Part 2: Waters

Chapter 3

Architectures of Sociability: Laghidze’s Waters

sasmelebis met’oke var—
ghvinis, ludis, ts’qlis da rdzisa,
xileulta esencia
mit’ropane laghidzisa.

I am the rival of drinks--
of wine, of beer, of water and milk,
the fruit essence
of Mitrophane Laghidze.

-- Part of a poem by well-known Georgian Kutaisi poet and nationalist Akaki Tsereteli greeting the opening of the Laghidze soft drink café in Kutaisi in 1900 (Sigua 1980: 9)

Figure 1: Laghidze’s soft drink label (early)

Soft drinks and Sanitation

This chapter and the next is an exploration of a specific Georgian soft drink, Laghidze’s waters, which in certain ways is an emblem of Georgian aspirations for modernity. The Laghidze’s waters café and factory became emblematic of Georgian modernity because it opened in the capital of the West Georgian province of Imereti, Kutaisi, in 1900, at the
dawn of the twentieth century, but also because it was like all that is perceived to be modern: novel and atypical of its place and time. In some ways, the café echoed the atypicality of Kutaisi itself: in some ways a small provincial backwater to Tbilisi, Kutaisi was also a birthplace of avant-garde and modernist movements in Georgian art (Mchedlidze 1993: 6-7, Magarotto 2006, on Georgian modernism more generally see Ram 2004, 2007, Tsitsishvili and Tchogoshvili 2006), just as Laghidze’s café was the simultaneous birthplace in Georgia of modern forms of urban public sociability, soft drinks and electrical illumination (in 1904). Of these, the most often remembered is the café’s electrical illumination (here remembered as gas lamps) which led here, as elsewhere, with “the formation of a distinctively modern sense of space” (McGuire 2004):

I remember the first time gas lamps were lit in Kutaisi. They were introduced by Laghidze, who hung them across his fizzy water plant, near the city gardens. The light of the maps attracted people. Kutaisi ‘society’ would meet around the tables set directly on the pavement, just across from the plant. Kutaisi was considered to be an aristocratic city where lived the few surviving impoverished Imeretian [West Georgian] nobles, making up the so-called ‘high society’. (Kutaisi poet Kolau Nadiradze, cited in Magarotto 2006 : 46, 74)

Laghidze’s café, prominently located on Kutaisi’s large central boulevard (Sigua 1980: 9.n2), was memorable because it was unique for its time and place. The café was easily outnumbered (in 1913) by a large assortment of other dining and drinking establishments, some relatively “European” (restaurants, buffets), some more typically Georgian or “Oriental” (sardapis, dukans) (Mchedlidze 2002: 10).1 In many ways such public places for commensal drinking, “architectures of sociability” (Ellis 2008), are emblematic of modern urban public life in general. Georgian modernist artists particularly seem to have been drawn to populating their paintings with public places of commensal drinking and
sociability, whether cafes in European Paris or dukans and qavakhanas in Oriental Tbilisi, even as their artwork depicting such scenes of commensality in turn reflexively adorned the walls of their favorite dukans and cafes, and they named their movements and publications after imaginary or real loci of bohemian drinking and sociability (“the Inn of the Blue Horns”, “the Fantastic Tavern”, etc.) (Tsitishvili and Tchogoshvili 2006: 98, 135; Ram 2004). But for these bohemian writers and painters, the stereotypically exotic and oriental Kutaisi and Tbilisi were typified by the dukan (an Arabic word, denoting in Georgian something like a tavern in which wine is the typical beverage), while the stereotypically modern and European Paris was typified by the café. For Kutaisi modernists like Grigol Robakidze, the predicament of the European modernist on the oriental periphery in Kutaisi is perhaps that they were forced to make the dukan function as a café manqué.

These young people, who violated the peace of Kutaisi streets with their new voices….The modernist style of perception of the outside world, manifested in poetic texts, was their creed. And thus Kutaisi dukans turned into Paris literary cafes, where together with the harsh sound of the music-box and the obligatory mraavalzhamieri (the name of a polyphonic Georgian song [accompanying drinking]) the names such as Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, Friedrich Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde, Paul Verlaine, …were uttered. (Georgian modernist writer Grigol Robakidze, cited in Tsitsishvili and Tchogoshvili 2006: 97, 133)
Figure 2 K. Zdanevich’s “Old Tbilisi Sketches” (1920) is a typical Georgian modernist treatment of the urban space of Tbilisi by populating it with scenes of ordinary public commensality: (clockwise from the top) a dukan, a stand selling kephyr and “sweet limonat”, men seated around a table-cloth (supra) drinking wine, a man and a woman seated on the ground drinking wine in traditional dress, and in the center a boy and girl in more modern clothing seated at a table holding hands.

But Laghidze’s café stood apart from all these more characteristically Georgian architectures of sociable alcohol-drinking, especially the dukan. If the dukan, a place associated with the ritual of the supra, with its Arabic name, is redolent of Georgia’s position on the backwards, traditional, Oriental periphery of Europe, then Laghidze’s café, by its very uniqueness, is emblematic of Kutaisi’s, and Georgia’s, aspirations to European urban modernity. This is so much the case that the first printed image of Laghidze’s café is found in a satirical cartoon and is used to typify the more general
problems of “Kutaisi entertainment”, in which the problematic underachievement of normative European modernity was writ large. ii

Figure 3: “Kutaisi entertainment” (1903) iii

The central problem of “Kutaisi entertainment”, the cartoon suggests, is that backwardness of village life intrudes on the genteel urban public life of the city, as a villager carrying what appears to a tank full of sewage in a primitive cart is leaking this malodorous waste in front of a local café, whose sign reads (in Russian) “Laghidze’s Mineral Waters” (the novelty of the product is itself signaled here, mineral waters were
the fizzy drink *par excellence* of the 19th century, soft drinks apparently were so novel that the cartoonist didn’t even know what they were). The cartoon draws attention to the gulf between the aspirations for “European” modernity (represented locally by Laghidze’s café) and the fact that throughout this period Kutaisi lacked any kind of sewer system or other provisions for urban sanitation (Mch’edlidze 1993: 87-88; 209-210). The problem of “Kutaisi entertainment” is emblematic of the more general problems of modernity on European peripheries: public urban spaces have different functions, entertainment and sanitation, which are kept separate in a European metropole like Paris (for Georgians at that time Paris was the paradigmatic model of modernity), but which are juxtaposed in jarring contrast in derivative, colonial outpost like Kutaisi. The Laghidze’s café in Kutaisi is not, after all, the Parisian Café it seeks to be, any more than a Kutaisi *dukan* is. Indeed, according to the ideology of the times, to make it so would require nothing short of a transformation of all aspects of public urban life, a standardization and segregation of things like genteel entertainment, and sanitation, orderly city and disorderly village, and Europe and Asia.iv

