with the meat product, and that documents its chain of possession and transfer: "Meat must go to a specific address, and don't just say 'the market.' There must be a name and address. This will help with tracing and accountability." Unrelated to the topic of slaughterhouses and meat itself, but backing up the claim that these markets are sites of dishonesty, another vet added that they always see apples and other fruits that are covered with wax simply to appear attractive on sale at the bazaars.

Throughout these training sessions, the veterinarians had much to say and the NFA representatives listened. But their responses seemed to repeat themselves ("Listen to us, not the businesses"; "the new government will be developing all of this"; "Yes, you are right it is a good point"), one major difference between these Georgian NFA-led sessions and forums led by EU experts was that the former really felt like conversations between expert colleagues. The Tbilisi-based NFA agents did not wear suits, and the only thing that seemed to distinguish them from their audience was the fact that I knew them. The sites and objects of techno-scientific intransigence (accreditation processes, opaque paperwork, and under-the-radar "business interests") are invoked as problems here, and in this case the response, rather than "working around" them, is something like "trust us, don't worry about it." I do wonder whether Collier would say that this is an example of the mutability and transformative generativity of "neoliberal" reform itself – that "it" – when in contact with "the local" – is a form of Foucaultian governance that can appear as state-building even within its marketized variant.

I'm just not sure if that is exactly what is happening in this context, because there is at the same time a Georgian ethno-nationalist project of state-building that is related to other nationalist

institutions like the Georgian Orthodox Church. This project is visible in, for example, the very popular televised and webcast sermons of Patriarch Ilia II who advises on how to live right – e.g. with "natural" forms of biological reproduction, "natural" foods," and no yoga (Corso 2003). The Patriarch's sermons also take positions against processes of Europeanization and liberal secularism, that ultimately and problematically appear (to Georgian experts and non-experts alike) as deeply unfamiliar, if not immoral. Here, rather than being a "neutral institution," the state agency – in its mandate to govern and ensure the safety of Georgian bodies – is not identified with non-interested technoscientific expertise (i.e. the veterinarians), but is appealing to them for recognition. This training session was just as much about authorizing who, ultimately, is positioned to best ensure regulatory confidence as it was about slaughterhouse inspections. It is not a given that this appeal to veterinarians, would work, or that the promises regarding all the material contingencies implied in these requirements would be fulfilled. Within the legal and political-economic framework of EU reform, together with the post-Soviet context of strongman politics of personality, the project of (re)building state authority rests in making claims to nationalized biomoral (care) as a form of confident technoscientific expertise – vis a vis food safety and Georgian food markets.

During the car ride back to Tbilisi, Temo's boss drove, one of the staff member that I knew from the food safety office sat in the front seat, and Temo and I sat in the back. While we drove through the countryside, we passed around homemade cheese and bread that we had bought in Kutaisi. Temo pointed to the countryside and said "*this* is Georgia," and the others agreed. The implied message in that car full of NFA food safety experts seemed to be a serious sense of some kind of responsibility and knowledge, echoing the DH's introduction to the training sessions: "You are responsible for public health," wherein the Georgian bionation is

implied.

In its self-representation across Georgia through the training sessions, the NFA claims and makes its authority legible to Georgian expert audiences by invoking its alignment with the Ministry of Health and its unique position to properly ensure the safety and health of Georgian bodies. These bodies, abstracted and scaled to national terms, are positioned in relation to a commodified food chain wherein business interests are repeatedly figured as opaque in their intentions and not interested in national biological wellbeing. In the next chapter, I will discuss this form of authority that seems to matter to the NFA in its claims, but for now I want to discuss how state-initiated training sessions like those I discuss here are practices of a certain kind of nationalized "standard making." These practices are developed in accord with the EU project, but at the same time occur within the context of a state agency (re)introducing itself and asserting authority to a national(ized) public.

In this process of standard making, the claim to technoscientific expertise is not the only form of authority that matters; rather, through claiming a relationship to meat, food, and Georgian bodies, and aligning itself with public health and the ministry of health, the NFA asserts a kind of biomoral authority that is strong, governmental, and outside of the politics of personality. But at the same time it claims a unique and visible position from which to regulate and ensure public safety.

In contrast to a framework for transition where reforms and policies are applied with varying degrees of (un)evenness, the transnational process of EU-sponsored reform here creates conditions of possibility for making – or at least articulating and claiming – a kind of nationalized state authority. My ethnographic point is that there are different kinds and projects of transition happening at the same time and that focusing on just one narrative of policies from

elsewhere might obscure some of the more complex interactions taking place at a given ethnographic site. This emergent political landscape of claiming authority over biomoral life in contemporary Georgia stems from national experiences of electoral politics and reforms (a seemingly never-ending cycle of promise and disillusionment) that are already embedded within a broader "post-socialist" political-economic context of reforms from elsewhere.

Conclusion

In a short ethnographic piece commenting on a *BioSocieties* journal issue focusing on "alimentary uncertainty," Liz Roberts writes about working with environmental health experts in Mexico City (2015). She asks how is it possible that mothers in a working-class neighborhood continue to serve their children soda when the messages of experts tell them to drink plain water instead. Children are no longer allowed to come to school with soda, as part of the mission of health campaigns in this UN-designated "world's fattest country" (2013); mothers are urged to stop feeding their kids junk food and soda. In response, mothers fill clear plastic bottles with clear soda and try to trick the teachers. Why would they keep doing this, when that isn't healthy? Roberts theorizes that what escapes the messages and "information" of technoscientific expertise is that, for these mothers, "food is love:"

> The contrast I am making between those who are certain that food is love and those who are not, and those who are certain that fatness must be vanquished and those who are not, is linkable to distinctions…that seem to center around relational worlds filled with uncertainty and object-state worlds that are uncertain about relations. 248

In analyzing some of the sites through which state biomoral authority is articulated, claimed, and nationalized, this chapter attempted to think about the kind of authority that comes to matter through the process of political-economic "transition." In the spirit of Roberts's attempt to think through and take seriously the seemingly paradoxical ways in which voices and

worlds that claim authority and might otherwise be expected to be heard are ignored when interacting with different systems of value and meaning, I wanted to think about "transition" as a process of worlds interacting and unexpected valuations emerging. In contrast to a model wherein norms from elsewhere are simply passed on, accepted, and implemented (or not), in these examples, the process of introducing these norms involves the NFA appealing to and seeking to persuade its audience to recognize its own trustworthiness, in contrast to the opaque) intentions of privatized market interests. No doubt the NFA still works with (rather than against) private food business operators (especially larger Georgian branded producers and retailers), but these training sessions are opportunities for the NFA to articulate its relationship to "Georgia" as a coherent nation and, as a state agency, claim some form of sincere, trustworthy authority. In this sense, it matters that these training sessions are between Georgians and other Georgians, and take place in the Georgian language (rather than in Russian, when experts from other post-Soviet nations mediate the conversation, or in English, when EU people are there).

Processes of post-socialist "transition," then, are as much about opportunities for a politics of standard *making* (within nationalized contexts) as they are about standard *meeting* (in the case of transnational, EU-planned reforms, for example). When a state agency like the NFA begins a long-term campaign of appealing to Georgian audiences as a trustworthy, regulatory authority, its claim to sovereignty over Georgian biomoral life and its relationship to a marketized food commodity chain is at stake. The emergent political effect is an unintended consequence of EU policies that seek to expand the "Eurozone" market territory: Georgian state agents claim to care more about Georgian bodies than the EU itself, certainly, but also more than private Georgian food business interests care. The resultant good/bad dichotomy – vis a vis Georgian state vs business interests in food safety – is central to the Georgian state's claims to

biomoral authority and trustworthiness.

Chapter Four
Encoding Ambivalence: Legal Harmonization and Emergent Technoscientific Authorities at the post-Soviet Georgian National Food Agency

Throughout my time at the Georgian National Food Agency (NFA), Salome, the Head of Risk Analysis, would ask me to clarify or explain some of the terms that appeared in her EU and Codex Alimentarius (CA) documents, all written in English in a register of standardized, official technoscientific food safety expertise. She and other office employees turned to me as a "native expert" on both expert and non-expert food terminologies in American English, and when something sounded unfamiliar and/or "British" to me I'd ask one of my expat friends.

One day, Salome was working on a project that involved rewriting a regulatory framework for dairy products with the World Health Organization's (WHO) CA guidelines as her "source material." Referring to a CA pamphlet on risk analysis in the dairy sector, she was trying to find general guidelines for a very popular food in Georgia and in the region: sour cream. She could not find this milk product listed anywhere in the book, and she wondered if it was implied, or assumed to belong to the category of "fermented cream." In addition to being uncertain about the safety guidelines, she was not sure how the product should be labelled exactly. The Georgian word for sour cream is *arajani*, and while many Georgians refer to it that way, it is also commonly referred to in the Russian, *cmetana*. She wanted to know: Is there a protocol for labelling procedures in a national context where both words are commonly used, and the now-unofficial lingua franca (Russian) may be even more frequent? Who is in charge of this policy and where can we find this information?

She asked me to compose an email to the CA Commission:

> "Dear Codex Alimentarius Commission,
>
> I am writing on behalf of Ms. Salome X., the Codex contact point for the Republic of Georgia, in Tbilisi.

> We require the following information as we work to harmonize our food safety legislation:
>
> We would like to confirm the official term under the Codex Alimentarius for "sour cream," or in the Slavic languages, "smietana" or "cmetana."
>
> We are not able to find this very popular and important dairy food product listed in the Codex Alimentarius standards for Milk and Milk Products, in the first and second editions.
>
> Is "sour cream" synonymous with your term "fermented cream," which we did find in the guidelines?
>
> What is the official Codex term for this milk product, and what are the related safety guidelines?
>
> Thank you."

After a few days, I asked Salome if she got a response. She did, and she was not very excited about it. She said that the CA response was basically "no answer":

> [Salome quoting the response:] "The Commission has dairy products listed in categories, and not by specific products like "sour cream," which by the way would go under "acidic dairy." It is up to the national [governing] body to form its own term, and to place that term on the product, provided that it does not mislead consumers."

Salome's impression was that this was a vague, half-hearted attempt at a response that basically left the question unanswered in terms of safety guidelines specific to the product itself. Since sour cream is so popular and such a large part of food life in Georgia, it was just unsatisfactory to her that it should be somehow lost, as it were, in a larger category that was itself, to her, unfamiliar if not totally arbitrary.

In moments like that I always felt an urge to apologize for some reason, as if I somehow embodied and represented that form of authority from over "there," most likely because I was very aware of the fact that despite my efforts otherwise, I was recognized in that very way. I responded, "Isn't it weird that they don't have a word for sour cream in the guidelines, especially since they have 'yogurt,' for example, and 'kefir,' and especially since so many people use sour

cream, especially in Eastern Europe?" I went on to analyze this; meanwhile Salome was over it already, thinking about something else. "Maybe that's why they don't pick a word for it and put it in the guidelines, because of the East/West thing? Is it political?" I asked. She looked at me with definite recognition and understanding. She replied and it felt like she was telling me something very serious, and secret: "They should pick something, okay maybe not English, not 'cmetana,' but something else, maybe a Latin name."

She then decisively explained how she would take care of this matter: "Anyway, we will go to the Russian legislation, to cite a framework, not just write our guidelines from out of the blue."

This reference to the contemporary Russian legislation as a reliable "framework," in contrast to what were read as EU and CA equivocations and non-answers, recurred many times during my time at the NFA, on different projects requiring translation and interpretation. For now, and as I will explain in more detail below, I would like to emphasize the utter lack of agency and care imagined, at least as Salome saw it, on the part of the CA regulatory authority. In her turning to Russian codes, the fact that the already-existing Georgian food codes are based on Soviet and post-Soviet iterations, which are themselves embedded in a legacy of Soviet technoscientific expertise, is not in itself the significant thing. This chapter will argue that Salome doesn't turn to the Russian codes simply because they are linguistically and historically familiar, but because they are valued – in that office – as more reliable, comprehensive, and authoritative than the policy authority of the CA.

I would like to think about how sites of technoscientific authority are differentially imagined, cited, relied upon, and trusted in processes of rewriting Georgian food safety codes to "approximate" those of the EU. The specificity of "food safety" reform is significant for this

particular historical conjuncture of state-building in Georgia. "Food" is like language in the ways it is mobilized as a "natural element" of nationalized beings, identities, and differentiations. [Is "natural element" a term from some other authority? If so, provide a cite; if not, think harder about whether food is a mediator of the social, a material component of social beings, a medium of exchange, or what.] Its ontological, epistemological, and semiotic ubiquity in homes, in mass-mediated communications like television shows and magazines, in fantasies of foreign contamination, and in the voices of food safety bureaucrats at state agencies like the NFA suggests the power food has to articulate and reproduce the structured ideologies that govern daily life: notions of gender and gender roles, the public/private divide, the legitimate role of "the state," the healthy body, the informed consumer of the market. More specifically, this chapter will examine how this very moment of food safety regulatory reform engenders an articulation of and ambivalence towards EU authority itself within the NFA.

When Georgia signed the Association Agreement in the summer of 2014, the Georgian press introduced this contract as primarily a market-based relationship, with the inclusion of certain liberal democratic reforms. For example, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs press release foregrounded the "creation of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). By removing customs tariffs and quotas and by comprehensively approximating trade-related laws and regulations to the standards of the European Union, the Agreement offers Georgia a framework for boosting trade and economic growth." An EU Commissioner was quoted as focusing on the economic benefits of this: "Georgian citizens will increasingly be able to reap the benefits of closer association with the EU as a result of our Association Agreement. Better business opportunities for Georgian small- and medium-sized enterprises, improved safety of locally-grown agricultural products and enhanced energy efficiency..." The article adds that in

addition to trade with the EU, the agreement also promises the re-writing of Georgian legal codes as they relate to Georgian citizens themselves:

> Having signed up to an Association Agreement with the EU, Georgia has made commitments in the areas of democracy and the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, good governance, a market economy and sustainable development. Furthermore, the Agreement commits Georgia to an ambitious reform agenda in key areas such as security policy, trade, economic recovery and growth and governance. Enhanced cooperation between the EU and Georgia in many areas including, for example, environmental protection, social development and protection, transport, consumer protection, education, youth and culture, industry, and energy, is also foreseen in the Association Agreement.[38]

During my time at the NFA, part of my responsibility was to work with a department called the EU Harmonization Unit, which is a legal office that focuses on drafting Georgian food safety legislation according to EU codes. This process of harmonizing consists of translating from English EU sources into Georgian. Between 2014 and 2015, among many other projects, we worked on the first iterations of the approximated Georgian food safety codes, as well as on a preliminary application the NFA filed to the EU on behalf of Georgia, with the goal of meeting the EU's safety requirements for exporting Georgian-produced honey to EU markets.

The practice of legal "approximation" involves "harmonizing" (the two terms are often used interchangeably in EU reference materials), or re-calibrating Georgian food safety standards with those of the EU, which are themselves based on "global" CA standards derived from the HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) protocols. The EU insists that in contrast to "legal unification," harmonization allows for regional, national, local differences in designing and implementing legislation. For Georgia, legally transitioning to a HACCP protocol itself constitutes a radical re-envisioning of food chains and points of potential danger (Dunn 2005).

[38] http://mfa.gov.ge/News/EU-Georgia-Association-Agreement-fully-enters-into.aspx?CatID=5&lang=en-US (accessed online Feb 6 2018)

Whereas the Soviet GOST system (*gosudarstvennyy standart* – state standard) of food regulation, within which Georgia was once positioned, focused on the quality control of food products after they were produced and ready to hit retailers (2005), HACCP, espoused in most OECD countries that trade in food with one another, claims to render the entire lifecycle of a food product legible ("from farm to fork") and subject to inspection (Dunn 2007, 2005).

I would like to discuss this process of legal harmonization as a "mode of translation" (Gal 2015, 226) and, following Gal, analyze it as a practice of value and meaning-making.[39] This process, communicative and citational, is one in which meaning emerges as translators? move between texts; it is not simply a matter of imagined equivalencies between the denotational properties of different languages: "The uptake of some similarities, while ignoring possible others, is constrained and inspired by the projects, roles, situations, and language ideologies of participants" (227, citing Goodman 1972). As a citational practice and "discursive act" (Nakassis 2012, 626), harmonization articulates and brings into relation varied forms of ideological meaning (time-spaces, histories, identities) (626) through semiotic invocations while it appears to simply be a means to making similarities of differences. Gal asks us to think instead about translation as a process of uneasy "sameness-in-difference" (226) wherein socio-political values themselves are mobilized, invoked, and (re)produced (235; Gal 2016).