**Soft drinks and Civilization.** Laghdize’s café shared with the Russian Imperial state a kind of colonial ideology of a “civilizing mission” with respect to Georgian urban public life. But Laghidze’s café was not an arm of the Russian state. Part of the problem faced the café’s owner, Mitrophane Laghidze, is his ambivalent position as a kind of “subaltern elite”, defining a subaltern elite here as a kind of elite, common in colonial situations, who is both in a position of subordination (to the Russian colonial metropole) and is in a position of authority over someone else (urban Georgian gentry to rural Georgian
peasants, for example) (Chatterjee 1993: 36-7). Such Georgian “subaltern civilizers” accepted much of the hegemonic framework of the civilizing mission of the Russian colonial state, but they at the same time disputed whether the selfsame colonial state was the most efficient or only means of achieving these goals. As is sometimes argued for other colonial situations (Chatterjee 1993), the attempts of such colonized elites to reform, civilize, or otherwise make public life respectable represents the germ of a specific kind of anti-colonial nationalism, and certainly this characterizes Mitrophane Laghidze, the founder of Laghidze’s waters, whose cultural reform projects, including both the café itself as well as even earlier activities as a publisher of Georgian language literature, spreading books and literacy and collecting folklore amongst the poor people, the peasants and workers, led quite quickly into explicitly political anti-colonial nationalism (including the publication of politically censored “underground” political literature) (Sigua 1980: 16-18).

What is the linkage between these various activities as a soft-drink manufacturer, cultural reformer and political nationalist? Mitrophane Laghidze was like many other Georgian cultural reformers, including his lifelong friend, the poet Akaki Tsereteli, in that his activities were aimed at “civilizing” public urban life in Georgia. “Civilizing”, then as now, meant for Georgians “Europeanizing”, that is, bringing Georgia out of Asia, which could mean alternately pro- or anti-Russian political activities, depending on whether or not Russia was understood to be “European”, “modernizing”, bringing Georgia out of the past into the present, and creating a orderly public urban life, typified by Laghidze’s café. Such civilizing activity could take many forms, exemplified equally by Laghidze’s ceaseless activity in many spheres, not merely the making of excellent soft
drinks, a café to drink them in, his electrification of public spaces starting with the café, the theatre and the central boulevard of Kutaisi, but also his involvement as publisher of Georgian literature and eventually the smuggling of prohibited literature, and ultimately anti-colonial nationalist activities, for which he was three times threatened with exile to Siberia (Sigua 1980). Soft drinks were for Laghidze only part of a more general civilizing mission. As we see from his later involvement in Soviet industry as a technical consultant and author of technoscientific treatises on the manufacture of soft drinks (Laghidze 1953), Laghidze, who had more technical knowledge than working capital, ultimately represents more of a budding member of the socialist technical intelligentsia than a capitalist entrepreneur, unlike the other famous soft-drinks producer in Georgia at this time, Davit Sarajishvili, whose role with respect to his enterprises was much more that of capitalist entrepreneur than captain of industry or technical expert (Sigua 1980: 29).

Laghidze’s incipient anti-colonial nationalism straddled, it is clear, both moral and material domains, public enlightenment via books and actual electrical lighting, too. In this sense he is a rather contradictory figure, at least from the perspective of influential theories of anti-colonial nationalism. Partha Chatterjee (1993) has argued influentially that anticolonial nationalists (the “subaltern civilizers” above), at least in South Asia, accept in general certain basic ontological premises from the (Western) colonizer, notably the ontological division of the universe into opposed “material” and “spiritual” spheres. The “material” sphere is the “outer sphere” of formal rationality (“economy and statecraft”) and technical modernity (“science and technology”), “a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed” (Chatterjee 1993: 6).
opposed “inner” sphere is the moral or spiritual domain of cultural essences which anti-colonial nationalism, beginning as spiritual or cultural reform projects, claims as its initial sovereign territory (for a broadening of the relevance of Chatterjee’s formulation to include both metropole and colony, as well as a critique, see in particular Van de Veer 2001: chapter 3). Something very like this thesis informs Levan Bregadze’s maverick and controversial theory of the supra as a nineteenth century invention of the Georgian aristocracy as a locus of authentic, intimate registers of expression (an “inner sphere”) compensating for their public lives in the “outer sphere” of Russian service (Bregadze 2000, also Manning 2004).

The Georgian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century were certainly people of this period inasmuch as they largely accepted the ordering of life into opposed material and moral spheres, often with the material having a certain logical or causal relationship of determination on the moral. The hegemony of this division is part of a more general modern ontology of naturalism (Descola 1996, Viveiros de Castro 2004), applicable both to metropole and colony in both the British and the Russian empires (on the British empire see Van de Veer 2001: 70). In fact, I would argue, that it is not so much the opposition between these spheres (material and moral; nature and supernature; technology and culture) that constitutes the specificity of the ontological ground on which these anticolonial elites take their stand, but how these specific spheres are ordered in terms of each other and other binaries of modern social imaginary and Orientalist imaginative geography, including state and society, technical and cultural, outer and inner, public and private, metropole and colony, Europe and Asia (as we saw in the previous chapter). The example of Laghidze shows that while the Georgian intelligentsia
might well be considered a kind of anticolonial nationalism, they did not always accept
the division of labor that implied that a European colonizing state would have
sovereignty of the technical-rational public aspects of modernity, and that they would
assume control of the spiritual-moral private ones. That is, alongside “cultural” reform
projects such as collecting folklore, publishing books and spreading literacy, people like
Laghidze also engaged in transformations of public life and even public works like
electrification. Part of the reason for this is that they believed in the superiority of
European models, and for them, Europe meant “Paris”, and not the imperial metropoles,
Russian cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg, which in many ways were themselves a
periphery of Europe. Under such conditions, where the imperial power (Russia) can be
shown to be itself deficient with respect to European (French) administrative and
technical models, a subaltern elite might be expected to use European models to criticize
the legitimacy of the imperial project of civilization, as well as to inform their own
independent projects (Manning 2004).

Seen in this context, the cartoon above is part of a more general genre of the period,
and with one exception the cartoons are all by one single cartoonist from the same
publication, one which is generally called “critical realism”, critique of the status quo and
the Tsarist state is implied by realistic portrayal of the generally sad state of things here
and now. The implied point of contrast for such critiques is usually the model provided
by a largely imaginary “normal European modernity”. Such critical realist portrayals of
public urban life in Georgia from this late imperial period dwell on images of failed
modernization, a state or colonial civilizing mission that never delivers its promises. And
such images always achieve this by showing improper mixtures of the modern, urban
space with elements more typical of a backwards village space. The main difference between the imperial intelligentsia activities of the 1860-1880s and that of Laghidze’s period (1890s-1917) is that by Laghidze’s period the intelligentsia were no longer drawn to descriptions of the backwardness of the village and village life, as they were more interested in cities, urban life, and contemplating and discussing their own historic transformative role (Frierson 1993: chapter 9), often while drinking in cafes or dukans. Cartoons depicting Georgian “urban modernity” as a failed or defective one are common themes, dwelling in particular on technological emblems of modernity, transportation as well as sanitation, for example insufficiency of seats on the Transcaucasian railroad discussed above, or the common cartoons mocking the public transportation systems of Tbilisi, specifically the “K’onk’a” district Tramway system, such as these, which are common motifs which associate the failures of colonial modernity with failures to produce orderly, European, civilized, urban public spaces and amenities. Such cartoons airing dirty laundry amongst the literate intelligentsia, while critical of the state, also form the basis for an intimate joking register of self-recognition among urban elites.

Figure 4: Konka tramway
“The last days of Tbilisi’s “Konka” Tramway” (1904)
The K’onk’a Tramway, more than any other public urban institution of Tbilisi, is the butt of all such self-parodies, because it reveals a central problem of Georgian urban modernity. It is a hybrid of the village and the city, traditional village carts drawn on modern urban tracks, themselves cracked and rusty. It stands for a failure to achieve that ordering of spatial difference that seemed to define European urban modernity. It represents not merely a passive backwardness, but worse, a failed attempt at modernization. Just as the image of the supra held on the roof of the train discussed above is not really as much a commentary on the supra as on the failings of the colonial governmentality to order public space by providing enough seats in trains in the Transcaucasus for passengers, so too Laghidze’s mineral waters store here stands not so much for itself as a kind of civilian attempt to colonize and order public urban space as “European” and “urban”, which comes up against its opposite in the obdurate West Georgian cart-driver the fecal drippings of whose sewage cart stand for the opposite. In fact, just as railroads, tramways and especially the socialist Metro stand as visual metonyms for claims of public urban modernity from the Tsarist through the Soviet period (compare Lemon 2000, Jenks 2000), we see primitive wheeled carts of various kinds standing as visual shorthand for backwardness of the village. Just as the Konka tramway is a curious hybrid of a tramway and a village cart, the cart is the master image of the backwardness of colonized Georgia and its Russian colonizer alike. As early as 1861 the Georgian nationalist Ilia Chavchavadze made the Russian postal cart into a
symbol of Russia’s own failure to progress, by having a European traveler, a Frenchman, appear only to criticize it: “The whole of Russia travels like that? Ha, ha, ha,’ He chuckled, ‘Who in the world will ever catch up with them?” (Chavchavadze, Letters of a Traveler, 1871; also Manning 2004).

Obviously, the cartoon ‘Technology decides’ in the previous chapter represents a socialist realist inversion of this tsarist critical realist genre. Critical realism, combating romanticism, deploys images of overcrowded trains with passengers on the roof, sewage carts dripping in streets next to cafes, and tramways drawn by half dead horses. Socialist realism represents ‘an organic unity of realism and romanticism; moreover, romanticism was an integral part of true realism, since Soviet life itself was romantic’ (Heller 1997: 67), hence, the achievement of cultured private life (the supra) is represented as being potentiated by the emblematic pinnacle of technology at that time, a (factually non-existent) airplane service from remote mountainous Svaneti to the dinner table (on the iconography of flight under Stalin see Nisbet 1990: 347-353).

Western modernities constitute themselves as the normal case of modernity by treating the opposition of between public and private, village and city, as a natural state that is the normal condition, deviations from which are chaotic, pathological disruptions of this normalized, naturalized normative order (Kaviraj 1997, Bratsis 2003). By contrast, colonial modernities in peripheries like Tbilisi or Kutaisi are posited, and posit themselves, as being aspirants to, not possessors of, this idealized Western order, always striving for, never achieving, a proper separation and ordering of these spheres. Georgian categories of modernity, urban publics, are always haunted by the fact that it has an exemplary model elsewhere, retreating over the horizon, ever visible, ever out of reach.
The soft drink café, Laghidze’s waters, is ordered here with defective public transportation systems like the Konka tramway as expressing an aspiration for urban modernity, an escape from the backwardness and idiocy of village life, that never quite arrives. The story of Laghidze’s is not unlike the story of Georgian self-perception of modernity itself.\textsuperscript{vii}

**Soft drinks and Electric Light.** Like European cafés, Laghidze’s café was emblematic of that which was “quintessentially urban and modern” (Ellis 2005: 215). The clearest single way that Laghidze’s café represented European civilization was that Laghidze’s café was the first establishment in Kutaisi, and probably much of Georgia, that had electric lighting. Electrical lighting was the technological sign par excellence of modernity in the period, embedded in a narrative in which illumination becomes a central organizing metaphor for civilization or modernity:

> At the beginning of the twentieth century, artificial light was routinely viewed as the supreme sign of ‘modernity’ or ‘civilization’.\ldots At its crudest, but also most powerful, the European past is dark and gloomy, and its historical present, formed over the nineteenth century, is glittering and radiant.\ldots Electric light was the ‘culmination’ of a century’s relentless drive towards spectacular radiance, generating a ‘fairyland environment’ or ‘celestial landscape’. (Otter 2008: 1-2)

As McGuire (2004) notes, “even from the first, electric illumination exceeded a purely functional role”, electrical lighting was as often initially as much a matter of public spectacle as public utility. Similarly, Laghidze’s use of electrical illumination at his café was clearly intended to be in part a spectacle, but even the functional aspect of this electrical illumination represented a kind of “excess over and above any pure functionality” for Laghidze, because the power used to illuminate the café was in fact

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created in the first place as a by-product of the power needs of Laghidze’s ice-factory (before the arrival of which, residents of Kutaisi used snow piled up in a cave for refrigeration (Sigua 1980: 11)). The power plant built to produce ice generated so much electricity that by 1904 Laghidze was selling the excess (along with the ice) to the city for public urban lighting of central places like the central boulevard, the theatre and for the lighting of private houses in some neighborhoods of the city. Until the creation of alternate electrical supplies under socialism the Laghidze’s electrical plant in fact provided for all the electrical needs of the city, public and private (Sigua 1980: 10). In 1911 the Laghidze company applied for a license to build a pavilion in a city park at which would be sold beer, mineral waters and soft drinks. The pavilion was to be transferred to the city as owner 15 years later. Among the amenities included was that the pavilion would be lit with four 500 lightbulb lamps using Laghidze’s own electrical reserves, and that three times a week there would be orchestral performances, linking technical modernity to European culture.viii