[39] The European Commission defines legal approximation (or harmonization) as "[a] unique obligation of membership in the EU, which means that countries aspiring to join the EU must align their national laws, rules and procedures in order to give effect to the entire body of EU law contained in the acquis. The obligation to approximate continues after accession." Of the "three key elements," our work at the NFA was concerned with the first: "transposition": "to adopt or change national laws, rules and procedures so that the requirements of the relevant EU law are fully incorporated into the national legal order. Some member and "aspiring" member countries like Poland and the Slovak Republic use the word "alignment" when defining approximation. European Commission Migration and Home Affairs Glossary (accessed online Feb 6 2018). The other two elements are "implementation" and "enforcement."

As I witnessed it, what this promise of legal reform means for the NFA is (a) the fact that the NFA is officially oriented to the EU and its technoscientific standards matters; and (b) the way this orientation to technoscientific authority unfolds – in processes of legal harmonization – invokes citations of and reliance on several different, geopolitically-mapped and envisioned sites of technoscientific expertise. For the NFA, the horizons of aspiration in legal reform are at least twofold. First, from an instrumental, political-economic point of view, the Association Agreement and its regime of standards presents the EU as a potential market for Georgian food producers. Rewriting Georgian food safety codes according to this horizon is, for the NFA workers, a process of reconceiving and redefining Georgian food production processes so that they "meet" the safety standards set by EU authorities. Second, the Association Agreement, in requiring that associate nation-states rewrite their own national food safety codes – as they relate to domestic, national market places and consumers, the process of regulatory reform also positions the NFA – as a state institution – in a particular relationship to Georgian food consumers and buyers.

Beginning with an analysis of the first mode, that of rewriting codes to meet EU safety standards to enable Georgian food products to enter EU markets, I demonstrate that the process of regulatory reform in relation to Georgian audiences invokes a particular set of expectations, anxieties, and senses of responsibility on the part of NFA workers in relation "the EU." Here, the practice of "harmonization," in claiming to allow for situational difference and in deferring answers to questions accordingly, in turn generates the anxious burden of not feeling *equal enough*, for my Georgian colleagues.

In the second case, confronted with the opportunity to craft a sincerely "good" code for Georgian bodies, my interlocutors at the NFA work very hard to make sure the EU "source

material" (safety codes written in EU English) is correctly understood and translated into the Georgian context. During this process, a team of experts and staff members – all women – interpret and make sense of EU codes through an animated, improvisational practice of citing the Russian food safety codes as a source of not only linguistically familiar, but also of a valuable and trusted source of precise, detailed, and technoscientific expertise.

This burden of designing sincerely good codes for Georgian food buyers through processes of harmonization as translation also generates bureaucratic anxiety; appeals to and potential citations of transnational and global regulatory authorities such as the EU and the Codex Alimentarius are embedded in a communicative framework in which these very "official" authoritative sources appear ethically distant at best and insincere (or not caring) at worst. But *because of* the anxiety produced by a distanced and distancing site of authority, Georgian food safety bureaucrats rely on other, unofficial -- namely *Russian* -- sources of technoscientific expertise. Popular suspicions of invisible Russian political ties to Georgian politicians like then-President Ivanishvili aside, even though they are often voiced within these very offices in passing, a different kind of Russian authority – one that is technoscientific and often imagined as outside of (geo)politics, rooted in "science"-- is called upon and cited. Sherouse discusses how Soviet/Russian legacies of techno-aesthetic practice and expertise live on in the institution of film dubbing in Georgia as an intransigent gold standard of "quality," despite governmental efforts to "remove Russian presence" from the film industry (2015). In another example, Sherouse demonstrates that contemporary techniques in wrestling training in Tbilisi are themselves iterations and unexpected reanimations of Soviet-era ideals of masculine/feminine binaries vis a vis socio-historically specific mobilizations of training cues and discourses around imagined bodily potentials (2016).

By "technoscientific expertise" I am referring to a form of expertise emergent in particular historical contexts in which authority and value are assigned to a form of modernist, calculative reasoning and practice that is severed from "non-expert" forms of knowing, being, and acting. For the purposes of this chapter: As a resource for governance in nation-states (socialist and capitalist), "technoscience" is the domain of "technocrats" who, through bureaucratic organization, administer to modalities of national life in a "biopolitical" capacity (Foucault 1972) and with deeply political effects (e.g. Ross 1995; Anand 2012).

In this way, geopolitically-mapped sites of authoritative, technoscientific emanation (Silverstein 2004) – specifically the EU and (Soviet) Russia, but sometimes the US as well – are invoked and evaluated in relation to one another in the bureaucratic practices that constitute "official" legal reform and harmonization. Rendered ethnographically legible, these moments of harmonization provide a lens into the highly ambivalent process of EU zone-making at its borders.

Temo's shrug: Making sense of EU standards for EU honey markets

In January 2014, Temo, my manager at the NFA, delegated a very tedious task to me and to one of the young interns, Nini: The Food Safety Department and the EU Harmonization Unit were in the middle of completing an application to export and sell Georgian-produced honey to the EU. Temo asked me to look through the EU codes on lex.europa.eu and track down the parameters for a few chemical residues that his team had not been able to find. As part of the process of this application, Georgia had to demonstrate that the honey in question met EU safety standards, which include the monitoring of chemical and biological "residues and substances"

(e.g. pesticide and veterinary medicine residues, metals, and radiation)[40] In applying to export a food commodity like honey to the EU, the European Commission requires a given "national competent authority" (here, the NFA) to file this report, and to administer and verify all the requisite steps in assessing the safety of the food product. It was thus the NFA's responsibility to manage the process by which the honey sample in question made its way to a properly accredited laboratory with the resources to test for the "residues and substances" in question, to collect and verify the report, and to include the reported information in the application. As part of this application process, applicants are also required to design a Residue Monitoring Plan. Temo's team was not sure if the sample met the requirements for maximum limits on the following substances:

(1) Metals (specifically Mercury, Copper, Lead, Cadmium)

(2) Dithiocarbamates (maneb group)

(3) Nitrofurans (AHD, AMOZ, AOZ, SEM)

(4) Non-dioxin-like PCBs

(5) Gamma-ray radionucleides (Cs-137)

(6) Radionuclides Sr-90.

Furthermore, it was not clear whether the criteria listed and tested in the lab report were designed to address all of the EU-defined residues and contaminants in the first place. At that time, Georgia itself did not have a laboratory equipped to test for many of the chemical substances listed in the report, and so the NFA had to mail the sample to Latvia, which is a very

[40] Ec.europa.ed/food/food/chemicalsafety/residues/docs/requirements_non_eu.pdf (Accessed January 24, 2014)

expensive and time-consuming process.[41] Salome, the Head of Risk Analysis, explained to me that this is common practice for the NFA in testing food samples, and that the system of Georgian labs in place at that time were legacies of the Soviet era, and actually very sophisticated in testing and experimental work on (micro)biological materials.

What ensued was (for Nini and me) a very stressful few days of combing through pages of EU Council Directives on honey, which, classified as a particular kind of "animal-origin food product," did not seem to enjoy the same attention and visibility on the legal pages as other animal-origin foods like meats and dairy products. Instead, while classifications and definitions of "honey" were readily available in the Annexes of these documents (e.g. "Names, Product, description and definitions" and "Composition Criteria for honey" per Annex 1 and 2 of Council Directive 2001/110/EC respectively), it seemed impossible to find a table of parameters for pre-defined substances and contaminants for honey products, unlike for meat and dairy products.

After a few days, the young and very motivated intern Nini pointed out (in Georgian) that actually, honey is not exactly an animal product but rather something like a "vegetable," but not quite. Our colleague Irakli, one of the three men who shared that large office space of primarily women, and who was out much of the time working with the municipal branch of the NFA responsible for local inspections of producers, restaurants, and vendors, agreed. These kinds of

[41] Because Georgia did not have laboratories equipped to test for criteria demanded by the EU to export and circulate within its markets (e.g. pesticide residues, veterinary medicine, and other forms of chemical contamination), it was common practice to send food samples to a laboratory in Latvia, which was very costly in terms of time and money. They did this for these fish samples, which caused a delay in the audit preparation. They also sent honey samples to Latvia when applying to export Georgian honey to the EU. The Baltics are regarded as a highly successful embodiment of post-Soviet scientific expertise that retained its technoscientific authority while also having been reoriented towards the EU. Many of my professional interlocutors in the medical fields in Tbilisi had travelled to Latvia and Estonia for graduate educations in medical fields.

products that include honey are something like nectars, maybe. Nini sighed that navigating through all of this legislation was like figuring out a puzzle, and went on to ask me what crab meat is like, is it like chicken, and what do I think so far about their outdoor food markets? Meanwhile, Temo, when he was in the office and not busy in meetings and site visits, would breeze by and shrug his shoulders when I would indicate that we're working hard on this but can't seem to find the information we need: "Check in [Directives] 96/23 EC and 97/747 EC, on residue levels." Again, we went to these pages but could not find the relevant details on honey.

Salome, whose desk was very close to our table, was busy working with other higher-level office workers on a report due to EU delegates on Georgian animal-origin meat products for 2013. This was probably the same report I mention later in this chapter and that stressed Salome so much, as it was connected to applying to export Georgian fish products from the Black Sea coast to the EU. She sensed our frustration over the honey residues and recommended that we look at a binder she kept on her desk from a workshop she had taken the previous year through the European Commission's Health & Consumer Protection Office, DG SANCO (European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Consumers).[42] The binder contained an index of food products and safety standards, she said, including health requirements. Nini took the binder and said out loud something like "Ok now let's find honey here," and Salome stood over her shoulder and tried to navigate her through the pages. I think at this point we appeared very inexperienced and clueless to her. After a few seconds she sighed and said "I don't have time for this," and went back to working on her own report. Nini and I tried our best but eventually I decided that I would email the EFSA (European Food Safety Authority) and ask them for the information. On January 21, I wrote to the EFSA:

[42] A division of DG SANTE (Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety) for the EU.

> "Dear [EFSA contact name],
>
> I am a researcher working on food safety in the Republic of Georgia.
>
> Your website has been very informative in providing information regarding residues and limits of honey contaminants.
>
> There are a few indicators for which I have not been able to find information:
>
> [list of the substances Temo defined above]
>
> These indicators have appeared as categories in a standard lab report produced in reference to a local honey sample.
>
> I have referred to all the possible EU legislative documents and amendments regarding these indicators and have not found any official information regarding maximum levels in honey.
>
> Can you please send me this information, and the legislative document I could cite in defining the maximums?... Thank you.

A few days later, they responded:

> "Dear Mrs Czarnecki,
>
> Thank you for your email and interest in the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).
>
> EFSA's role is to provide independent scientific advice on matters linked to food and feed safety. EFSA's risk assessments provide risk managers (i.e. European Commission, European Parliament and Member States) with the sound scientific advice they need to help them take the final legislative or regulatory decisions required to ensure that European food is safe for consumers.
>
> It is the European Commission or national food authorities in each Member State, not EFSA, that are responsible for taking these decisions.
>
> Your request relates to regulatory limits in food legislation (risk management) which the European Commission can advise on. You can contact the European Commission, in particular, the Directorate-General responsible for Health and Consumers (DG SANCO)...
>
> You can find current EU legislation relating to contaminants in the food chain at the following link…
>
> You may also find useful information in the EU Pesticides database of DG SANCO…that contains all the MRLs (Maximum Residue Limits) in the regulated commodities and their evolution…
>
> Should you need further information, please do not hesitate to contact us again…"

I then sent the information request to several contacts I found in the DG SANCO binder to which Salome directed us a few days before, and let Temo know that we were waiting for

their response. In the meantime, searching through the DG SANCO databases; the tables of the European Commission Decisions and Council Directives; online EU, NGO, and industry-related handbooks for national applicants seeking to export honey to the EU (e.g. a microfinance research report guiding Tajikistan regulatory authorities in the application process for exporting honey to the EU and suggesting recently successful Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyz state authorities as potential resources); and EU legal documents on "honey" and contaminant levels, we were still not able to find parameters for all of the substances listed on the lab report. I could find some of the metals information related to honey on DG SANCO's database but the antibiotic nitrofurans were only listed in relation to chicken and poultry products. PCBs were listed as selectable variables on the database, but not "Non-dioxin-like PCBs." Cadmium appeared as the topic of a recent Commission report but only in relation to trends in daily intake levels of EU consumer bodies.

Temo and my colleagues were sure that the information was out there somewhere, and we just had to find it. I had a feeling that part of the issue was a classic case of "bureaucratic deferral," not to mention the relatively obscure categorical status of "honey" itself on the pages of EU food safety legislation; somewhere in the inter-departmental process of completing the application, the details of this lab report did not match those on the actual application, if any such details were provided in the first place. This was a bureaucratic "loose end" that Temo's office would have to deal with. But after our attempts to untangle the ever-multiplying threads, we were left waiting, hoping for the information to appear as an email response in my inbox. About a week later, I voiced my anxiety about waiting to Temo and he surprised me with how little the lack of a response seemed to bother him, as if he was already used to it: "That is okay. If they don't respond, we can find the information anyway."

Eventually the application was completed in the NFA's EU Harmonization Unit, and as of 2015, Georgia has exported honey to the EU. Looking back at this moment at the NFA, I realize that Temo, Salome and other managers were very busy with other annual reports and audits on the NFA itself and its processes; the question of these few contaminant thresholds was for them probably one of the last things on their minds; they were hoping that perhaps my fluency in English would simply be helpful.

In response to Nini's and my unsuccessful efforts at trying to solve this puzzle by locating the information in the EU records, Temo's shrug indicates a "business-as-usual" resignation about how some things get done in this particular historical moment at the NFA. In this case, the honey application – as an instance of "EU harmonization" – requires that Georgian food production chains meet EU standards if Georgia wishes to export to EU markets, which it very much does. This is one of the benefits of signing an Association Agreement; not a potential member state and not quite on the "path" to membership in NATO either,[43] in signing this contract, Georgia – legislatively and economically – orients toward the EU and its markets. This formal orientation in general helps mitigate its dependence on Russia and Russian buyers (especially in relation to Georgian bottled mineral water and wine). In this way, when it comes to getting Georgian food products into EU markets, "harmonization" is a matter of (re)calibrating and articulating food products in terms of (pre)defined components of the production processes according to technoscientific standards set by the European Commission, which the EFSA made clear in its email to me, and which itself defers to a globalized "scientific opinion" and consensus in its legislative and regulatory decisions. (I discuss the multi-scaled geopolitical processes and

[43] "What if Georgia was to join the EU or NATO," my diplomat expat friends would say, "and NATO had to inherit its wars with Russia? It'll never happen."

deferrals at work in a term like "EU regulatory authority" as it relates to the re-branding of the NFA as a governing state agency in more detail in Chapter 2). Of course, as recent critiques of "audit cultures" and of contemporary forms of technocratic governance of food systems (not to mention Marxist critique itself) have argued, the image of quantified, apolitical, and abstract commensuration between and within systems of standards obscures the socio-political inequalities that such measurements and standards generate and from which they themselves emerge (see e.g. Lampland and Star 2009). For now, I would like to focus on the way the work of "harmonization" with respect to the aspirational horizon of getting Georgian food commodities into EU markets articulates at the NFA as a project of standard-matching (vs, e.g. "standard-making," which is done somewhere "out there," within the EU, and perhaps vaguely in relation to other national agencies like the FDA and the global WHO.)

In the case of the honey application, "the EU" itself appears at once as a highly desirable and elite economic horizon and a cumbersome database, an index of standards, and its personnel annoyingly slow to respond, but in the end, the information will be found (because "it" is "out there" somewhere), the application will be completed, and honey will (hopefully) be approved for EU markets. As Borocz argues in his work on "Europe" and "the EU," "the EU" here operates as an ideological fantasy with political meaning. Europe as both "EU technocratic authority" and "potential market" is imagined in contrast to the post-socialist, "Eastern" and "Central European" worlds that Borocz discusses in his work, on "goodness" and "Europe" (e.g. 2000 and 2006).