Electrical lighting turned Laghidze’s café into an establishment that could operate well into the night. It is difficult to imagine nowadays what kind of figure would be made by such a single brilliantly lit café beside a park in the midst of an otherwise dark city lit by the dim glow of household lanterns and candlelight. Laghidze thus not only transformed public space, but also created night-life in Kutaisi. In Kutaisi, as in Paris, night life, aristocratic society’s ability to keep later hours, reinforced “the social gulf between the leisured classes and the working population, but also the difference between the metropolis and the provinces” (Schivelbusch 1995: 142). Laghidze’s light provided a lone beacon of “commercial” lighting in a city, in which the Tsarist state had neglected to
create any form of uniform and homogeneous “public”, “street” or “police” lighting for purposes of surveillance (Schivelbusch 1995: chapter 3, 142-143). Public light, and with it night life, neglected by the state, spread in Kutaisi from commercial light, unlike in places like Paris:

What we think of as night life includes this nocturnal round of business, pleasure and illumination. It derives its own, special atmosphere from the light that falls onto the pavements and streets from shops (especially those selling luxury goods), cafes and restaurants, light that is intended to attract passers-by and potential customers. It is advertising light—commercialized festive illumination—in contrast to street light, the lighting of a policed order. Commercial light is to police light what bourgeois society is to the state. (Schivelbusch 1995: 142)

It followed that the public social life of Kutaisi was almost entirely dependent on the Laghidze’s factory and more specifically, its fuel supplies (which were in turn dependent on the unreliable transportation infrastructure provided by the Tsarist state mocked above). One writer, commenting on how Kutaisi had emptied out that summer (as Georgian cities often do, as people return to their ancestral villages), noted that even Laghidze’s was empty, as an index of how barren the cityscape became in the summer. In case of Laghidze’s factory, this writer added, the reason was that because of a railroad closure, there was no fuel oil to produce electricity for the electric lamps, or, had there been electricity, “if there had been even a single butterfly left in Kutaisi”, that’s where they would have been.ix

What this last report reminds us of is that the new forms of public space and time (“night life”) created by electrical lighting quickly become a presupposition, something which is only noticed in its absence. Laghidze’s café and electrical plant quickly became the technical “base” upon which the “superstructure” of Kutaisi social life depended. Just about exactly a century later, the lights went out in Georgia. Much of the period of my
fieldwork in Georgia was in these dark cities, in which certainly there was no public “police” street light (partially because of expense, partly because the street lamps themselves had been claimed as scrap metal like many other public utilities), and very little in the way of commercial lighting either. The public spaces of postsocialism were dark and dead, even after the curfews of the early nineties were lifted.

In his 2003 film *Power Trip*, a documentary telling the story of the denationalization and consequent privatization of electricity in post-Soviet Tbilisi, the capital city of Georgia, Paul Devlin interviews a local resident on the question of what electricity means…: “If you don’t have power, it means that you are hungry. And you are cold. And you are in the dark. No information. This is like . . . being dead, you know?” His “being dead,” to her “we still didn’t exist” — can we not hear in both of these statements a way of equating being supplied with electricity with being recognized as citizens, as the difference between social life and social death? In 2004 in another Georgian city, Kutaisi, protestors motivated by rolling blackouts took to the streets shouting “Give us light!” And in response, the deputy governor, Gia Tevdoradze, uncomprehendingly blurted before the crowd…: “You haven’t had electricity for thirteen years [so] why do you remember it?” (Rubenstein 2008: 43)

If the arrival of electricity heralded a new kind of modern public life in 1900, the sudden absence of electrical illumination in the early 2000s was just as quickly experienced as social death. Georgian public life, then as now, is a precarious achievement, technical and social.

**Public and Private life.** If urban public life in Kutaisi in 1903 is threatened by incursions of village backwardness, the same is true of the private life of the leading elements of the city, the urban “society” (*sazogadoeba*) of Georgian gentry, in cities like Tbilisi. If public amenities are the butt of jokes in satirical cartoons and tracts as a way of obliquely criticizing the claims of the colonial state to a civilizing mission in public spaces, images of the Georgian gentry society, the subaltern civilizers whose mission is
to serve as a model for imitation, serve the same role in private life. Just as state public projects under tsarism are a kind of Habermasian “representative publicity” in which the Russian state’s claims to embody European modernity and civilization can be judged and found wanting, so the Georgian aristocracy represented a kind of social group which embodied representative notions of publicness, whose private lives were felt to represent public models of a certain kind of respectability, models for imitation. The very term “society” (sazogadoeba) both for aristocratic and intelligentsia society and publics carries an etymological implication that the group so denoted represents the social whole, the public (sazogado “general, common, public”), as opposed to the peasantry, for example.

Georgian gentry, too, were the first group of Georgians to begin to inhabit cities like Tbilisi and Kutaisi in large numbers. Living in the city, and yet not yet of the city, the Georgian gentry could also fail as exemplary incarnations of urban modernity. Just as Georgian intelligentsia like Ilia Chavchavadze might criticize Russian pretensions to European modernity by seizing on the post-cart, so the debased feasting habits of the Georgian rural gentry, which have moved from public displays of generosity to private displays of gluttony, were the topic of some of his other polemical works (Kacia—adamiani? “Is man—human?” 1871).

In another image from Tbilisi in the same period as the cartoons above, we see a typical gentry townhouse in Tbilisi where rural gentry can “drop in” on their relatives in the city. The unfolding scene appears to be some sort of supra presumably for the entertainment of rural gentry who have “dropped in” on their urban relatives, held on the balconies that surround the central courtyard of a traditional Tbilisi house. The men at left wearing rural style hats and clothing, drinking out of traditional drinking glasses
(horns), the men at right wearing drinking out of European glasses and wearing urban attire, reinforces the contrast between rural and urban Georgian society. In the courtyard are traditional two wheeled carts, perhaps brought by the visiting village gentry. The scene, then, is one in which village elements are present mixed with urban ones, a humorous depiction of an imperfect separation of village and city.

**Figure 5:** “Tbilisi—a house where village gentry can drop in” (1903)
We can contrast this picture of a private feast in a house in Tbilisi with the café in Kutaisi as well (Figure 3). The café is a public space, the house a space for private entertainment. And yet both spaces are urban ones in which the village intrudes, in one way, or the other. It appears that the Tbilisi private household shows an imperfect urbanization of noble private life: they live in the city, and eat as in the village. The Kutaisi scene shows an imperfect urbanization of public life: they enjoy aromatic tonics, sitting in a European style café, while the aromas of village and agriculture (fecal matter) are present but politely not attended to.

The key actors in both scenes are members of Georgian aristocratic society (sazogadoeba). The scenes in both cases depict scenes of aristocratic consumption. Because this society (sazogadoeba) is defined as embodying and representing the general, the social, the public, the common (sazogado), aristocratic consumption is always exemplary consumption. That is, aristocratic acts of consumption are typically not private matters, but have a public, whether those invited to the feast who are subsumed thereby by the hosts’ generosity, or in any case a kind of “representative publicness” of the aristocracy (Valeri 2001:9-10), following Habermas where the people form a backdrop or audience “before which the ruling estates…display themselves and their status” (Habermas1992: 426). Feasting in the nineteenth century is the diagnostic activity of the gentry, the representative publicness of exemplary consumption. In village life of the period, feasting and indigenous notions of publicness are closely tied together. There is no sense that a feast is a strictly private event. The vast scale of expense and consumption of a wedding or funeral feast to which all must be invited, crippling for a peasant, and difficult even for a lord, are constant theme of intelligentsia commentary in
the nineteenth century. However, as the gentry become urbanized after the emancipation of the serfs in the late 1860s, they move away from their “people”, and their feasting loses its “public”. Their feasting is emancipated, and becomes a private display, losing its exemplary quality, its “publicness”, an exemplary “theatrical” quality which can only be gained if everyone is invited to partake in it or at least witness it (Valeri 2001: 9). As such, such private urban feasting, with its moral element removed, becomes materialized, interpretable as an act of private gluttony and waste rather than public generosity (Valeri 2001: 1-3).

The gentility of the Kutaisi scene at Laghidze’s also represents a form of exemplary consumption, where, once again, the urbanized gentry are the exemplary consumer. This is the representative publicity of fashion (moda). Fashion is a form of representative publicity. It is a way in which urban aristocratic patterns of consumption are addressed to a public, and form a model for imitation. Indeed, exemplary aristocratic consumers here, as elsewhere, often served to provide the yardsticks for the bourgeois fashion system (Manning 2006). The representative publicity of the aristocratic fashion system grows out of the representative publicity of courtly and public life in the city. Georgian aristocrats were the first class of Georgians to begin to live in cities like Tbilisi as part of the representative publicness of the imperial court of the Imperial Viceroy. Aristocrats in European clothing sipping tonics on the street in the city are very much a natural extension of an explicit Imperial civilizing mission, a representative publicness with an audience that includes both the Russian colonizer and the Georgian peasants. The formation of an aristocratic fashion system was part of the transformation of Georgian aristocrats from a rural estate living off their serfs to an urban, courtly service estate, a
process which was begun much earlier in the mid nineteenth century under the Viceroy Vorontsov. The Viceroy’s wife insisted, for example, that the wives of the Georgian gentry be dressed for courtly functions in the latest European fashions.

Of the two scenes of aristocratic consumption in figures 3 and 5, the “Kutaisi scene” (figure 3) seems at once the most familiar to us, yet the least typical of Georgia of the period. We saw in the last chapter that there is nothing particularly odd about portraying Georgians in their natural habitat as engaged in drinking wine and feasting. The Kutaisi scene is different from the Tbilisi scene, from the same year and same newspaper, at every point: here Georgians are gathered in a public space, not in a private house; seated outside on the street (hence the malodorous intrusion) and not inside on the interior balcony facing the courtyard, men and women seated together, rather than men only; drinking and not eating versus drinking and eating; European fashions versus Georgian dress; and lastly gathering to drink “waters” as opposed to gathering to drink wine.

The unique and novel addition here to the Georgian repertoire of sociability is represented by the establishment itself, Laghidze’s waters, an establishment which began in Kutaisi and spread thence to Tbilisi later. Laghidze’s becomes an emblem of new forms of public sociability, opposed to the supra and wine, ones that are at once self-consciously modern and European and yet indigenous.

**Soft drinks and Public Culture**

The various ways that Laghidze’s represented an alternate form of public sociability, specifically as a “rival of wine and beer”, are summarized in a newspaper report from
As this newspaper report makes clear, Laghidze’s linked together a specifically feminine form of cultured public comportment and fashion (moda), identified with genteel “society” (sazogadoeba), which was opposed, specifically, to a rather plebeian masculine behaviors of public drunkenness and beer consumption. In a manner akin to the sewage cart above, private masculine wine consumption produces a certain public excess, in the form of drunken hooligans wandering the streets demanding beer, who disrupt the civilized feminine public order embodied by Laghidze’s café, also pointing up the ways that the state, in the form of the local police, were not performing an effective role in helping to create an ordered public space. In a manner akin to the lighting of public streets with private electricity, here the activity of “subaltern civilizers” to civilize their own public space points to the failure of the state to do the same.

At first glance, these properties of Laghidze’s café might make it resemble the European model of “coffee house sociability” which links drinking of non-alcoholic...
beverages, especially coffee, and the sociability of unhurried talk, whether playful or deliberative, favored by many contemporary theorists of publics and modernity, especially Jurgen Habermas. Great claims have been made for these places in social theory, especially if they happen to serve coffee (for a critical discussion see Ellis 2005, 2008; Laurier and Philo 2007). According to Habermas, such places devoted to sociable talk and drink such as the Early Modern English coffee house offered a kind of “architecture of sociability” associated with urbane refinement and “egalitarianism, congeniality and conversation”, a model specifically opposed to equally egalitarian and intimate, but more boisterous and less urbane, environs of the tavern:

A customer, when entering a coffee-house, might expect himself to behave differently to the way he behaved when he entered a tavern: a contrast that drinking the primary product only exacerbated (beer made you loud, rowdy and boisterous, while coffee made you intense and talkative). The expected set of discursive practices are reproduced by the coffee-house customers in their own behaviour, immanent rather than explicit, customary rather than constitutional. (Ellis 2008: 160)

As Laghidze’s waters are the rival of wine and beer, so in Early Modern England places and forms of sociability associated with coffee are opposed to those associated with gin and beer. Both coffee houses and pubs grew up to each in their way symbolize a form of egalitarian public sociability, each with its own claims to offer formal openness and equality of access to customers regardless of status, including both social rank but also age, gender, ethnicity, that is diagnostic of Western understandings of publicness, and each at the same time generating its own novel mechanisms of exclusion, working on an implicit rather than explicit level (Kaviraj 1997, Laurier and Philo 2007, Ellis 2008).