Such geopolitical mappings of the technoscientific world of authoritative standards making are multiscaled and imagined to interact in particular ways. In the context of a non-EU country applying to export to the EU (defined as "third country" applicants in EU nomenclature),

EU standards are themselves up for negotiation if one knows the politics of citing and invoking regulatory authorities on the global level, i.e. the WHO's CA guidelines for food safety, which also invoke their grounding in "scientific opinion." Salome explained it to me while I was trying to find the maximum thresholds for metals in honey samples. Looking through the binder from the DG SANCO workshop she attended, I asked her who is responsible for enforcing these limits, in the Georgian production process. She explained that these limits are "standards," not "regulation." "Regulation," she said, is "compulsory." "Standards are voluntary" and it is up to food business operators themselves to maintain standards. She explained that in addition to CA standards being based on scientific opinion, their status as a globalized code under the WHO implies that they are not themselves subject to the specific policies of (trans)national interests. "When negotiating food trade to strict regulatory systems like the EU," it is possible to appeal to CA codes when necessary. She continued:

> for example, growth hormones [in animal-origin food products] are not regulated in the US or Africa, and they are in the EU. Yet there is currently no scientific opinion on the safety of this, even though according to common sense, it would have an effect on the human organism. This is ongoing in the EU now. As a member of the WTO they can't refuse something based on a standard that doesn't have expert scientific authority behind it. It creates potential barriers…At one of the Codex sessions [they] were deciding on developing a scientific opinion concerning growth hormone. The EU did not want to proceed with any work on elaborating or developing the scientific opinion, but US and Africa delegates happened to attend the meeting that day, and they voted and outnumbered the EU. These countries now can ask Codex committees to work on developing scientific opinions. African countries do this because they say that in regards to food security and hunger, growth hormone is needed to produce more meat for people to eat. It is the same for instance in regulating aflatoxin in nuts – which is a big problem in Turkey and here too. Official scientific opinion limits are 10 [microgram/…?] and the EU made theirs 6.

In this depiction of the EU as regulatory body, Salome points to the "strict" guidelines upon which it insists, perhaps irrationally, according to this account. In terms of standards, EU regulatory authority is trumped by both globally-scaled regimes (e.g. the appeal to the CA and "scientific consensus") and the simple circumstantial pragmatics of regulatory governance at the

geopolitical level (e.g. the US and Africa agents happened to show up for that particular meeting and outvoted the EU.[44]). For those trying to get their food products into "strict regulatory systems like the EU," EU regulatory authority is invoked as yet another obstacle for "outsiders" simply trying to "do business" ("negotiating food trade," as she put it). There are ways around EU regulatory intransigence, as it is imagined here, and EU non-responsiveness is generative of both anxiety and reliance on other valorizations of technoscientific authority.

Encoding authority: Translating food safety codes for Georgians

In contrast to the project of entering EU markets, another part of "harmonization" ironically makes work at the NFA a process of nationalized, perhaps even distinctly non-EU, authority making. In the previous chapter, I discussed the political-economic ideologies in which the NFA has emerged as a kind of regulating authority *for Georgian citizens*. In particular, I analyzed its positioning in terms of political elites' projects of "libertarianism" (Saakashvili's two administrations), and then a re-establishment of governmental authorities in the more "liberal" projects of Ivanishvili and his administrations. Briefly: The NFA finds itself "rebuilding" after almost two decades of deep political unrest and uncertainty: civil wars in the 1990s, followed by a two-term presidential administration and policies that defined itself according to a "libertarian" agenda of de-regulation and that publicly effaced agencies like the NFA (then called the "Food Safety Agency"). Against (or from within) this atmosphere of "non-regulation" and uncertainty, the NFA has emerged as a governmental agency self-conscious about its institutional pasts aligned with severe libertarian agendas. It was precisely in this

[44] The specific categorization of "Africa" itself here and the way the entire continent is itself voiced in this particular narrator, and the work she is doing here to align herself and "Georgia" in relation to "it" is itself an important question that I don't have the space to address here.

political moment that I started my fieldwork at the agency.

In rebranding itself as a trustworthy regulatory authority for Georgians, the NFA's work on legal harmonization is centered on re-writing Georgian food safety laws within the domestic food system to "approximate" those of the EU. As such, the text to be changed was a Georgian book of codes that the Ministry of Health originally designed in 2001, during Shevardnadze's administration, and as Salome explained to me: "The first part is based on the Russian system and parameters for end-products [i.e. the Soviet GOST protocol] and the second half, parameters on contamination levels and safety is again based on the Russian system. At that time, the Ministry of Health was responsible for defining parameters, diseases, and in relation to food." In 2006, during Saakashvili's reformist administration, the Food Safety Agency was established as a division of the Ministry of Agriculture and took over responsibility for these codes.

It was a blue book, about one centimeter thick and A4 paper size. Unfortunately I don't have a photo of the book, which was a weathered fixture on all the managers' desks and my veiled requests to get a copy of one for myself was usually met with an "unfortunately they were printed long ago," or a vague "these are really from the Ministry of Health." In general, I never felt comfortable asking to take photos and recordings in the NFA offices, since getting permission to do fieldwork there had been so challenging at first, and I did not want to overstep what eventually became – thanks to managerial changes after the 2012 Parliamentary elections – a very hospitable welcome.

After our work on the draft's first iteration in June and July of 2014, the document went through an editing and revision request process at the Ministry of Agriculture (the organization of which the NFA is a part and to which it answers), before it would finally be sent to Parliament to be ratified as active Georgian legislation. Throughout the translation/approximation process, I

was able to witness how Georgian legal experts in that office rethink some of the terminological and conceptual translations and understandings that emerged.[45]

In July 2014, Temo tasked me to work with Mari, a very charismatic and glamorous woman in her mid- to late-fifties, whose daughter, a mother of two, also worked in the NFA in a different division. Mari's husband had died many years before this, and she lived with her mother in Saburtalo, a large, lively, and "middle-class" neighborhood in Tbilisi.[46] As a Georgian woman, Mari was very proud of being a "successful" grandmother, mother, and daughter. Although she had lived through difficult, tragic times in the 1990s, her family was healthy, appeared to be very secure financially, and professionally driven. She, like so many Georgian

[45] One of these terms is that of the "consumer" and related to this, of "consumer rights." This legal category of personhood is brand new in contemporary Georgia; it was not until well after Mikhael Saakashvili's Rose Revolution of 2003 that high-profile libertarian figures in his United National Movement government during his second term, particularly former economic minister Kakha Bendukidze, centered on "the consumer" in public discourse around issues of "free choices" and as a (potentially) discerning agent who, through his/her purchasing "power," may exert political-economic leverage in regulating consumer goods markets such as food. This category of "consumer" had *just* – during my time there – entered the food safety codes of Georgia, now with a new political party in power (Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream coalition) and well after Saakashvili's political demise. One of my colleagues at the NFA, the manager of the EU Harmonization Unit and a lawyer, is currently working on her PhD in Law, with her dissertation focusing on exactly these terms. A young Georgian woman in her early forties, she does not speak English and since most of her primary research texts are in English and from the business/marketing and juridical-legal literatures on the topic, one of the other English-speaking lawyers in her office often reads these texts and translates for her, which is in itself a process that offers ethnographically rich insight into the actual practices of translation-as-interpretation and "value-making" (cf Gal 2015) that constitute law-making.

[46] As I mentioned in the previous chapter and as I will discuss in more detail in subsequent chapters on "regulation's objects," the unemployment rate is very high in Georgia – officially around 12% but unofficially much higher. While there is a "middle class" in the sense of a socio-economic group that acts as a particular kind of consumer (an aspirational bent towards whatever "cosmopolitan" lifestyle is in vogue at the moment), "disposable income" could signal credit card debt just as well as it could signal someone with a well-paying job. Most likely, in Tbilisi, "middle classes" are in some kind of debt or else struggling to maintain a middle-class lifestyle (i.e. owning an apartment and accompanying furniture and appliances, at least one car, vacations once a year during August, if only to the Black Sea coast).

mothers, knew very well how to provision her family and loved ones (including office colleagues) with delicious and high-quality food, accompanied by good conversation and laughter.

Mari was part of the group drafting the approximation of Georgian food safety law to that of the EU. At the time I worked on this project, one of the other people working on this project was Nino, a very kind young woman in her early thirties with a law degree from Ukraine, who was married, with a little daughter who looked exactly like her. Nino's office was in the EU Harmonization Unit, an office that consists of two legal experts (Nino and her manager, a woman in her forties who is now working for her PhD in Law), and two staff members. We all met at Mari's desk in the Food Safety Department's office, so although a few people from the Harmonization Unit worked on legal approximation, Nino, whose English is excellent, was a regular presence at our regular group sessions. My role was simply to help with the English interpretations and translations as needed, and I was otherwise very graciously permitted to take fieldwork notes and interrupt with my own questions when they would come up.

To draw a more detailed picture of the context in which approximation took place: The office space was very social and lively throughout the day, as employees in the Food Safety Department were available to one another and seemed very close. It felt as though each day there was some cause for everyone in that office and colleagues/friends from elsewhere in the building (including Temo's boss, who had his own office across from ours) to share a large meal (*supra*) with homemade food women colleagues would bring from home, to eat a large cake from Tbilisi's famous Bela's Bakery, and to drink cognac. Usually someone who had just travelled back from Bucharest or Sofia for a conference or training program would bring a few bottles of wine for us all to try, and everyone would of course comment on how sour or bad it

was compared to that of Georgia. Even if there was no real reason for a *supra*, Mari was one of the women who would regularly bring in fresh seasonal fruit or some baked goods from the market for everyone to share. Men or (very rarely if ever) a woman from the regions outside of Tbilisi would come in to sit at Mari's desk and ask her about registering their new and small businesses in bottled water (spring, mineral) with the NFA, as they are required to do. There were thus many different – and rarely-seen (because many never made it to market) – bottled waters throughout the office, some of which looked very unappealing to me, especially those classified as "medicinal" and which I was sometimes very strongly urged to try. On the walls over each expert's and staff member's desk, next to the rows of binders and colorful reference books, Orthodox crosses, icons of Georgian Orthodox saints, and dried herbs from religious holidays hung, infusing the place with a sense of shared ethical purpose.

I focus here on this office as a space of deep mutual, gendered, ethno-national familiarity, considering these bureaucrats' identities as mothers, grandmothers, and daughters; the materializations of Georgian Orthodoxy in their office space; and the daily event of sharing food. When legal approximation to EU codes is happening, the food safety experts involved are also embodiments of a particular kind of Georgian maternal femininity. I do not think they were tasked with this specific job specifically because they are women or because of a particular kind of gendered valuation of their expertise in relation to the job of legal approximation. Rather, I think the staff assigned to this project and organizationally-positioned to act as "competent experts" here happened to be women. And that accident of history gave the NFA's mission and project, as they pursued Association with the EU, a particularly gendered and national character (at least as seen from within the Agency).

When I started working on the approximation project, my colleague Salome was

preparing materials for an FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN) audit, the deadline of which was the end of that very day, one day before Georgia was scheduled to officially sign the EU Association Agreement (on June 27, 2014). She was very stressed about gathering all the paperwork and demonstrating "progress" since the last audit, conducted in 2012 by DG SANCO. One of the problems had been with fish food products (anchovies) from the Black Sea coast that previously had tested positive for chemical contamination. "We didn't have the laboratory capacities for the criteria they needed, and still don't. Many of the pages of tables are blank. And our labs use GOST methods. You can't change everything at once." She explained that Georgia was trying to get approval to include their fish products in EU markets. She was also frustrated because the staff member who translated the audit information from Georgian into English used the wrong words according to EU and Codex Alimentarius official language ("Look. They used 'evaluation' instead of 'assessment,' and "incompliance' instead of 'noncompliance'").

At Mari's desk, where I was working at first, we were also anxious about interpretations and efforts at valuation. My manager Temo handed me a print-out of the working draft of a section of the food safety codes, which, according to EU protocol, contained both Georgian text and its English translation, side by side: The working Georgian text on the left side, working English on the right, with track changes edits throughout. There had already been at least one completed round of approximation, and part of the reason I was permitted to work in the NFA was to help with a much more thorough round.

On this day, we were working on a section of the EU code on "Preliminary Definitions" and Mari sat at her computer and Nino and I sat to her left at her desk. Nino had her laptop open.

The conversations were in Georgian; Mari was still not comfortable speaking in English although I suspect she understood a lot more than she let on.

> Mari [to me, pointing to the hard copy of the EU codes we had printed out and laid on her desk] 'Prepacked food."[47] What does that mean exactly? When they say 'not packaged on site at consumer's request'? So isn't that then 'non-prepackaged food'? Shouldn't they have a separate section for that?
>
> NC: Yeah they probably should but there isn't one. I don't know it's like if you're buying apples by the kilo-
>
> Mari: Well what about when I buy candy in wrappers from the plastic box at the store? I take however many I want and then put them in a plastic bag and then they weigh that and put a label on it with the weight, price, and description of the item.
>
> NC: I don't think that counts as packaging? The plastic bag? I don't think there are ingredients or anything on that label [that's printed out]. I don't know about the candy-what that would be. Pre-packaged? [Look at Nino, who shrugs]
>
> Mari: Oh! And here – when I buy vanillin or yeast for baking. I tear a package from the….spool [it takes her a while to get me to understand 'spool' in Georgian] – one, two, how many I want. So the spool, is that pre-packaged? Or is it the packet I'm tearing off? Hmph!
>
> [I note that this is something about which I should email the EFSA (European Food Safety Authority), and it turned out eventually that according to them, they have no actual authority over such matters, and that I should contact the European Commission for clarification.]
>
> Mari: [going through the Georgian text document on her computer screen to discuss problem areas one by one.] Okay now 'food information' – 'labelling.' Shouldn't 'advertising' be included in 'food information'?
>
> NC: No I don't think that really counts as 'food information' here…I think- They say 'brand' and that is on the food label they're talking about but advertising I think is more general?
>
> Mari: Well now they have 'label' and 'labelling.' What is the difference?
>
> NC: You know from this document it really isn't very clear. I think it's just that labelling isn't necessarily on the package but it can be attached to the package.

[47] In the EU code: "'Prepacked food' means any single item for presentation as such to the final consumer and to mass caterers, consisting of a food and the packaging into which it was put before being offered for sale, whether such packaging encloses the food completely or only partially, but in any event in such a way that the contents cannot be altered without opening or changing the packaging; 'prepacked food' does not cover foods packed on the sales premises at the consumer's request or prepacked for direct sale;[…]" http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32002R0178 (Last accessed 2/6/2018; same version used during fieldwork in July 2014).

Mari: Ugh – Ok wait let's look at the Russian codes.

Let's look at the Russian codes. In the same way that Salome dismissed the EU's response to her question about classifying "sour cream" as "fermented dairy" and thus having a set of guidelines to which to refer when monitoring the labelling of "sour cream" and other practices of food business operators in the dairy sector, Mari turns away from making sense of the EU document in its own terms. It is as if it is not worth the effort, since it does not really seem to correspond to what Mari would recognize as a logical thought process and as such, appears weak and arbitrary.

She pulled up the Russian codes from the Russian state legal database very quickly, as this reference is very frequently used and cited in daily regulatory work when interpretation of official EU and Codex Alimentarius food safety words is needed.

> Mari: Here. [*Vot!* she says in exaggerated Russian] [She reads the section on labelling, after she searched for it using word find in the site. All computers at the NFA have Georgian script, Russian script, and English keyboard functions] See! It's all spelled out here so clearly.

She motioned with her hand the levels and organization of information as if they were presented in step-by-step, self-evident way. The Russian code did appear to contain more text and it did appear more comprehensive than that of the EU.

Mari continued to read through the Russian code and then seemed to feel better about approaching the EU code, in the same say Salome proceeded to use the Russian legislation as a guideline for sour cream, rather than coming up with guidelines "out of the blue" (i.e. by simply taking the CA Commission's response at face value). The Georgian code Mari ended up writing

was indeed an "approximation," and while she kept the separate section on "labelling,"[48] she tailored it to include the information listed in the EU definition, and much of the information from the Russian code, which to her was much more comprehensive and "safe" in its detailed consideration of varied needs, situations, and ethics of communication. In this way the food safety code is written in a careful way that echoes the imagined carefulness of Russian technoscientific authority.

Furthermore, Mari seemed to find an affinity with the Russian code's consideration of foods addressed to mother-figures, noting its attentiveness to food for babies and children. There was something very "commonsensical" to her about indicating this possibility [what possibility? Say more about what she was indicating], The comparison of EU and Russian codes was another sign to her that the EU codes were careless (at best) and lacked the proper spirit; not only were the European regulators not substantive enough despite their formalism (Weber 2012 [1947]), they did not care.