On the level of universality and equality of access, Laghidze’s was a place from the outset frequented by women, one might say it was one of those few establishments in
Kutaisi of its period where women might feel comfortable in public. This early report from Laghidze’s, and period illustrations such as the one above (figure 3), show Laghidze’s to be a place particularly fashionable among women, a place where men and women could engage in mixed gender sociable commensality in public. Men from the period, of course, complain that this was a particularly feminine fashion (*moda*), and, indeed, Laghidze’s seems from a very early period to be strongly associated with women. What appears to be an old advertisement for Laghidze’s, painted in an older modernist style, shows a typical figure of Old Tbilisi, a Kinto (street peddler) replete with distinctive cap and sash, against a balconied backdrop of the streets of Old Tbilisi, holding a sign that announces “If you want to be a beautiful woman, you must drink Laghidze’s waters” (*tu ginda iqo lamazi kali, unda dalio laghidzis tsqali*). The two things to be associated, beautiful woman (*lamazi kali*) and Laghidze’s water (*laghidzis ts’qali*), are made to rhyme, deepening their association.

Figure 6: Advertisement for Laghidze’s Waters
Egalitarian mechanisms of openness along one axis of inclusivity typically arise in a dialectic with either overt or covert mechanisms of exclusion along some other axis. That is, hierarchical considerations of status are transformed into egalitarian ones not by eliminating status distinctions entirely, but by simplifying them, turning grayscale hierarchies into black and white inclusions or exclusions, so that masculine egalitarianism of “public” spaces in Ancient Athens or Modern Britain is achieved by the causally related exclusion of women from such spaces, or North American civic egalitarianism is sustained by the complete exclusion of the foreign non-citizen. For example, the “architecture of sociability” of the English coffee house, public house and tavern alike were “egalitarian” spaces, but implicitly excluded women. As Markman Ellis notes, the idea that such places “disregarded status altogether” is at best a polite fiction:

While women were not explicitly barred from the coffee-house, the regime of the coffee-house made their presence uncomfortable or untenable….virtuous women of the middle station who wished to be thought well of would not go to the coffee-house…. In this way, even a space that considered itself radical precisely because it was egalitarian, nonetheless established a space which surreptitiously re-encoded forms of hierarchy and prejudice without itself knowing it was doing so. (Ellis 2008: 162-3)

Laghidze’s in the Tsarist period resembled European cafes in being open to aristocratic women, but as a genteel space it was implicitly exclusive of the lower orders of society. For its mixed gender, non-ritualized, alcohol free (“polite, urbane, civilized”) forms of mixed gender egalitarian sociability made Laghidze’s open access to women from urban gentry circles, what was still in this period called “society” (sazogadoeba), even as it would have (implicitly) excluded others, not merely drunken, rowdy tavern-goers, but also peasants like the one portrayed driving the sewage cart past. The appropriate
European model for comparison then is not the English coffee house, but the European café (on which see Ellis 2005: 215; Haine 1996). Laghidze’s represented a modern form of sociability imitative of European cafes, themselves emblematic of incipient transformation associated with the concept of the modern. The European café, unlike the English coffee house, was associated with “propriety, politeness and the cultural elite” (Ellis 2005: 204; for a more general study of the Parisian café life of non-elites, see Haine 1996). In fact, by its association with privileged aristocratic forms of consumption, particularly those people who formed an exemplary group, sazogadoeba “society”, urbanized Georgian aristocrats were indeed exemplars of moda (“fashion”), even as they themselves were imitating foreign (Parisian) models. Such “genteel” comportment in society, particularly associated with women and society, was not merely a bearer of stylistic distinction (moda) but also represented, as made clear in the quote above, a kind of “civilizing process”, a set of standards of feminine genteel public comportment opposed to masculine and plebeian public drunkenness, hooliganism, fighting and swearing. The former was associated with drinking waters, the latter with its “rivals”: wine and beer.

Laghidze’s under socialism

Laghidze’s unusualness was a property it retained throughout the socialist period. The first time I came to Tbilisi in 1992, I, like many visitors, fell in love with the Laghidze’s waters store in downtown Tbilisi at 24 Rustaveli Prospect. I was not alone, as there were always lines at Laghidzes’s. Laghidze’s Café differed from all the other fast food places that typified the socialist landscape, and indeed, represented a kind of “architecture of
sociability” that differed not only from the usual dreary socialist fast food places by what it served, but how it served it, especially those places that served those drinks that Tsereteli called its “rivals”, wine and beer.

To become convinced of the truth of these words [sc. that Laghidze’s is wine and beer’s rival], it is enough that we enter the recently opened store “Tbilisi’s waters” on Rustaveli Prospect … The old and the young both come here, to drink the remarkable waters with syrups and to taste the hot khachapuri [cheese bread], which is baked almost before the eyes of the users. This pleasure costs all in all about 50-60 kopeks. But “Tbilisi’s waters” is not at all just a “fast food” café. Here they hurry no one and you can sit for a while at a table, talk, relax. These places are especially attractive to children and young people.  

(\textit{Komunist’i} 1986: 4, translated reprinted from \textit{Vechernaia Moskva})

The model of sociability represented by Laghidze’s waters was an unusual environment in which one could relax, sit, and talk. It was fast food, yes, in that it was served promptly, but it was a tasty affordable fast food one could consume in an unhurried fashion, commingled with other activities, talking and sitting.

The seamless transition of Laghidze’s from tsarism to socialism illustrates the way that socialist consumption is strongly informed with a sense not only of emulation of the bourgeois capitalist West, but also a desire to imitate, and spread to the people, the patterns of consumption that belonged only to aristocratic “society” in the tsarist period. Laghidze’s plays a special mediating role, a reminder of the aristocratic past and a prefiguration of the coming world of communism. Not a specifically socialist achievement, Laghidze’s became a naturalized citizen, even a utopian model, for public life, a “radiant future”, that was coming to be under socialism, a good that was freed from its aristocratic shackles and returned to the people by socialism. Laghidze’s represents a model for socialist consumption, representing a form of “cultured consumption”, opposed
both to the grim practicality of socialist fast food and the masculine sociability of beer,
and the ritual elaborations of the alcoholic supra: xii

You won’t even need a ruble, here [at Tbilisi’s waters] you will kill your thirst
and have a snack with pleasure: hot cheese-bread [khachapuri] and followed up
by Laghidze’s water—it really is an unusual thing. A beautiful interior pleases
us, convenient furniture and Old Tbilisi’s unrepeatable vista, too. In addition,
cultured service [kulturuli momsakhureba], culture of relationships. And all this –
thanks to non-alcoholic, more exactly fizzy water with syrup. And what waters!
(Stanco 1986: 5, translated from Khimia I Zhizhn)

Laghidze’s café is an excellent example of the architecture of sociability associated with
the Soviet concept of culturedness (kulturnost), a state directed program of “directed
desires”, beginning in the 1930s, which sought to fuse together two seemingly
incompatible programs for consumption inherited from the Tsarist order, the materialism
of “bourgeois” (actually aristocratic) feminine moda, and the ascetic anti-materialism of
masculine intelligentsia kultura.