Such invocations of Russian (and often Soviet Russian) technoscientific expertise, as a way to manage anxiety around Georgia's seeming "third-country" place in the world, recur often in daily life throughout Tbilisi. For example, one rather stressful ritual I practiced during my time doing fieldwork in Tbilisi was waiting until night to walk to the local mini grocery store, purchase two 6-liter bottles of water, and then carry them back down to my apartment building. I had to wait until night because I dreaded passing the three grocery stands located in my apartment complex, where the grocers' intuitive hawk eyes always somehow sensed that I, the visiting Euro-American woman, was passing by carrying my drinking water for the next few

[48] Whether this remained in the final version of the code, after its editing and proofing by the Ministry of Agriculture, I am not certain.

days. Of course I also had to pass neighbors and the obnoxious groups of drunk, bored, and unemployed men (usually around thirty years of age and above) who spent their mornings, days, and nights standing and sitting outside these grocery stands, chiming in on conversations and occurrences that usually had nothing to do with them.

When one of my primary interlocutors in the field, a grocer named Marina, would comment on my frivolous decision to buy water, rather than drink tap water, she echoed what many of my Georgian women friends expressed.

First, I would always try to pre-empt her expression of disapproval: "They were on sale, Marina, 2 for 1 practically." She responded:

> Hmph. Yeah yeah I know they're on sale. What's wrong with you? Why are you wasting your money on this?! Our [tap] water is good. It is clean, healthy. Our plumbing is from the Soviet period. They knew what they were doing. Very high quality, and we all drink it and it is good. They were very careful. They built things very strongly We only buy bottled water from the pharmacies and that is if we need it for small children [which is a very popular way to say that the food/drink product in question is of the highest and most trustworthy, beneficial quality]

In distilled form: Soviet-era infrastructure is not only objectively reliable but subjectively trustworthy, scientifically authoritative, and a kind of unofficial gold standard in quality that remains over time and stands in contrast to present geopolitical configurations of technoscientific authority.

When Marina talks about tap water as "healthy" (*sasargeblo*), and "good" (*k'argi*), she does not use the word safe, as it is used in relation to food in more expert and "official" registers one might hear or read in news reports or in meetings at the National Food Agency. In addition, she talks about Tbilisi city water as "good" because it runs through the systems of ostensibly Soviet-constructed water lines. Whether this imaginary includes other infrastructural elements of municipal water systems such as chemical treatments, filtration, central programming stations, it is not clear. But I do sense that the image here is of some kind of invisible system that is located

underground, is modern (like mass transit networks of metal lines, pipes, and interior movements of some *thing* (Larkin 2013)), and is mediated by and at the same time emblematizes "Soviet technoscience." Marina slips between calling this water city tap water (*kalakis onk'anis tsq'ali*) and *our water* (*chveni tsq'ali*) – which is a much more capacious classification, and appears much more often in daily talk about *Georgian water* (not necessarily from the tap) according to various salient typologies, each one somehow connecting Georgian land and its water's "goodness" and its "Georgian-ness" –"medicinal," "pure," "natural" (Manning 2012).[49]

Marina's evaluation of Soviet technoscience, here materialized in her insistence that Soviet-era infrastructure like the municipal water system is reliable and trustworthy, is especially striking in that she seems to laminate the Georgian "our" onto "it." "Our water" (*chveni tsq'ali)* is a deeply salient indexical icon of Georgianness, recurring in daily conversations that invoke Romantic associations of the land, its healing properties unique to particular Georgian regions (*terroir*) (Manning 2012 and Silverstein 2006), to remarks on Georgian-branded mineral water (particularly Borjomi) that is distributed and sold in Russia. (I heard this very often when I would complain to my Georgian friends that when I started travelling to Tbilisi in 2010, there seemed to be a lot more Borjomi in glass bottles, while now (after 2013), I could only find it in plastic bottles. They would reply with both pride and resentment that Borjomi in glass bottles is exported to Russia and sold in pharmacies (because it is of such high quality that it is medicinal) for outrageously high prices, while Tbilisians have to put up with plastic bottles of Borjomi.[50])

Yet in Marina's reckoning, and against the seemingly "impersonal" structures of

[49] See Manning 2012 for a very comprehensive, insightful, and helpful analysis of "water" in its varied semiotic contexts in Georgia.

[50] *ici ra, rusetshi q'idian borjoms shushis botlshi [sic]. xo da akit, plastikurshi. ikit q'idian borjoms aptekebshi, asetad janmrtelia*.

infrastructure, even today and after almost thirty years of non-Soviet management post-Soviet[51] "our water" is trusted because it is provided through a remembered Soviet design.[52] (The Soviet-built (1953) Tbilisi municipal reservoir (*tbilisis tsq'al sac'avi*) is located outside of Tbilisi and is known as "Tbilisi Sea" (*tbilsis zghva*). The reservoir's lake is a site of sunbathing and recreation for Tbilisians in the summer, and from what I have witnessed, it is otherwise not thought of in terms of the Soviet project of municipal water distribution).

Much of this overlap between "Soviet" and "ours" might well relate to the fact that Marina, a former wrestler ("I was a 'sportsman,'" (*sp'ort'smeni viq'avi*) she would proudly say, using the Russian loan word, which I have heard just as often used as the Georgian calque for the English "athlete" (*atlet'i*)), who lived in now-Russian-occupied Abkhazia from her birth to her twenties, is of a Georgian generation that lived much of its life during the Soviet period, and

[51] I.e. Georgian, and more recently EU- and other global and transnational-sponsored projects on municipal water management in Tbilisi and throughout Georgia.

[52] Another interesting thing to consider when making sense of this relationship between "Soviet" and "our" tap water is the intimate historical relationship of Russian imperialism, pre- and Soviet, with Georgia. As I discuss in a bit more detail in the next chapter on the masculinized invocations of the Georgian countryside as an object of regulatory affection and care: In order to understand and appreciate the ideologies at work in invoking the Georgian countryside as a site of intervention care by EU, Georgian, and other post-socialist food safety experts, it seems necessary to consider the inter-discursive nature of such invocations and from which positions exactly they are invoked, as they echo a paternalistic, "civilizing" project of caring for Georgian lands and understanding them from a particularly "Russified," masculinized position. In her analysis of nineteenth-century depictions of Georgia in Russian literature, Layton refers to this representational trend as an "orientialization" of Georgia: "[These texts] have ideologically significant features which support the extension of Russian suzerainty of Georgia. Russian authors invariably invented the 'Asiatic' as a primitive, on a lower rung of civilization than a? Europeanized self. Ideological import resides likewise in the divergent typologies of male and female Georgian characters, where a rhetoric about the plentitude of virgin land plays an important role…The types of stories, the affective rhetoric and the dichotomous patterns of characterization (male vs. female, Russian vs Asiatic) comprise a literary discourse which justified the tsarist homeland's assertion of authority over Georgia…Georgia appeared decidedly non-European in Russian eyes: its most populous areas lay behind the mountains, it was contiguous to Turkey, nearly adjacent to Persia and its eastern part had a balmy, subtropical climate" (197).

tends to (re)inhabit the values of that world in many ways

Hussein Agrama, in analyzing the seemingly "traditional" authority of the fatwa, asks us to rethink the modernist assumptions around temporality and ethical agency that cast particular contemporary practices as simply artifacts of the past, pre/nonmodern, and illiberal, and thereby dismisses them (2010). In relation to a term like "nostalgia," Agrama's analysis, together with Gal's on the making of "tradition" (1998), offer a way to rethink contemporary practices that seem to invoke imaginaries of pasts (e.g. Georgia's seemingly receding friendship with Russia). Agrama and Gal show that such invocations of times past are more about a process of making sense of life in the present. I would argue, however, that the citations of Russian technoscientific authority here, as in Salome's case when she did not get a helpful response from the CA on how to categorized "sour cream," might be understood more as a response to EU and global organizational indifference than a longing to identify with Russia itself.

I have heard this opinion on Soviet Russian infrastructure recur in different ways during my time in the field, most often in reference to how "good" Georgian tap water is, or how Soviet authorities – in contrast to those of today – knew how to maintain hygienic city streets in dealing with street dog populations. I have come to understand in this "folk formulation," which values this particular rendering of expert-authority-from-afar, a way in which "Soviet infrastructure" is emblematic of a kind of popular (expert and non-expert) understanding of Soviet "technoscience." Cast as a contrast to present configurations of geopolitical power and technoscientific expertise, this invocation of "the Soviet" laminates onto a recursive invocation and positive evaluation of a post-Soviet presentist ideology of *Russian* expert authority, precision, and knowledge amongst many of my Georgian friends. In other words, part of the work of this chapter has been to demonstrate that when someone in Tbilisi "remembers" Soviet

expertise in talking about, for example, municipal tap water infrastructure, s/he is invoking and valuing a popular and salient ideology of *trustworthy* expert authority that she takes to be still emanating from Russia, today. The ways in which "Russia" and "Russianness" figure into forms of *Georgian* personhood, identity, ideologies of foreignness is often ironic and unexpected in terms of emergent positions and calibrations of moral and ethical evaluation. In the context of officially *EU-oriented* reform, NFA bureaucrats work to craft a satisfactory, trustworthy, and sincere food safety code for Georgians, much like the imagined plumbing of Soviet-era municipal tap water systems constitutes a trustworthy encasement of Georgian purity-as-water.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to ethnographically analyze daily practices of legal harmonization at the NFA as a process of "translation" (Gal 2015) that invokes Russian presence by turning to Russian technoscience as authoritative, trusted, and substantial, and as an imagined "framework" that is often preferred to that of the EU. By first establishing that the NFA practices legal harmonization in anxious relation and response to particularly imagined forms of EU technoscientific authority, I then demonstrated the multiple forms such responses take: pragmatic resignation and work-around strategies toward EU regulatory intransigence and standards, and unofficial citations of imagined forms of Russian technoscience. This discussion hoped to demonstrate the experience of EU border-zone making as it unfolds in the daily life of state bureaucracy tasked with ensuring safe food systems for multiple envisioned audiences.

Chapter 5
Authority that Matters: Managerial Experts, Sincere Regulation, and Food Safety Reform in Post-Soviet Tbilisi, Georgia

In 2014, the head manager of the Food Department at Georgia's National Food Agency was a guest on one of Georgian televisions very popular day-time talk shows, "A Different Afternoon" (*sxva shuadge,* literally "a different noon"). This guest appearance by the NFA manager, one of many he made on different shows, in various formats, and on different television channels over the subsequent three years, was the equivalent of a bureaucrat from the FDA, or the USDA, appearing on a show like "Good Morning America" or "The View" to talk about the fact that they are food safety experts and that their job is to evaluate the safety of foods. To a U.S. viewer, it was all so obvious that it was a bit disorienting at first.

The show airs every weekday at noon on one of Georgian TV's most popular channels (*Imedi*, or "hope"). Unemployment rates are high in Tbilisi, so both men and women watch this show regularly. The target audience, however, is female; the primary hosts, three women of different ages (twenties, forties, and fifties, approximately) sit in a space that mimics the domestic space of a bourgeois living room, and the non-naïve, self-referential "edge" of the set image is framed so that the show points to itself as filmed in a large television studio. The décor on set is airy, modern, warm, and sets the conversation: soft white couches, a shabby chic coffee table, and splashes of color (curtains, flowers, coffee mugs, and the hosts). The bright berry pink logo "*sxva shuadge*" sits in the bottom left corner of the television image.

In anticipation of today's special guests, this particular episode starts with the three women and a guest host (a man in his forties) discussing how they shop for food and what they know about food safety. Still, the conversation indexes gendered norms, experiences, and knowledge of food shopping in Tbilisi. The man sits to the left of these women, looking as if he

does not completely belong there. His dark clothes, slouched shape, and short, non-committal remarks are legible as very "masculine" both in their relation to this set itself and to the kinds of embodied masculinities one encounters in Tbilisi homes. He does not smile, except for when prompted by a joke or banter. His way of sitting there seems to be saying the usual: "I have more important business to take care of but I am respectful of you and this conversation, and that is what it means to be a good Georgian man, to respect all women and to make sacrifices like this." Within the first few seconds of the conversation the women take over and we can forget about him for now, they and the cameras seem to tell us.

One of the older women starts by asking the others how they shop for safe (*sasargeblo*) foods:

> [Man:] (shrugs). Eh, now *that's* a tricky topic, I don't even know where to start
>
> [Woman host in her 40s:] (other women talking to suggest places they shop for food [outdoor market, retail chains, small grocers]) Ok ok the question is how do you check to see if a food is safe-
>
> [Woman host in her 50s:] (confidently and solemnly) It depends on what I am buying: meat, produce…
>
> [Woman host in her 20s:] I think the most important question is if you are buying for children. If you are buying for children…(they all agree) Then it is really important; I will check the dates, freshness, where it comes from…

They then greet the guests who walk on stage, two Georgian men in their forties, both managers at the National Food Agency (NFA). One of them is Temo the manager of the Food Safety Division and the other is his colleague from the Veterinary Division. The men sit down on the guests' side of the sofa. They are dressed in what I recognize now as Georgian business casual, Temo especially displaying a very understated chic, preppy look: Button-down plaid shirts in muted colors, a cardigan in a dark knit, blue jeans, and some nice leather shoes. He does most of the talking, since the topic is food safety (rather than veterinary medicine). He speaks quickly and seriously, his voice is quiet and it is obvious that he knows what codes and

forms of scientific expertise he is dealing with in describing new forms of safety legislation. He is representing the NFA as a newly-styled regulatory agency that acts on behalf of Georgian "consumers." He explains that his training (a Master's degree in Preventive Medicine from Tbilisi Medical University, like most of his colleagues) is in biological sciences and public health, and that the plan is for the NFA to become more active and effective in testing for safety (through laboratory development, of which there has been very little in Tbilisi after the Soviet period), and also to be more present across national regions in enforcing regulatory codes.

Like the man already sitting on the sofa to the left of the women, Temo and his colleague appear out of place in this feminized space of the daytime talk show, and their no-nonsense way of speaking and being there is a contrast to the way the hosts – on screen and in this interaction – seem to embody a kind of naïve non-expertise. The host in her 40s asks incredulously:

> Well given the problems of places like the outdoor (black) market (*bazari)*, imported meats, GMO foods, what can possibly be done? How can we *tell* if something is safe? What are your tips?

As he does throughout the interview, Temo shrugs and explains that the new EU standards that are being implemented do provide a comprehensive, standardized set of codes for all "food business operators" to refer to when introducing and circulating food products in the market. These codes are based on "scientific opinion" and follow EU standards and practices. The question of *responsibility* and *whose* burden it is to ultimately enforce these new standards is elided, here and elsewhere. As a serious, knowledgeable, and caring state agent, Temo seems resigned to the fact that there is much to be done in terms of implementation. He points out that as of that moment, the NFA has plans for expansion, including building a new office space and planning a major hiring campaign (both of which I witnessed during my time working there).

In explaining the forms of verification and testing that experts at the NFA were currently

using to gauge safety (ironically, a form of testing that is not "new" or particularly "EU-designed" in relation to Georgian food safety codes), Temo shows the hosts a device that can test for pesticide residues in food products. They pass him an apple from the fruit bowl[53] on the coffee table; after he pushes the device into the apple like a thermometer, the women excitedly ask for the results, and he shrugs again, saying there was no residue. When he met me in the office later that day, he told me about his experience on television (a first of many more to come), and shrugged it off as something he has to do, as if such projects of public relations were not "real work."

What I would like to focus on here is the way in which Temo is legible through this interaction as a specific kind of embodied, post-Soviet authority type. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that through this bureaucratic position, state regulatory authority seeks a stance of sincere trustworthiness that has the potential to be recognized as such, by Georgian audiences – both expert and non-expert. In order to perform and claim this stance of authority, Temo and his managerial colleagues, both men and women, try to express a form of bureaucratic authority that partly indexes the Weberian rational-legal ideal type and at the same time embodies what Acker has famously described as the inherently gendered (masculinized) structuration of bureaucratic organizations.