The brilliance of the kul’turnost’ ideology lay partly in the fact that it was a fusion
of two value systems previously though incompatible, those of the bourgeoisie
and the intelligentsia.... kul’turnost’ also achieved the hitherto impossible feat of
equating consumer goods and cultural artifacts, both now respectable
appurtenances of the new Soviet citizen....The ideology of kul’turnost’
deconstructed the binary opposition, creating a world in which a nicely bound
collection of Tolstoy’s works could, with perfect dignity, stand next door to a
lustreware teaset, looking down on a tea-table laid with lace doilies and a
tablelamp. (Kelly and Volkov 304-5)

 Apparently irrelevant details of decor, like the mosaics and marble finishings of the
Laghidze’s store, or the heroic troika of curtains, lampshades and tablecloths in a private
household, were in a sense the material core of “culturedness”, serving to link together
the moral and material dimensions of consumption. The way tablecloths, curtains and
lampshades adorn private life with kul’turnost’, so cafes like Laghidze’s, ice cream parlours and parks adorned public life:

The creation of public spaces in which refreshments might be consumed in orderly fashion by happy families (ice-cream parlours, patisseries, cafes set in parks) was an important concern of the Soviet state from the early 1930s right up to its collapse in 1991, as part of the propagandization of kul’turnost’ and the continuing battle with undesirable phenomena such as drunkenness and hooliganism (Kelly and Volkov 1998: 294)

There was no doubt, of the two basic forms of fast food establishment offered under socialism, places like Laghidze’s, patronized by men, women, children, represented kul’turnost’, the “bright future” world of cultured consumption under communism. By contrast, those that served beer, frequented only by men, were unadorned and represented uncultured plebeian mass consumption of the present. Both of these, in turn, different as forms of public “fast food” consumption in relation to the model of private feasting with wine offered by the supra (as we saw above).
Laghidze’s as a model of sociability differed from the formal private ritual sociability of wine and the informal public ritual sociability of beer in yet other important ways. At Laghidze’s, soft drink consumption expresses abstract equality in public, drink consumed for no other purpose than to drink, talk pursued for no other purpose than to talk. Women and children were quite at home at Laghidze’s. In this sense places like Laghidze’s were very much unlike restaurants or bars, the homes of male camaraderie expressed in the form of supras. For me, a foreigner, places like Laghidze’s were also refuges from the iron law of hospitality of the supra. One of my problems in my early fieldwork was finding such places where I could meet a friend and not become
encompassed by the demands of the law of hospitality, places where I could eat and drink for their own sake, and talk merely to talk, and come and go as I pleased. Indeed, one of my host families saw my practice of lunching at Laghidze’s an affront to their hospitality! By simple experimentation I discovered that some, but not all, coffee shops, tea houses or soft drink shops were immune to the law of hospitality expressed by the supra. Such places, too, have from the beginning been those public places in Georgia in which it was possible for literally anyone to hang out and chat without being disturbed.

There was a related pragmatic dimension, too. Laghdize’s was, after all, a fast food place. These were places where it was possible to eat alone there, in silence, unlike a restaurant. Georgian restaurants are virtually synonymous with feasting, even if it is, from the Georgian perspective, a somewhat anomalous kind of feasting, by not being held in the home. At one point in my early field work I attempted to enter a restaurant alone, I hadn’t eaten for a long time because of the general crisis that was Georgia at that time. I hoped to order a small dish of red beans, eat it, and go on my way. The waitress ordered me to leave, saying “A man eating alone, it’s awkward” (uxerxuli, something that is not quite shameful, but certainly makes one ill at ease or uncomfortable). But at Laghidze’s one could not only eat alone, but it was normal to do so. The fact that there was only one thing to eat, cheese-bread called khachapuri, was not a problem for me, because the khachapuri was the best I’ve ever had, and Laghidze’s soft drinks are certainly the best, truly unique, beverages.

Laghidze’s achievement of a unique architecture of sociability, a space of autonomy from the laws of hospitality of the supra and masculine forms of alcohol fueled camaraderie was a precarious one. Not all cafes were so immune. In less respectable
cafes, there was always the permanent danger that the informal public sociability of coffee and tea and soft drinks would be overcome by the private ritual sociability of the supra. First bottles of alcohol would be sent to the table where one sat, then the guests who sent them would present themselves, and thus would come to an end any other plans one might have had that day. The more general tendency of the supra to invade other spaces of sociability is noted in this Niangi cartoon, published in 1960 and attributed to an artist named Ghoni. The joke here is that wine, under normal conditions, is drunk out of glasses that do not differ much from wine glasses, and normally supra toasts begin by mentioning the glass (“with this little glass, I want to drink a toast…” here rendered as “with this tea glass, I want to drink a toast”):

Figure 8: Tea/wine house

*In some tea houses instead of tea they sell strong drinks.*

-- With this tea glass, here’s to our brother, the director (*gamge*) of the tea house, who instead of tea fills our tea glasses with wine! (Niangi 1960.9)
But if the ritual order of wine constantly threatened to take over the sociability of other coffee and tea houses, Laghidze’s itself was often touted as an effective antidote to strong drink and drunkenness:

Fruit waters prepared according to his [Laghidze’s] recipes have caused many of our young people to grow out of the habit of drinking alcoholic beverages to excess. It is for this reason, that whatever month of the year it is -- spring, summer, fall or frosty winter—the hall on Rustaveli Prospect, where the famous sweet drinks of fruit waters by the name of Mitrophane Laghidze are sold, is always full of people; everyone flocks, everyone hurries -- old or young, worker or engineer, writer or actor-- to this beautifully decorated hall. (Sigua 1980: 25)

The exemplary public culturedness of Laghidze’s café seemed to flow from the culturedness of the private intelligentsia circles in which Laghidze moved. Without a doubt, Sigua speculates, a supra thrown by Laghidze would never have been a “simple orgy” (ubralo ghreoba) or an excuse for drunkenness (lot’oba), but would have been more of a friendly meeting and conversation on social and literary themes (Sigua 1980: 39).

**A Socialist Product.** Laghidze’s was not only a model of the Soviet notion of “culturedness” in consumption, an effective cultured antidote to the uncultured Georgian habits of drink (ghreoba, lot’oba), it was also genuinely popular, as evidence by the fact that in 1992-3, as in 1980 when Sigua was writing, there were always lines at Laghidze’s. Obviously, much of the appeal of Laghidze’s was not how and where the waters were served, but what the waters were, that the product itself, the waters, as well as the cheese bread, were very good. Whatever one might have heard about socialist products or socialist food, Laghidze’s products were better than anything I ever tasted in a capitalist
country. Laghidze’s café was something like the Mecca of Socialist Soft Drinks, presiding over a socialist softdrinkscape that stretched across all the cities of the USSR. By 1952, according to the newspaper *K’omunist’i*, a particularly popular soft drink prepared according to *just one* of Laghidze’s recipes by itself amounted to more than 40 per cent of the USSR’s industrial non-alcoholic drink production (Sigua 1980: 24).