Building on such models of bureaucratic authority, this chapter further argues that for post-Soviet Georgian audiences, this form of bureaucratic authority is not in and of itself recognizable as a form of authority that matters, when it comes to ensuring bodily or biological

[53] A "fruit bowl" of this kind does not often appear in Georgian kitchens and definitely not in living rooms! The fruit in this bowl is an example of what Georgian food shoppers in Tbilisi would call "plastic" and "not Georgian": shiny, large, and uniform in color. Instead, fruits are bought only in season and at this time (mid-summer), there would be no apples (fall and winter fruits) in that bowl.

well-being through food safety. This bureaucratic authority is only potentially recognized as *morally* authoritative in its embodied iteration as masculinized in a more non-liberal, regionally-specific mode of masculinity – that of the "paternal strongman," an embodied afterlife of Russian power as imperial and then Soviet authority. Public and non-public narrations of regulators' relationship with their objects are one site in which this bureaucratized form of "good" authority is made legible, and where sincere forms of authority are articulated. Georgian expert managers in food safety perform as "good guys," gendered in terms of a regionalized (i.e. "post-Soviet," "Russified) idealization of masculinized, paternal authority.

For example, in the video clip described above, like the man already sitting with the three women hosts, Temo the food safety manager embodies a respectful and confident stance toward his women interlocutors. In the play of popular Georgian gender typologies, an always-popular subject of talk that often comes up with my interlocutors (men or women, any age), is that a person like Temo is a "good man" (*k'argi kaci*). Many Georgian women would also call him a "good boy" (*k'argi bichi*), which translates more like "good guy" in English. "Good guys" (*k'argi bich'ebi*) are the opposite of "street boys" (*kuchis bich'ebi*), or "old boys" (*dzveli bich'ebi*), who are men that are most likely unemployed, who model themselves on Russian mafiosi, who drink heavily, and tend to get into violent fights in both private and public spaces. "Good men" have jobs in state agencies and actually care about Georgian society, I have been told many times. While a good man could also work at a bank or other institution in the private sector, work in a relatively low-paying job in the state sector, which demands working regular hours and often overtime, is seen as extremely "honest work" and indexes an especially "good person."[54]

[54] There is, of course, a similar lexicon on female "types."

Of course, these pure distinctions are never actually embodied; "good" guys and men will tell anyone who will listen that they are also always "street smart" and know how to fight when necessary. It is the ability to act ethically, however, to compromise and move between moral norms when a situation demands, that makes for a "good guy" who is tough but not a pushover, understanding but not corrupt, expert but not cold. In this context, as in "middle-class" identities in the post-socialist world and elsewhere, "masculinity" here is always a process of becoming, aspiring, enacting, invoking, and claiming. It is precisely a kind of moving between "good" and "bad," an ability to ethically compromise particular kinds of ideals when a situation demands it. (Recall the shrugging of Temo's shoulders, his understated way of saying that a fruit is safe, in contrast to the feminized excitement of the women hosts). A performance like this makes Temo and his colleagues at the NFA legible as caring and "good" in a particular kind of masculinized way.

This gendered "quality" of food safety expertise in Georgia, embodied and invoked across different institutional iterations of food safety regulatory reform – from "expert" participation at conferences (discussed in this chapter) to the unofficial and regular use of Russian safety codes in drafting Georgian laws (discussed in the last chapter) – is central to understanding how differentially-positioned and differently–scaled forms of governmental food safety expertise – global, regional, national – claim "sincere" and moral authority in their regulatory articulations and processes of regulatory policy implementation.

It is important to remember, when considering this context of regulatory reform, that my Georgian interlocutors are very conscious of and anxious about the fact that Georgia is a very small nation-state (approximately 3.5 million people at the time of my fieldwork), and as a rather

unique ethno-linguistic identity,[55] "Georgianness" is constantly envisioned in terms of a very possible future loss of national sovereignty, or incorporation into some larger geopolitical formation (especially Russia, but also of course the EU, the US via NATO alliance, and other surrounding geopolitical formations – Turkey/Middle East, Central and East Asia).

In the wake of a Soviet welfare state that is popularly remembered to have ensured some forms of security, wellbeing, and healthy life, "sincerity" means a lot both to Georgians who are learning that there is a governmental National Food Agency and to the food safety experts at this agency who are working to position themselves as authoritative *and trustworthy.* (See Carr 2010, Silverstein 2006, and Knorr Cetina 1999 for discussions on modernist forms of expertise and the ways in which "experts" emerge vis a vis positionalities in and between different institutions of knowledge and value).

I will demonstrate the semiotic processes of meaning making through which regulators' relationships to particular kinds of *objects* of care (e.g. the Georgian countryside, "informal" food markets, or the narrativized food chain) are *narrated* – publicly and within the daily life of the office. I will focus on two narrative events as semiotic processes: (a) daily, embodied interactions between managers and non-managers in the NFA office and (b) a "Future of Food Safety" conference in Tbilisi, Georgia, wherein Georgian, other post-socialist, and EU food safety experts from the public and private sectors discussed regulatory reforms and responsibility within Georgia. Through this public interaction between differentially-positioned experts who objectified the Georgian countryside itself as an object of regulatory authority, Georgian expert managers emergently asserted a particular kind of embodied stance of regulatory care –

[55] Georgian is not an Indo-European, Turkic, or Semitic language, and, together with languages like Laz, Svan, and Mingrelian, is part of the Kartvelian language "family."

regionalized, masculinized, and sincere.

As a managerial professional, an NFA bureaucrat is positioned in relation to and mediates between at least three different worlds, or "time-spaces" of idealized governance of Georgian lands and people: the popularly remembered past of Russian-administered care (imperial and Soviet); the world of EU and globally-administered technocratic food safety norms; and the imagined present as a moment of rebuilding national state institutions as regulatory authorities. All of these arenas of action are positioned in the aftermath of the 1990's, a period of severe material shortages, civil violence, and political upheavals. This chapter hopes to demonstrate that these imagined modalities of bureaucratic "care" are the semiotic and popularly historicized "meaning material" that Georgian food safety regulators draw on (intentionally or not) in crafting the image of a caring, sincere, and trustworthy regulatory authority, embodied in the managerial expert at the NFA.

With the term "embodiment," I am echoing Judith Farquhar's work that shows us how bodies – hungry, full, male, female, national, desiring, cosmopolitan, traditional, sensual, biomedical, healthy, diseased, good, bad, beautiful, ugly, etc. – are "formations of everyday life (temporal, dispersed, shifting) and everyday life [is] thoroughly suffused with discourses (collective, concrete, historical)" (8). Bodies are sites and processes of meaning-making. Citing Bourdieu's invocation and discussion of "habitus" (1987), Farquhar apprehends bodies as positioned within, emergent from, and co-habiting in world(s) of daily life, the "elements" of which, while the material of ethnographic attention, as lived, have a "certain taken for granted dimension" that – in Farquhar's reading of Bourdieu – constitute "a disorderly and inarticulate collection of 'durable, transposable dispositions' informing routine practices, giving repetitive and predicable form to bodily life as 'history turned into nature'" (8). Repetitive, predictable,

patterned – yet always materialized in the generative, unfolding horizons of meaning-making in daily interactions between people, ethnographically-rendered forms of embodiment are semiotic processes of meaning making and meaning communication.

As I discussed in more detail in earlier chapters, popular disavowals of EU technocratic authority can be put into conversation with the post-socialist, "Central European" worlds that Borocz discusses in his work on "goodness" and "Europe" (e.g. 2000 and 2006). For Borocz, the intelligentsia of the "Hungaries of the world" once looked to liberal immigration policies of France as exemplifying the kind of "moral goodness" that characterizes an ideal of "Europe" in general (122). For pro-EU positions in countries like Hungary and Poland, the ideology of a "return to Europe" in post-socialist times is a political assertion and maneuver to distance themselves from the "Easternness" of the Soviet-socialist world, wherein "Eastern Europe" represents relative barbarism and "Europe" is the site of "civilization" (128). In contrast, the "Georgias" of the world are not members of the EU, nor are they officially on track to become so, having thus far only signed Association Agreements. Georgians are vocally and acutely aware of their positioning between "Asia" and "Europe," wherein centuries of constant, intimate, and proximate Russian influence and presence has made Georgia's relationship to and identification with "Europe" more distant and ambivalent than that of Poland, for example. Following Perry Sherouse (2015), I call these daily instantiations of "Russia" in Georgian life examples of "Russian presence."[56]

[56] As will be discussed in the next section, such an atmosphere of rumor, suspicion, and uncertainty around political elite men and their loyalties in Georgia ironically mirrors the ways in which imperial Russian (and later, Soviet) authors such as Alexander Pushkin, Alexander Griboedov, and Mikhail Lermontov (many of whom have streets or other city landmarks named after them in Tbilisi), located in a Russia anxiously positioned between idealizations of the Muslim and Asian "East" and Christian and European "West" (Layton 1992), represented Georgia itself as a site of contradiction and ambiguous affiliation, at the edge of "Asia" and

Through the figure of the contemporary food safety expert manager in post-Soviet and post libertarian Tbilisi, I hope to think through this gendered process of making sincere expert authority as a question of masculinized, quasi-charismatic bureaucratic authority in this particular post-Soviet and increasingly global context of "strongman" politics.

My discussion will center on two ethnographic examples in which Georgian expert managers embody authority that matters in the context of food safety reform. First, through the practice of "deferring responsibility" in a way that is partly grounded in bureaucratic procedure but that also emphasizes the semiotic labor through which deferment is performed. Second, I will focus on ethnographic moments in which expert managers came to embody a particularly "good" authoritative stance by managing their position between globalized technoscientific expertise and regionalized, (post-)Soviet modes of paternal care.

Middle-mensch: Engendering managerial authority at the NFA

When I say a "Georgian" expert, I am of course referring to many things at once, not only the simple fact that s/he identifies as ethnically Georgian (i.e., according to the "folk ideology" of ethno-national belonging: born in Georgia, identifying as Georgian Orthodox Christian, and speaking Georgian as one's native language), but also to the particular way in which s/he is placed – as "Georgian" – in relation to a *lived imaginary* of a contemporary geopolitical world: this placement is a form of regionalized, unique, ethno-linguistic *Georgian* being and identification that anxiously faces being lost in larger global and transnational processes of

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"Europe." (Today, in just one example of the ways in which "Russian" (here embodied in Russian lexical units) lives as a deeply familiar object of orientation in daily Tbilisi life, many of these Tbilisi streets have long since been officially renamed with famous Georgian figures' names, but most people still use the Russian/Soviet-era names and aren't even aware of the newer, Georgianized versions. E.g. "Plexanov" vs "Aghmeshenebili;" "Perovskaya" vs "Aghvlediani," or the Soviet-oriented Georgian-named district "Kolmeurneoba" ("Collective Farm Square") vs "Baratishvili."

Europeanization, cosmopolitanism, and globalization. Such "Georgian" anxieties emerge in different ways, as evidenced in the ethnographic data presented in each of this dissertation's chapters.

In first designing this project, I hypothesized that the current moment of food safety in Georgia is especially revealing; while Georgians in Tbilisi are historically positioned within informal networks of trust and mutual food provisioning (e.g. relationships between family members, close friends, and regular acquaintances that are trans-generational, trans-regional, and have overlapping socioeconomic differences), Georgian state agencies are increasingly working to re-orient Georgian food consumers' experiences of trust towards a more techno-scientific, industrially-standardized understanding of the food chain and its associated risks.

But rather than posit an idealized spectrum of "technoscience ---- tradition" as two poles against which both Tbilisi experts and food shoppers might orient or calibrate their valuations of "food" and "safety," my time working with food safety experts at the National Food Agency in Tbilisi reoriented my own assumptions about the semiotic, deliberative, and legal processes through which post-socialist state and non-state authorities seek to establish (embody? Not here, I think.) regulatory authority in the first place. In this chapter, I will focus on one organizational position of regulatory authority, the managerial food safety expert at the National Food Agency, and his/her practice that embodies a kind of sincere regulation.

Within the Food Safety Department of the NFA, I spent time working with the Georgian staff members in all of its three sub-divisions: Animal Origin Food Division, Plant Origin Food and Drinking Water Division, and the Risk Analysis Division, which ?last consisted of two inspectors (men) and also several administrative workers (women) responsible for updating and maintaining paper and electronic records such as food business registrants, inspection

documents, laboratory testing results, applications to register as food businesses, and databases tracking food products and their placement in retail sites.

My primary interlocutors, those with whom I spent the most time and to whom I actually reported in the capacity of a native English speaker, translator, and interpreter, were first, the Head of Risk Analysis in the Food Safety Department, a tall, chic, and confidant Georgian woman in her mid-thirties whom I will call Salome, and second, Salome's direct supervisor, the Deputy Head of the Food Safety Department, whom I introduced as Temo earlier in this chapter. These two experts are the people I have in mind when I refer to "managers" in the organization. In particular, Temo works closely with higher levels of management at the National Food Agency and at its supervising entity and physical neighbor, the Ministry of Agriculture. In addition, and in a practice that I witnessed in its early stages and development, Temo has become one of the public faces of the Food Agency, appearing on popular television daytime talk shows and news programs, many of which are circulated online (primarily on Facebook) as video clips. He also appears on radio shows, and I have sat in on a few of his photo sessions and interviews with journalists when these took place in his office. Serious, quiet, and intensely oriented to his work as an expert and regulator, Temo sees this practice of publicity as a distraction. When I jokingly refer to him as a rising celebrity he waves the process off as a silly but unfortunately necessary part of his job, a project to portray the Food Agency as a sober, non-corrupt, and a-political institution guided by "science" as articulated through "scientific opinion," an expert and technical understanding of said scientific opinion, and a secular authority that works for the Georgian public to ensure its safety.

Experts at the NFA, particularly expert-managers like Temo, who, through televised appearances, act as the public face of the state agency, were and are highly conscious of the fact

that their positions are as much about redeeming a state institution as they are about food safety itself. Neither Salome nor Temo are ones to take advantage of, or advertise, their potentially advantageous position as a figure in Georgian government (even if Salome might sometimes come across as managerial to her staff). At one meeting to plan training sessions on food safety, one important target audience, the independent grocers at Tbilisi's very large and seemingly "unregulatable" outdoor food markets, was discussed: This group was very intransigent in their views and practices, the experts agreed, and it would be impossible to get them to any training sessions because that would mean their losing hours of business. One EU delegate at this meeting suggested offering a small monetary "incentive" to get these vendors to come to the training sessions ("We can give them 25 GEL (Georgian Lari) and then guarantee a diploma to get them to be 'invested' in the program"), to which Temo adamantly objected: "As a government agency, we cannot have people paying us 25 GEL, because it would be very unpopular with the public and the media and it will set a very bad precedent."

In Chapter 2, I discussed the political-economic conditions and "politics of personality" through which the NFA has emerged as a kind of regulating authority. In particular, I analyzed its positioning in terms of political elites' projects of "libertarianism" (Saakashvili's two administrations), and then a re-establishment of governmental authorities in the policies of Ivanishvili and his administrations.

Against (or from within) this atmosphere of uncertainty and resistance to "regulation," the NFA has emerged as a governmental agency self-conscious about its institutional pasts, which some feel are still aligned with severe libertarian agendas. In the following section, I will demonstrate some of the practices that managerial experts at the NFA use to establish themselves as sincere. The discussion will focus on practices of "compromise" as a kind of masculinized,

authoritative process of deciding when and how to defer regulatory authority-as-accountability in particular instances.

Engendering authority through a display of compromise: Discretionary maneuvering around rules and *embodied management* are not the same thing

Salome and Temo think of themselves as food safety experts who are also administrators of public health and well-being. Conscious of their position as *Georgian* food safety experts whose English is not nearly fluent, my colleagues are doubly self-aware, to the point of questioning their own expertise when suspecting that they are somehow being officially evaluated from the position of U.S. or EU technical expertise (which I always tried to convey that I in no way embody). For example, when I asked Salome about her and her colleagues' educational and professional biographies, she answered in a very self-effacing way: "We graduated from Tbilisi Medical University, the Faculty of Preventive Medicine…Some of my colleagues from the Food of Animal Origin Division graduated from the Veterinary Institute and some from the Faculty of Food Technology in different Universities." She added, "It is not obligatory to do any post-graduate studies for working at the NFA…I do not (do not need to have) any honors or scientific degree, though after fourteen years of experience some call me a food expert…In two divisions of the Food Department we have a position called "expert," but neither requires a scientific degree…According to the results of a competitive examination and the decision of the competition council, a person can start work here and after some years (it is not predefined and there is no legislation to tell a person what kind of experience they should have), people call you 'expert.'"

In my conversations with Salome and Temo, one thing that regularly puzzled me was the practice of (de)limiting the degree to which state authorities might intervene, through legally

prescriptive, observational, and punitive measures, in the sphere of food business operations.[57] For example, during my first two years at the NFA, we in the Food Safety Department were working on revising and drafting a newly-introduced body of food safety legal codes after Georgia had signed the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) contained within the EU Association Agreement (signed in 2014). The document, a draft version called "Law of Georgia; Food/Feed Safety, Veterinary and Plant Protection Code," came to us from the EU Harmonization Division at the NFA, which, as I explained earlier, consisted of Georgian legal experts. Our task, in working with one of these legal experts who was especially skilled at English and who had left Georgia for a few years to study law in Ukraine, was to "interpret" the English codes into Georgian. In turn, we would send our working document to colleagues in the Ministry of Agriculture, who would then request edits and changes, eventually resulting in their approval of the document for submission to Georgian Parliament for approval.

I noticed that one prefix, "Bio," appeared in the legislation, in Article 2, Section B.2, as "Bio-production." "Bio" has become a powerful and popular adjective in the marketing of food products (evidenced in the wildly popular brand of chicken called "Bio Bio"). Tbilisi food shoppers repeatedly told me I should buy frozen Bio Bio chickens at the local markets, that these chickens are very "good" (*kargi*), "delicious" (*gemrieli*), and, of course, since they are "Bio,"

[57] Small, medium, and large-size food businesses that comprise the stages of the food chain: primary production, production and processing, marketing and distribution, retail. Per Article 2 Section M of the Code, a "food business operator" is defined as a "physical or legal person, whose activities are connected to producing, processing and distributing food/feed, animal, plant, animal and plant origin products, veterinary drugs, pesticides and agrochemicals, as well as who provides services in veterinary and plant protection fields and who is responsible to ensure the conformity of the activities to the requirements laid down by the Georgian legislation. Section N defines "stages of production, processing and distribution" as "each stage of the process, including food/feed, plant, animal, plant and animal origin products, veterinary drugs, pesticides, agrochemicals, import, export, primary production, processing, storing, gathering, transporting, sale and supply to the final consumer."

"natural" (*naturaluri*) and "healthy" (*janmrteli*).[58] When I brought up the fact that they are frozen and not fresh, I would hear a similar response: "It doesn't matter. They are good. Just thaw it and prepare it." I knew that "Bio" was and is a problematic descriptor and claim, a marketing device that advertises with? the pastoral image of a senior woman villager feeding her chickens under a blue sunny sky, even though these chickens are most likely farmed under some variant of factory conditions that are anathema to the Tbilisian ideology of "pure" "natural" foods and "good" food production[59].

Salome also knows this. When I saw that the new legal code actually defines "Bio-production" as a "united system of farm management with methods ensuring bio diversity and ecological balance preservation, environment protection, efficient use of natural resources and corresponds to the bio-production requirements at all levels of producing, recycling, storing, packaging, transporting, labeling/marking, distributing…" and that "this relevance must be approved with relevant certificate[,]" I was very excited; here is a chance for my hardworking Georgian friends at the NFA to exert their lawful powers for the benefit of their fellow Georgians! That excitement soon evaporated. [conversation from my notes]

> [N.C.:] Salome, what happens when they don't have the certificate?
>
> [S.:] They will be fined. I must check but it would be close to 1000 GEL [Georgian lari, equivalent to around 500-725 USD, depending on the exchange rate].

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[58] Strangely, "Bio" has also taken on, and is simultaneously used as a word to describe something that is perniciously fake, but that claims to be natural. This is evidenced in my younger friends' references to purportedly synthetic forms of marijuana circulating in Georgia, with its very strictly enforced prohibition of any illegal narcotics, from origin points imagined as pernicious and untrustworthy. "Bio" marijuana, it is said, is very dangerous to smoke, it is made of chemicals that are terrible for the human organism ("*organizmstvis kargi ar aris; sashinelia*") and can make people "go crazy" while doing permanent damage to their bodies (I did not ask in detail about what kind of damage, but this fear of "damage" to the body was discussed in more detail in Chapter 1).

[59] Note on this "Tbilisian notion" of safe/natural foods. How this is different from eg farmers' markets here and the local food movement.

[N.C.] That seems like it would be nothing for them.

[S.:] Yes well these requirements are their responsibility to meet. Not ours. It is the responsibility of the food business operator to meet these requirements; we cannot enforce them.

[N.C.] So these are more like guidelines?

[S.:] No, they are requirements. But it is the food business operator's responsibility to meet them.

I came to see this kind of explanation recur, and I interpret it as a particular kind of deferment of responsibility. I partially trace Salome's deferment back to the texts which she, as a food safety risk analyst, considers her professional canon and with which she is extremely fluent, and which define and guide her work as a food safety specialist. These texts are (1) the Codex Alimentarius, an internationally- recognized, referenced, and utilized assembly of food safety standards generated by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which has local offices and funds parts of Georgia's Ministry of Agriculture, and the World Health Organization, and (2) the EU Food Safety Authority's books and texts on food safety, which are based on the Codex Alimentarius standards. Salome is familiar with and professionally respectful of these texts; they line her office book shelves as colorful pamphlets of different sizes, binders from professional training sessions in Europe, tens of colorful ID lanyards hanging near her desk from past conferences and training retreats she attended, posters from different global public and non-public initiatives (e.g. "Five Keys to Safer Food," prohibitions and warnings around the use of antibiotics on food-producing animals for growth promotion, "Making better use of food contamination data"), CD-ROMS and microchips that contain all the relevant information to Codex Alimentarius guidelines.

In one such document, an FAO-branded booklet called "Dealing with Uncertainty," the chapter entitled "How to Talk about Risk" addresses strategies to practice "effective risk communication" when "frequently, [local] offices are too busy or overwhelmed collecting data and making decisions to engage in effective communication." The strategy offered is an

"effective dialogue" for risk communication: "Not public relations, and not public education," but a "two-way," "transparent" conversation with "people" (i.e. food consumers). From the expert, regulatory position in this conversation, a "transparent risk assessment" and communication strategy centers on the directive that "government works with industry to develop a plan."

Government works with industry. Contrary to what I originally thought, these are not two political-economic spheres in opposition to one another. Further, the nature of the latter "regulating" the former [wait, the former is government, and the latter is industry, in your writing here], of redeeming its history of being ignobly cast aside in the recent libertarian past of the Saakashvili era, is not modeled on the righteous sense of justice that I had envisioned. Instead, in accordance with the principles of global safety standards, managerial experts must defer to what are depicted as ideal processes of democratic deliberation, to the recognized authority of "scientific opinion," to geopolitical, transnational forms of political-economic authority.[60]

Hull, writing on the mediational workings of paper (which he calls "graphic artifacts") in governmental bureaucracy in Islamabad, Pakistan, argues that this kind of responsibility deferral is an emergent instrument of bureaucratic procedure itself (2012). In other studies on bureaucracy in practice, recent analyses in sociology and political science following Lipsky's foundational concept of "street level bureaucracy" (1980) have argued that as practiced in daily life, bureaucratic procedure is only materialized in the actions of actual individual bureaucrats. When operating in relation to other points of interest in the world of a bureaucracy (e.g. citizen-beneficiaries of state services, other institutional nodes within the bureaucratic network, or

[60] See Jasanoff 2005 for discussions of this in the EU and Gille 2016 for such technoscientific authority's relationship to the EU's expanding eastern border.

regulatory objects such as sites of inspection), an individual bureaucrat exercises "discretion" in relation to rules: (re)interpretation, bending, and compromise, for example. Furthermore, analyses within this literature, primarily those with an ethno-methodological bent, have devoted attention to the ways in which these discretionary forms reflect, or index, the wider contexts of moral valuation, social identification and differentiation, and historical situatedness of bureaucrats themselves?

Building on the concepts of bureaucratic discretion and deferment in order to discuss how a "morally good" (not just morally "neutral") bureaucratic authority might make claims for itself, I would like to focus on Temo's and Salome's conscientious effort to redeem the image of this state agency as operating within discrete limits and only in rationally patterned relation (i.e. not stemming from random individual "agents") to something or someone else: discretion as a display of generous compromise from a position of paternal strength. Skilled, experienced, and devoted to both global food safety codes *and* the liberal democratic principles that underpin them (e.g. transparency, deference to "scientific opinion," support of an educated and enlightened public), Salome is not one to run from the ethical, legal, and psychic demands of professional responsibility.

There are examples of managing official mandates to demonstrate conscientious maneuvering – as "good" regulators. For example, since I started spending time in Tbilisi in the summer of 2010, when Saakashvili's United National Movement (UNM) was in power, each year seemed to repeat governmental efforts to "clean" Tbilisi streets of vendors thought – by government officials – to be peddling foods (produce, dairy, meats, fermented and preserved foods, spices, and legumes) in unhygienic and irresponsible conditions that – perhaps more to the point for official municipal interests – compromised the aesthetic aspirations and hoped-for

performance of a "modernizing" city in a nation that officially self-identifies as "on the path" to joining the European Union.

By the summer of 2015, when I asked Salome why, while such governmental efforts seem to be publicized on televised news and talked about amongst Tbilisians, street grocers still either remained where they were or returned after closing temporarily, she explained that first, it is not the NFA's responsibility to fine or otherwise discipline street grocers, but rather the City's. Second, even when City inspectors attempt to fine vendors, with nonpayment potentially resulting in revoking business registration and closing the shop, vendors tend to respond in very personal ways. She explained – as if she very well understood the position of City officials, rather than complaining about their work – that it's "just impossible. When [sellers] are threatened with a fine they say they can't pay it: 'Oh, come on! I can't pay a fine. Look at me, look at this small place I have – I can't. And if I am shut down how will I support my family?' And so the inspector understands, and how can they then fine them? They just can't."

This style of explanation and the sense of familiarity that structures this conversation is a very "Georgian" mode of negotiation, and the inspector's response here, walking away without assigning a fine, demonstrates that he/she is a reasonable and "good" person occupying the authoritative and masculinized position of regulator. Persisting and demanding a fine would signal "coldness" and someone who is neither understanding nor good. Moreover, this interaction marks a personalized approach to regulation that varies depending on the perceived vulnerability of the business owner. For example, a friend of mine, a city inspector who works on construction projects and building codes in the city, would sometimes repeat the story of halting construction on a major construction project run by a very large multinational hotel brand. With understandable pride, he says that he single-handedly not only issued a major fine,

but that the developer's repeated disregard for and disrespect of Tbilisi codes prompted him, on behalf of the city, to stop the entire project.

In his book on the place of food hawkers in early 2000s, "modernizing" Mumbai, Anjaria argues that the interface between illicitly-positioned vendors and state bureaucratic agents has been similarly characterized by negotiations, compromises, and bribes (12). But while such flexibility on the part of state agents might be, and has often been interpreted as a sign of a weakened, or failing state, Anjaria observes that such sites of interaction are full of unfolding contestation, political meaning-making, and process:

> Illicit arrangements that characterize hawkers' encounters with state functionaries are typically considered a failure of governance. But I argue that these failures are productive—not in the utopic sense of producing a perfectly equitable society but in the sense that they produce practices of citizenship, contested meanings of rights, and new forms of politics. What is often vaguely glossed over as corruption can also be an ordinary space of negotiation within which fundamental rights to space are worked out and the condition of illegality is recalibrated. (Anjaria 2016, 63)

Rather than a disciplinary state governing through an unyielding shield of bureaucratic rationality, differentially-positioned "rights" and, I argue, state authority itself, is claimed and crafted through processes of negotiation. I have thus come to interpret Salome's pushing away of responsibility as something other than simply her habits as a "bureaucrat." It is the *way* one defers, or manages one's unique authoritative position, that makes for a politics of sincerity and trustworthiness at the Georgian food safety agency. In addition to stoic dedication, the expert-manager shows herself as sincerely dedicated to and actually caring about food safety in Georgia. Temo and Salome embody this caring, trustworthy sincerity by their position as both *Georgian* food safety experts, and as educated experts oriented towards EU and global modes of conceiving, defining, standardizing, and regulating safety in the technocratic register. In this way, they are positioned between and *manage* two worlds of understanding "safety"; through

this management of their position as *Georgian* experts who are also oriented to global technocratic norms, they are caring, familiar, and also distant enough, scientifically grounded enough to be considered knowledgeable, reliable, and professionally committed to safety. Through this kind of proximate distance, the food safety expert/manager comes to embody the affective quality of being sincerely caring and trustworthy. I should note that I did not witness recognition of this kind of authority in so many words, in all of my time with food shoppers in Tbilisi, since most people are not aware that this Agency exists. But even if they did know of it and if they did pay attention when Temo was on the television, many Georgians mistrust state agencies and do not taken them very seriously. This popular attitude made the authority-negotiating task of officials like Salome and Temo even more of a project.

For this reason, I earlier referred to the authority of expert-managers as emergent and quasi-charismatic. One of the qualities of charismatic authority (in Weber's sense) that I would like to focus on here is the fact that such authority must be recognized ("'proved' by being recognized as genuine[,]" as Parsons suggests (65)). This kind of recognition is different from the "consent" of abstract publics in sought in the electoral politics of liberal democracies (65). Rather, recognition in relation to "charismatic authority" implies a different kind of orientation to authority, wherein the object of recognition is him/herself embodied and individualized in unique ways. With the Weberian term "charismatic" (in contrast to "traditional" or "rational-legal") I am using the word to get at a particular kind of *embodied* authority that is spatio-temporally specific (i.e. not timeless or abstract, but present in the "here" and "now" of the situation at hand) and potentially recognized as singular. Charismatic authority is emergent in experiential encounters that are both generative of and structured by socio-historical processes. "Charisma" and its recognitions index what Mazzarella extracts as the theoretical and methodological

significance of the "mana" concept: "[…]the palpable dynamic power of this dialectical process: an actualized social order bursting with immanent potentials and, conversely and at the same time, immanent potentials pushing toward ordered actualization" (2017, 148). For the purposes of this chapter, I would like to point out that as embodied authorities with *potentially* recognizable authority accruing to themselves, bureaucratic expert-managers in the Georgian context partially draw on, or "activate" (145) ideals of masculine vitality and while it is clear that they are "talking to" Georgian audiences and to themselves as members of that audience, it is not clear that they are being heard, or whether or not this matters.

The food safety experts with whom I worked at the NFA, embodying technical competencies situated in standardized, predetermined structures of organization (a modern "bureaucracy"), no doubt exemplify "rational-legal" authority: The "impersonal order itself" (58) of the legally-sanctioned and defined organizational structure *is* the "source," and the self-generating quality of authoritative expertise is what makes these experts legible as experts. According to this typology, the Manager of the Food Safety Division, featured in the television clip above occupies his office in an "officially sanctioned" way; he meets the standard requirements for occupying such an office, just as his predecessor and his successor are trusted to do. Authority does not lie in his unique qualities as a social individual per se, but rather, in meeting the qualifying standards for someone to hold his position within the organization.

Feminist critiques of organizational theory and bureaucratic structure, especially Acker's foundational 1990 essay on "gendered organizations" (and related to this, MacKinnon's argument on the sexual domination of women foundationally structuring legal organizations (1982)) have questioned the image of a "gender-neutral, asexual" organization. Acker writes that organizations must be recognized as "gendered processes" themselves, and that "both gender and

sexuality have been obscured" by traditional organizational theory (140). She echoes Scott's definition of gender as an analytic, constitutive category of social differentiation and processes of hierarchy: "Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based in perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (145) that do not themselves somehow "preexist" gender and sexuality. In Acker's formulation,

> [t]o say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not an addition to ongoing processes, conceived as gender neutral. Rather, it is an integral part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender. 146

According to this argument, the very components of bureaucratic structure, such as jobs and job descriptions, managers, clerical work, and organizational leaders – emerge from historical conditions that, through normative mobilizations of the heteronormative gender binary, devalue women's jobs and labor in relation to those of men. As a result, "a certain kind of male heterosexual sexuality plays an important part in legitimating organizational power…it is formed around dominance over women and in opposition to other masculinities, although its exact content changes as historical conditions change" (153; Connell 1987).

As an embodied ideal in the office place of the NFA, the fact that managerial authority appears to be gendered *and* sexed makes it difficult for someone like Salome who, though she might not completely embody the standard "feminine" ideal in Georgian (late thirties, unmarried, and without children), and while she might embody the managerial presence of a confident, cosmopolitan technocrat, is at the same time not able to embody this particular quality of male heterosexual sexuality and thus his particular form of embodied authority: "Currently, hegemonic masculinity is typified by the image of the strong, technically competent,

authoritative leader who is sexually potent and attractive, has a family, and has his emotions under control" (153). Though Acker's article was written in 1990, the contemporary post-Soviet (and increasingly global) valorization of "strongman" presence in state institutions three decades later reflects the degree to which the recursive (Gal and Irvine 2000), disembodied liberal ideals of the "individual" and technocrat – through their refusal to recognize "bodied processes" (151) – have the (un)intended consequence of eliciting masculinized, patriarchal, sexed presence with a vengeance.

Even later critiques of the image of office work and of "neoliberal" models of entrepreneurialism, which claim to question these discourses' valorization of masculinity, do not necessarily attend to the historically-grounded and recursive power of the gender binary in actually constituting institutions and hierarchies of bureaucracy themselves. For example, Yurchak has written that the world of post-Soviet Russia valorizes the figure of the neoliberal entrepreneur: "It is inhabited by remarkable characters – *biznezmeny* (businessmen), *bankiry* (bankers), *brokery* (brokers)…They are residents of Moscow and a few other large cities…[thus] characterized by one Moscow sociologist: 'We often see his shining automobile racing through the city at high speed.'" (72). He describes the particular historical conditions in which such an ideal emerged: "favorable conditions for its rapid development appeared precisely when Russian society was rejecting the discursive regime of socialism (with its state control of personal life), but not the ideology of male chauvinism, and, furthermore, was embracing neoliberal market values" (89). I am attempting to empirically explore how this relationship works and why this matters – vis a vis the generation of embodied, sincere authority – in this chapter. Even in the daily life of regulatory reform in daily Georgian life – here materialized in the state bureaucracy – there is an affectively-charged orientation/attraction (if not longing/desire) to an imagined

source of sincerity, limited and historically-structured though the seemingly immediate sources may be.

Recognition: An instance when embodied masculinized authority comes to matter in a strategy meeting at the NFA

I have emphasized that the entire Food Safety Department consists of Georgian employees because there are several departments within the NFA and the Ministry of Agriculture composed partly or entirely of non-Georgian staff. To Georgians, these foreigners are largely unfamiliar and stereotyped embodiments of technoscientific expertise from the EU and FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations). These experts, the great majority of whom are men in their forties and fifties are from EU countries, especially, at the NFA, from the post-socialist Baltics. The Baltic nations are, for Georgians who have been educated in medicine and other biological sciences, a kind of "gold standard" for laboratory testing and technologies, scientific research, and their scientific "development" represents a successful mediation of EU/global technoscientific standards and Soviet modes of scientific authority.

ENPARD, the European Neighborhood Program for Agricultural and Rural Development, has its own offices within the NFA, and a few of its delegates from non-postsocialist EU countries (e.g. from Finland, Germany, and Sweden) organized and led some of the planning meetings I sat in on. One of these meetings, in which Georgian managers and staff from the Food Safety and Public Relations Departments (approximately ten people) met with an ENPARD expert from Germany, whom I will call Felix, to discuss how to begin implementing training programs on the "Five Keys to Safe Food," a WHO-sponsored campaign on hygiene. The gendered dynamics at play in this room that I observed encapsulate the kind of stereotypifications at work. I will focus on three semiotic processes through which masculinized bureaucratic authority is made legible in this Georgian conference room: ethno-linguistic coding;

bodily hexis; and the inter-discursive citation of differently-positioned geo-political sites of techno-scientific authority.

Felix, the ENPARD expert leading this meeting, which centered on selected a target audience to start the program of Five Keys Training in Tbilisi and later in other Georgian regions, was obviously working hard to convey the importance of this initiative. However, it was clear that the Georgians in the room were not taking him completely seriously. First, like many EU experts in food safety in Tbilisi, he did not speak Russian (in which all Georgians are highly advanced in speaking, if not fluent), let alone Georgian. His English, and the fact that the Georgians in the room were not fluent or very advanced in understanding it, resulted in a kind of awkward dynamic wherein he was simply either ignored in favor of text messaging on phones or, for the busy managers, leaving to take phone calls (common practice in meetings with Georgians). This was not necessarily a sign of disrespect from the Georgians (who are very polite to foreign guests and respectful of them), but I could sense the speaker's discomfort and frustration in talking through what he must have commonly experienced in that office. Besides these distractions, some of my colleagues from the Food Department would catch each other's or my eye and sigh with frustration, or roll their eyes and take a deep breath when a joke not fully understood was correctly assumed to be not very funny, or when people felt the meeting was dragging on.

The communication of information in this meeting, from Felix to the attendees around the conference table, was furthermore met with what I read as indifference. The problem seemed to rest in the "delivery." For example, Felix opened the meeting with what he no doubt expected to be met with a round of enthusiastic recognition. He explained:

> The Five Keys are a concept developed by the WHO [World Health Organization] and in 2001 they introduced this poster [shows slide of poster;] The Five Keys' message and purpose is to

raise public awareness on food hygiene, and they are designed for everyone who uses food, to get safe food in the end:

1. Keep Clean;
2. Separate Raw and Cooked Foods;
3. Cook Thoroughly;
4. Keep Food at Safe Temperatures;
5. Use Safe Water and Raw Materials.

Now why is this important in Georgia? [He then switched to photo slides of the Georgian port city of Poti's fish market, or bazaar, and to the chicken vendors at Tbilisi's Didube bazaar, which here function as icons of the unhygienic and in general "unsafe" sites of unofficial outdoor food markets: food products close to unclean grounds (dirty surfaces, dirty floors, stray dogs in the area, vendors handling meat products with bare hands, etc.)]

Because there is a low awareness of food safety on the part of small food business operators.

In contrast to the nods of recognition in the audience, which regional post-socialist experts tasked with introducing food safety protocols to Georgian experts receive regularly in such meetings (e.g. the atmosphere of mutual familiarity and recognition I witnessed at a HACCP training session led – in Russian – by a Ukrainian food safety expert who represented a "successful" post-socialist case of food safety reform, or the regional experts called upon to present at the conference I will discuss in the next section), the audience in this conference room was rather stony-faced in viewing these images. A few nodded in agreement and some shook their heads to one another in knowing disapproval of Georgian market conditions – markets where many of them themselves shop for food -- but the relationship between the speaker and the audience appeared to be mutually opaque. At one point, when Felix clicked to a slide of small-scale cheese production in what appeared to be the basement of someone's home, the Georgians simply looked to one another, nodded, and did not seem to acknowledge Felix himself, who, whether he was paying attention to his audience or not, continued to speak. His suggestions for implementing the Five Keys training sessions throughout Georgia were met with some resistance, and it was clear that my Georgian interlocutors felt that Felix did not completely understand "their" situation. For example, when the topic of whom to address in the first round

of training recruitment resulted in people discussing kindergarten school cooks or independent street vendors as potential target groups, a debate emerged as to how the NFA might address independent street vendors who would have to lose a day's work and pay in order to attend such a training. "We could award certificates of completion. That could surely count eventually, when people [consumers] realize that some of them have it and some don't." "No," another person answered, "people don't care about that. They just care about price and quality." Felix suggested the NFA charge around 25 Georgian lari (at that time approximately $13) for the training session and certificate, so as to "get people who attend invested in this process."

This atmosphere of studied unfamiliarity and sense of personal indifference to this man's position as an expert and an authority on the topic at hand is what I am beginning to interpret as a kind of resistance to the authority, perhaps even a form of "emasculation," of the EU delegate as a function of geopolitical differentiation. This "trainer" is here recognized as a technocrat unfamiliar with and to the Georgian audience. In contrast, ENPARD experts from Estonia, for example, embody a completely different habitus, or kind of authority, to Georgian experts. They, also most likely men, not only share the "post-socialist" experience and designation as being at the EU's eastern "edge," but also seem to embody a kind of recognizable and respected quality of masculinity, which I began to recognize as an index of one's proximity to "Russia." This positioning itself, in certain ethnolinguistic contexts, signals an ideology of "real masculinity": the strongman/authoritarian politician, the Mafioso who is sly and smart as a fox and wears black, the expert whose wisdom comes from a specific tradition of Soviet (techno)science and Russian legal codes, the man with ties to his beloved countryside (see Sherouse on tropes of masculinity and femininity in Georgian weightlifting, 2016). Together with the differently-masculinized space of the office, wherein managers like Salome and Temo

embody a kind of modernist, technocratic aesthetic of no-nonsense professional procedure, educated and informed expertise, a disdain for "wasting time" (see Yurchak 2003) and a constant air of busy-ness, they also embody this very specific orientation to "Russianness" and Soviet forms of technocratic authority.

I would also like to point out that in reference to particular EU experts I say "emasculation" rather than "feminization" for several reasons, one of which is that, amongst *Georgian* regulators, "femininity" signals a very specific mode of being in the world. In short, idealized feminized being is closely related to the practice of "provisioning." As I have shown in Chapter Two, there is an entire ethic and rhetoric around women (especially women-as-mothers) making do with very scarce resources. Central to this ethic are stories of the 1990s, a period characterized by wars and political-economic instabilities, food scarcity, forced migrations out of Abkhazia and correspondent resettlements of families – of which Marina and many other food vendors are veterans. These stories and memories of extreme scarcity and improvisational provisioning loom large in everyday conversations around food, family life, and home.

Patterning sincere regulatory authority: Engendering a caring and authoritative stance at a food safety conference in Tbilisi

Processes of (en)gendering expert authority were also made visible to me at a one-day conference I attended in January, 2014, on "The Future of Food Safety in Georgia." At this meeting, attendees from state and private sectors discussed the division of responsibility and accountability in developing a plan to design, implement, and monitor safety regulations across regions, business scales, production processes, and food industries. The Georgian countryside was often invoked – from different positions of expert regulatory authority and accordingly in different ways – as an object of not only regulation but, and particularly for the conference's "post-Soviet" participants, of care itself. For EU and global authorities, the countryside appears

as a kind of infantilized object of reform in the context of Georgia's Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) and (at that time) soon-to-be signed Association Agreement with the EU. But for Georgian experts and for the experts invited to the conference as representatives of "successful" reforms in the eastern "Eurozone," the Georgian countryside is maternal and archaic in its modes of "traditional" production. It was thus referred to as distant from our conference site, which was an urban and educated embodiment of "modern," "cosmopolitan" forms of knowledge and expertise. But at the same time it was intimately familiar and an object of masculinized affection. For Georgian experts, the countryside is especially salient as a terrain of identification and affiliation; part of daily conversations amongst Georgians of all ages in Tbilisi are claims to ancestral pasts and familial ties to different countrysides. People take pleasure in placing one another to Georgian regions based on surnames, physiognomy, and personality traits. A stereotypical "Megrelian," for example, has a surname ending in –ia or –aia, has light-colored eyes and blonde hair, has a good sense of humor and is considered to be very clever and of course speaks Megrelian. A person from Kakheti (wine country) is considered warm, down-to-earth and hospitable; and so on for people from Svaneti, Guri, Racha, Imereti, Adjara, etc.

The comparison between these various (en)genderings of the Georgian countryside is designed to help us consider what might be at stake in processes as seemingly straightforward as food safety regulatory reform at the EU's geopolitical "peripheries." This process of reform is a semiotic practice through which moral authorities are articulated, claimed, and later, perhaps even trusted.

At the conference, held at Tbilisi's most posh and futuristic hotel, Radisson Blu, global, transnational and national food safety and agricultural authorities from the public and private

sectors invoked the Georgian countryside in very different, though always moralizing ways. Most of the experts present invoked the countryside in terms of a development narrative with which we are all too familiar. It is embodied by "small-scale" and "family" farmers with a troubled relation to an abstract, technocratic understanding of "the value chain" of food production and regulatory reform. Here I would like to focus on a kind of moral authority, based on a "caring" disposition, that some conference attendees claimed. They were engaging in a very specific and ambiguous process of gendering that was emergent, invoked, and mobilized in the process of determining and delimiting regulatory objects and expert relations to them.

Two EU and global institutions had designed and sponsored the event. One institution, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), along with ENPAR, is deeply implicated and imbricated in the Georgian National Food Agency, as well as in other Georgian governmental and economic "developmental" projects–financially, organizationally, and ideologically. The other, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), is also very present and authoritative in relation to the Georgian Ministry of Agriculture, which is the organizational structure within which the NFA functions.

The purpose of this conference, per the EBRD and FAO, was to facilitate a "public-private policy discussion on upgrading food safety and quality standards in Georgia." In this spirit of "dialogue," the conference included a number of Georgian state and business representatives. From the state sector, primarily representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Food Agency; and from the business sector, managerial interests (Food Safety and Quality Control Managers) at major national retailers in Georgia (e.g. Smart) and Georgian food processing companies (e.g. Sante, Marneuli, Bio Bio). In addition to these Georgian participants from state and business interests, there were a few Georgian attendees from non-

governmental agencies in Tbilisi, including the two most active and publicly-recognized food safety and consumer interest watchdog groups.

Last, mediating these two positions of expertise (one EU/global and the other Georgian) were two "FAO consultants" – one from Ukraine and the other from Serbia – both of whom formerly worked in their respective national agricultural ministries. Each of these figures spoke as representatives of successful national food safety reform programs, constantly referring to the once-archaic and "lagging" positions of their national food safety regimes 6-10 years ago, for example. They were implying, of course, that Georgia is in the same place that "they" once occupied on this imagined timeline of change.

Introducing and implementing HACCP protocols was a main item on the agenda that day, and participants were asked to report and discuss whether food business operators across all stages of the production process would be able to adopt, implement, and become certified as HACCP-compliant. Here, for EU experts and the conference moderator from Britain, the food chain is called a "value chain," understood according to a temporal and diagrammatic narrative wherein the first stage "raw materials," or "primary production," ends with food-as-commodity object in the hands and home of the "consumer."

This is where the countryside emerges as the object clearly in need of care (or regulation-as-care), and in direct contrast, though unwittingly and ironically, so does its characterization as a source of reliable sustenance and experienced, familial care. At the same time, however, for post-socialist conference attendees (e.g. the experts from Serbia, Ukraine, and those from Georgia), the countryside – while still an object in need of EU-mediated reform – is referred to with familiarity and appreciation. First, responding to a question by the conference moderator about whether HACCP certification procedures are planned for not just industrial food

processing in Georgia, but also for small farmers, the Food Safety Manager at a major Georgian dairy food processor explained that the countryside is a source of unintentional though problematic food poisoning: "yes, the whole production process must be addressed. I understand it is a political issue and of course the government can't force anyone to do anything, but farmers are the main producers and we can't ignore a whole area of the market. With the problem of food poisoning, we can't ignore farmers." The FAO expert added that "our food safety strategy" approaches "the whole value chain and we don't want to kill the 'small guys' who are trying to survive day to day, we don't want to hurt them..."

The moderator then called upon the Serbian expert to comment on the experience which his national food safety program "already went through" and he replied: "Yeah small scale farmers produce, even in the mountains, people produce, and many of our farmers were producing traditionally. We had specific laws, food safety laws, for small-scale farmers." The Ukrainian expert (president of the Ukrainian Association of Milk) also added that in Ukraine "we have these small farmers, we call it 'babushka production,' which makes up 75% of our production capacities…They survive because of the dialogue we had between government and private sectors. Small farmers need to learn to invest in and to use their land. Eventually large-scale farmers increase and become more competitive and small scale farmers in some parts have a chance to survive." He means, "when there are special rural codes, then small farmers have a slim chance of surviving against the inevitable growing dominance of the big corporations."

One Georgian woman from Elkana, the non-governmental Georgian association of family farmers, reminded us that 2014 was the FAO-designated "Year of the Family Farmer," and that especially in Georgia, most food production happens at family farms. "We must remember the importance of family/small-holders production." She added that she "advocates for modern

standards for small farmers, not deregulation exactly," and that "the government needs to implement this."

At the same time, and belying the discourse of "dialogue," the fact that EU and global authorities called upon other post-socialist/Eastern European exemplars of reform as mediators suggests that a meeting without these voices would not have been enough. In this sense, there are particular qualities specific to these Serbia- and Ukraine-based voices that do a particular kind of work. Echoing the centuries-long project of "Russian civilization" in Georgia, in this case through a politics of technocratic EU reform, the experts from post-socialist Eastern Europe were not simply stooges, or messengers, of the EU's message. In a bizarre and perhaps unplanned way, the EU's "eastern" zone, mediated and articulated at events like this conference, embodies a kind of "recursive" form of masculinized, Russified governance and authority that purports to know *and* care for Georgian lands. In a specific way, these regionally-based experts speak to a Georgian audience in a way that the German-based EU expert described in the section above, cannot.

In order to understand and appreciate the ideologies at work in invoking the Georgian countryside as a site of interventional care by EU, Georgian, and other post-socialist food safety experts, it seems necessary to consider the *inter-discursive* nature of such invocations and from which positions exactly they are invoked, as they echo a paternalistic, "civilizing" project of caring for Georgian lands and understanding them from a particularly "Russified," masculinized position.

The two things I would like to focus on here are the particular image of what seems to be a widespread idealization of the countryside, and the emergent position of a particular kind of masculine, paternal, authoritative, though (institutionally distanced) form of regional, collective

expertise that refers to itself as caring.

In contrast to the EU expert, Felix, whom I discussed in the preceding section, the kind of authority that matters in the process of food safety regulatory reform in post-Soviet Georgia is not simply a matter of a generic expert transmitting technoscientific information. Rather, that this expertise is embodied in a recognizable stance is what makes a particular kind of "uptake" possible. In this example, the depiction of the countryside – embodied by "small-scale" "family" farmers – as site of intransigent and unsanitary farming practices that are deemed highly problematic, if not impossible, to "reform." (I have sat in meetings at the Food Agency where this position was expressed.) At the same time though, in relation to Georgia's countryside thought of in terms of a specific political-economic trajectory, the countryside is depicted as a kind of inexperienced, naïve, intransigent site that happens to be located at the beginning of a food "value chain."

In this narrative, Serbia and Ukraine, as icons, of successful food safety reform, and as coherent units – nation-states – are the working, engendered "end products" of this project of associated expert authority for different scales and in the service of supposedly distinct political interests (i.e., "state" and "market"). The consultants from these institutional sites were themselves embodiments of this kind of success, recognizable and respected by Georgian audiences, and reflecting a very regional, post-Soviet and Russified sense of masculine authority: very confident, strong men with persuasive and charismatic voices, in that conversation called a "dialogue" but with positions that at the same time ultimately echoed *regulatory* technocratic expert claims to successfully care for, cultivate, and *engender* successful relationships involving countrysides.

Last, regarding the authority of this associated positioning of regulatory food safety

expertise: In invoking the pastoral countryside and farmers, were experts at this conference actually talking about food safety? Of course, the envisioned end of these reforms is one in which the stages of food production might be monitored, controlled, and calculated in terms of particular understandings of risk and the calibration of its management. But taking into account all the insightful critiques of this kind of modernist, technocratic form of governance, I would like to suggest that in mobilizing the image of a countryside as a kind of naïve, infantilized site of impossible future reform, regulatory expertise positions itself as proceeding from a caring perspective, one that remembers the "small farmer" first and foremost, as if (geo)politics and the bureaucratic configuration of European market zones were distant and secondary to being a "good" and ethical governing authority.

Conclusion

In focusing on the gendered dimension of bureaucratic, regulatory authority in the making, this chapter sought to address some of the ways in which "gender" and "politics" are mutually constitutive in a process of meaningful authority-making (here, the building of a kind of "state authority"; cf Scott 2017). I demonstrated how "gender" – as an ever-indeterminate process of selving/othering – is *meaningful* to claims of expert authority, and to the ways in which such claims are political (Gal and Kligman 2000). Furthermore, this chapter demonstrated through its ethnographic examples, how a regional form of masculinized, post-Soviet authority recurs (Gal and Irvine 2000) and in this process, the Georgian expert-manager manages his/her ambiguous position in relation to embodied encounters with (a) EU and globalized forms of technocratic expertise; (b) Soviet, "Russian," and specifically-regionalized forms of paternal masculine authority; and (c) "Georgian" bodies themselves (including the Georgian countryside).

EPILOGUE

The night of June 12, 2015, there were very heavy rains in Tbilisi, a city built along the banks of the Vere River and surrounded by mountains on three sides. The next morning, the weather was clear, and there were unexpected messages on my phone from friends telling me to stay indoors; because of the heavy rains the night before, landslides had caused the portion of the Vere River that runs through Tbilisi, the Mtkvari, to flash flood. "Stay inside. There are wild animals on Tbilisi streets today," my friend Merab told me. Through the night, the flooding poured into the Soviet-constructed Tbilisi Zoo, which was positioned at the very edge of the Mtkvari River. It was heartbreaking: In addition to twenty human deaths and countless damaged homes and livelihoods, zoo animals drowned, and some escaped. Also victim to these floods was one of the largest and most crowded dog shelters (*tamarelizbarashvilis tavshesapari*), a private plot of land within the compound of a wealthy Georgian cigarette distributor who was rumored to have a "God complex," and whom the animal rights people despised for things like his stubborn refusal to vaccinate and sterilize the dogs in his care, and his bizarre decision to keep rescued circus bears in cramped cages adjacent to the dogs. I lived very close to this compound, and the loss of human and non-human life in the wake of this disaster was crushing.

In addition to rumored sightings of white tigers walking through fancy Tbilisi neighborhoods and bears climbing on apartment buildings (see photos of the aftermath at the end of this epilogue), there were many trajectories of blame in the wake of that night. Amongst my Georgian friends, the most common that I heard placed blame on former President Mikhael ("Misha") Saakashvili: In 2009, he had the audacity and arrogant cluelessness to push through the very risky project of building a major roadway through Tbilisi parallel to the river (the Varaziskhevi–Tamarashvili motorway), involving tunnels that cut through the hills in its path.

Some of the tunnels were built and then sat there unused for years, the trees cut down, and parts of the roadway started but not finished. It was impossibly ambitious modernization and development projects like this[61] that contributed to the deforestation and other forms of ecological felling that compromised Tbilisi's natural barriers to landslides and caused resultant floods.

Other targets of blame varied, depending on the positioning of the person or institution voicing it. Some foreign and Georgian organizations, in a narrative grounded in valorized temporalities of the present, blamed Soviet-era infrastructure, such as the dated structures and safety protocols at the zoo (built in 1927) that did not have the capabilities to handle unintended consequences, like the flood, of more recent "development" projects.

Furthermore, according to some of my Georgian interlocutors, the Soviets had actually *moved* part of the Mtkvari River from its original route through central Tbilisi to a nearby, parallel path. It was said that during their modernization of Tbilisi, some time in the mid-twentieth century, the Soviet Georgian government filled the original path of the Mtkvari, also known as the Kura, with dirt and concrete and built a road and bridge over it. The bridge is now called "Dry Bridge" (*mshrali xidi*), and is the site of a very famous and popular outdoor flea market offering mainly vintage Soviet-era collectibles: jewelry, clothes, silverware, military uniforms, paintings, night-vision goggles. Other popular histories of this now-dry riverbed say that the river was one of many other branches of the Mtkvari, and that during the course of

[61] And beginning with modernization projects during Russian imperial rule in Georgia during the second half of the nineteenth century, though that is not part of this particular narrative. See Malkhaz Kharbadia, "A River in a Sarcophagus," 17 November 2009, http://www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=text&pid=7940&lang=eng. See also http://crp.ge/?galleryItem=19 for the Georgian contractor's (Caucasus Road Project) photo gallery publicizing the project on their webpage.

constructing roadways and buildings there were other forms of hydro-diversion, such that tributaries like that under Dry Bridge emptied and dried out on their own. Either way, in these narratives, Russian and Soviet interventions in "natural" Tbilisi ecologies contributed to a legacy of violation and damage that ultimately resulted in the 2015 tragedy.

The degree of human intervention cited in these rumors indexed the larger question of whether this was, in fact a "natural" disaster. Like the argument that our current COVID-19 crisis is not natural, but rather, an effect of governmental incompetence on so many levels, the reckless endangerment embodied by Saakashvili (per rumors coming from a particular group of my Georgian friends), the now-dated projects of the Soviet and Russian imperial governments (a narrative common to the stances of Euro-American and otherwise Soviet-critical interests), and the modernization projects of Russian imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet governments more generally (for Georgians and non-Georgians critical of destructive interventions in the name of modernization and development), resulted in unintended consequences like the flash flood and romaing wild animals. This crisis in the management of infrastructure stood in stark contrast to the ways in which many of my interlocutors talked about things like effective animal vaccination campaigns and municipal plumbing systems like tap water – icons of Soviet infrastructure discussed in earlier chapters – as safe, scientific, and in control.

The reason I bring up the flood crisis here, in the Epilogue to a dissertation on food safety, is to discuss the form of popular collectivity that emerged in response to it, and to note the shared sentiments that neither state nor market interests were up to the task, or even present, to manage it. In contrast to a body politic that is unsure of itself and dealing with precarious conditions, as discussed in experiences of food safety discussed in the preceding chapters, the collective that came together after the flood was figurable, and animatedly so. Against public

sentiments that the state's carelessness had led to the flood, and that it was absent when ost needed in the period after, conversations on social media like Facebook, and Twitter, were alive with images of civic engagement (McMahon 2015). Mobilized through community activism and pop-up organizations (Georgian and non-Georgian) that modeled themselves on responses to the disaster of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 in the United States, individual organizers of ad-hoc Georgian relief efforts were vocal in their characterization of themselves as self-organized, and they were filled with a sense of purpose in the exhausting labors of shoveling mud, clearing debris like garbage, fallen trees, and buried cars, and rebuilding homes. These representations were echoed in what my own friends told me. As quoted in McMahon: "When life gives you a flood, you get the shovel and do the hard work in the summer sun, because this country belongs to you"; "set up by a couple of my friends that gathered up to 15,000 volunteers who were daily briefing each other, getting assignments, tasks, reports, etc."; "For the very first time millennials united under one goal and proved to the elderly that this young generation, which sometimes looks different (I mean long hair, tattoos, piercings, etc. – things that the elderly don't understand) cares about the country and is ready to get out and do the work."

Simultaneously circulating along with these discourses, there were stories and rumors of careless governing bodies that were the ill-intentioned agencies behind the dated, unethical zoo and the overly ambitious urban planning infrastructures that had been ultimately responsible for the city's experiences of disaster. Talk of zoos presented non-human animals as the compromised living subjects of, in Saakashvili's case, the Varaziskhevi–Tamarashvili motorway, which had resulted from an unchecked masculine authority engendering these infrastructures.

Even Saakashvili himself invoked zoos in this way after the election of Ivanishvili in 2012. After his party, the United National Movement (UNM), lost the national parliamentary

elections after two terms in power, Saakashvili regularly used the image of zoo animals on the loose to criticize the Georgian Dream coalition leader's ability to govern. For example, after a mass prisoner release of 8,000 prisoners due to overcrowding in 2013, one article from 2013, titled "Saakashvili calls Ivanishvili a 'zoo director' for releasing prisoners," wrote that in anticipation of the upcoming presidential elections, Saakashvili and the UNM had "run a crime-themed campaign…and claimed that the Ivanishvili government has allowed the mafia a comeback in the prisons." At the same time, the article argued that Ivanishvili had endangered the Georgian civilian population by releasing thousands of "dangerous" criminals. I heard this rumor among my Georgian friends several times during that year. It expressed a shared anxiety that what was considered normal and good living in idealizations of everyday Georgian society was disappearing.

Thinking with the post-flood example of collective mobilization that presented itself as vitally cohesive in its ethical caring and its spontaneous self-gathering, all in relation to failed infrastructures that embodied several legacies of mismanagement and irresponsibility at once, I would like to consider the outdoor "black markets" (*bazrebi* – pl.) in food. I argue that these sites sustain and are constitutive of a sense of collective belonging that exceeds their political-economic status as markets, and even as "informal." This specific form of food-mediated belonging is what I have been thinking of throughout this dissertation when I have used the term "body politic." Unlike, but thinking with, the sense of collective belonging emergent in the 2015 moment of crisis, how can we think about this market site as a form of sustained self-mediation and living well?

Despite these markets' strategic characterizations by Euro-American and elite Georgian politicians as sites of danger, dirt, lawlessness, and anachronisms, my Georgian interlocutors

(matriarchs, patriarchs, and their children) prefer to shop for foods like fresh meat and produce there, and at smaller grocers' stands on the city streets, while also going to branded retail chains like the French Carrefour and Georgian Goodwill. As I briefly discussed in Chapter Two, there is an understanding that while the meat bought at an expensive store like Goodwill might be guaranteed to be safe and "will not poison or kill you," only at the bazaars can one find *really delicious* and *good* meat, if s/he knows what they are doing and knows from whom to buy. Again, in the formulation of "it's *really* delicious and good, just as long as it doesn't poison you," is there a sense of an untamed energy to the natures contained and incorporated in this marketplace, in ways that Soviet zoo and contemporary urban planning infrastructures failed to incorporate these energies (embodied in the "wild" animals and criminals running loose), while they might have only provisionally contained them?

In subsequent pieces, I would like to work with all of the notes, photographs, audio recordings, and the "sociology of the bazaar" that my Georgian MA students and I developed, in order to think about a collective, Georgian body politic that, through its self-figuring at the bazaar – through reported memories, historical narrations, mediatized discourses, and lived experiences – understands itself as self-sustaining, cohesive, and vital. As a site at which "really good food" can be found, and in its own material specificity – its crowded and seemingly chaotic patterns of self-regulation, its unique status as a sensory experience, and its seeming intransigent presence against its discursively-positioned devaluation and predicted disappearance – in what ways does the bazaar exceed the political-economic parameters of global food safety that seek to define it?

One day after work at the NFA, one of my colleagues, Natia, gave me a ride to the subway stop closest to my destination, as it was located on her way home. As we drove through

the Saburtalo neighborhood to pick up her daughter from school on the way, she pointed to what seemed to me an ordinary, random small cul-de-sac at the intersection of some streets. As if remembering an event close to her, like a friend's funeral or the site of a beloved childhood grammar school, she told me that this was once the site of a small outdoor bazaar: "Here, is where the Saburtalo bazaar was." She seemed to offer this comment spontaneously, as if the memory came from her missing that bazaar, rather than her anticipating that I'd be interested in it because of my research topic. In general, it was not worth explaining to most of my Georgian friends and colleagues that my ethnographic concern was not solely with food or food safety per se, and that my ethnography was and wasn't about food at the same time.

What can this kind of shared affection and implicit trust tell us about these markets as sites of shared, political collectivity making? How does the state agency of the NFA mobilize the bazaars when thinking about and crafting its own authoritative trustworthiness? What are the forms of time-space that govern the experience of searching and navigating these markets? Chance? Luck? Popular understandings and knowledges? What are the gendered distributions of labor at these sites (e.g. men tend to sell meat and fish, while women sell produce?), and what does this mean for the forms of collectively-imagined belonging mediated through the matriarchal and patriarchal authorities that shop there? How do these sites connect to practices of provisioning vs shopping as a "consumer"? How do they mediate varied forms of collective hunger? Exceeding their status as markets, are these also sites of a unique, sovereign, urban terroir in their imagined proximities –through vendors and fresh foods – to the Georgian countryside? How are they generative of publics, bodies, and how do they work to sustain a body politic as collective *organizm*? Where do they fit on a spectrum of wild and tamed nature, if at

all? How might they relate to popular understandings and histories of infrastructure, intention, and (a)political authority?

Figure 12: The flooded dog shelter is at the bottom of the hill they are walking down. Photo by author.

Figure 13: Dog shelter (tavshesapari). Photo by author.

Figure 14: A different dog shelter not affected by the flood and just outside Tbilisi. Photo by author.

Figure 15: Desertirebis bazari. Photo by author.

Figure 16: Buying Georgian lari (GEL) with US dollars (USD). Photo by author.

Figure 17: Batumi Bazaar, Black Sea Coast I. Photo by author.

Figure 18: Batumi Bazaar, Black Sea Coast II. Photo by author.

Figure 19: Blackberries and currants at Deserterebis bazari, Tbilisi. Photo by author.

Figure 20: Poultry section: Batumi Bazaar I. Photo by author.

Figure 21: Poultry section: Batumi Bazaar II. Photo by author.

Figure 22: Dairy section: Batumi Bazaar I. Photo by author.

Figure 23: Dairy section: Batumi Bazaar II. Photo by author.

Figure 24: It is not exactly "straight from the village" I: Wholesale distribution at the Desertirebis bazari. Photo by author.

Figure 25: It is not exactly "straight from the village" II: Wholesale distribution at the Desertirebis bazari. Photo by author.

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