Even though it was created before socialism, Laghidze’s waters became a model socialist enterprise, a perfect embodiment of socialist kulturnost. In fact, Laghidze’s became a Pan-Soviet drink precisely the same watershed year (1934) that the Party Congress announced an end to the intelligentsia cult of asceticism and utopian schemes to abolish all the dualisms of bourgeois culture: production and consumption, public and private. Under socialism, Laghidze himself made a seamless transition from a typical member of the tsarist cultural intelligentsia to an exemplary exponent of the socialist technical intelligentsia. As a consultant for the Socialist state, Laghidze extended his Georgian style soft drink production all over the USSR in the 1930s (Sigua 1980: 22-3, for the context see Gronow 2003). In 1930 the well known leader of the Abkhazian communist party and close friend of Stalin, Nestor Lakoba, who we in the first chapter as the tamada of a feast with Stalin, invited Laghidze to Abkhazia to set up a soft drink factory (Sigua 1980: 34).

In 1934, presumably as part of a Party Congress mandate “for better quality” in food production (Gronow 2003:43), Laghidze was entrusted with opening non-alcoholic fruit drink ‘firm’ (*sapirmo*, a category I will discuss in the next chapter) stores in Moscow and other Soviet cities (Sigua 1980: 22-3). Laghidze’s was a model socialist ‘firm’ precisely because it was atypical for its time and place, it was a model of the kind
of enterprise that would become more common in the coming bright future of communism being built under socialism. In addition to its higher quality, as a genuine traditional luxury, and not an imitation of a foreign one, Laghidze’s soft drink recipes also carried the important advantage over its Muscovite competitors that they were cheaper to make, since his recipes involved fewer “deficit” goods that could only be obtained with foreign exchange (Sigua 1980: 23). This made Laghidze’s soft drinks both ideologically and economically appealing to a regime committed to authenticity, autarchy and autocthony (and not imitation or importation of Western models and goods) in production (see Gronow 2003: Chapter 5).

Laghidze’s waters was simply one of a large number of common luxury goods, including champagne and chocolates, that were introduced in this period as an expression of a coming “joyous life” of cultured consumption predicted by Comrade Stalin: “These new products…acted as concrete models or examples of the happy and abundant socialist way of life. They carried the promise of general abundance….In food culture in particular, but also in many other areas of consumption, industrially-mass produced, relatively cheap copies of formerly expensive luxury products came to play an important part in the everyday lives of Soviet citizens. Now, thanks to the Communist Party and its great leader, Comrade Stalin, every worker could live like an aristocrat” (Gronow 2003: 14).

In many ways, Laghidze’s Waters were a perfect instantiation of the new specifically socialist model of consumption, kulturnost. Part of this ideology (that little bit that served to distinguish it from the petty bourgeois model of consumption it otherwise resembles (Kelly and Volkov 1998: 305), was the claim to universality of
access. Drinks made according to Laghidze’s recipes were available in principle (to use the ironic socialist phrase) in every city in the Soviet Union. But precisely there lay the problem: Laghidze’s store in Tbilisi was unique. In a socialist cosmology, this very uniqueness could be seen as a kind of violation of the proper socialist order of things. Not only should the luxuries of socialism be made available in all socialist cities, but particularly glaring was the absence of such a model café in the model socialist city, the city which best instantiated the bright future of communism, Moscow. As the model city for socialism, particularly under Stalin, Moscow was not only to be more visually impressive, its building taller and more beautiful than those permitted for other cities (Clark 1981: 146), its Metro more grandiose (Jenks 2000), it also had to be supplied with more and better consumer goods than other socialist cities.

Such an omission, in which Tbilisi had something that Moscow lacked, would never have been permitted under Stalin. And, it turns out, there had been a branch of Laghidze’s store in Moscow in Stalin’s time, nostalgically remembered by a war veteran decades later:

I read the correspondence in “Vecherniaia Moskva” and right then I was reminded, that before the war in Moscow there was a good, Tbilisi-style shop, where they sold fizzy water with different syrups. …It had a rather unusual name – “Store-Laboratory.” At the counters stood tall glass vases (dokebi) with syrups of various designations, which they prepared right there, in the kitchen-laboratory from herbs, vegetables, fruits, berries, coffee, cocoa and cream. And what syrups they were! Each one better than the last—cherry, raspberry,… They made them so that they preserved their natural numerous vitamins, colors and flavors. They sold the syrups not only with fizzy water, but with hot and cold milk, too. I and many of my young age-mates living in this area after playing football or volleyball in the courtyard would run out to this store in order to drink this tasty and cheap water. Unfortunately, I don’t know, what became of this store. When I returned to Moscow after the war, I couldn’t find it again. I think that we need to restore such a store, it is possible with the help of Georgian specialists. Now the matter is in under the guidance of Moscow’s trade and social provisions. (A Milovanov, veteran of war and labor. Komunisti 1986)
All the other correspondents in this exchange from the Russian paper above agreed that there should be a “Tbilisi’s waters” in Moscow. Not just the product, in bottled form or dispensed in some other way, but the whole manner of socialist cultured presentation, as well. After all, as one Russian journalist argued, even the objectively same product might taste better in the picturesque surroundings of a café in Old Tbilisi than it did in the factory in which it was made, so too, Muscovites required not only the product, but also the cultured presentation, perhaps a café in the similarly picturesque Arbat street in Moscow:

(at the Laghidze’s factory) I saw the cauldrons that they boiled the syrups in, I saw the soturaci and the pouring (bottling). I tried different drinks, among them were some that were better than the best… but ordinary gassy water seemed better tasting to me when prepared in the Laghidze’s manner in the Café-Store on the banks of the Mtkvari river. Even though I know, that the store receives its syrups from this factory, such syrups, as they use in the factory’s….. Sense, perception is dependent on surroundings. The Old Tbilisi café-store however is truly lovely. It would be very good, if such a thing would appear among us on the Arbat. (Stanco 1986: 5)

Under late socialism, the culturedness of presentation embodied in the Laghidze’s café is an integral part of the gustatory experience of Laghidze’s Waters. The café combined a complex multistage technical method of assembling the beverage with an interior décor (see the photo in the next chapter) that instantiated a Georgian version of “the design of socialism”, which Fehervary (2009) argues served as a kind of “socialist brand” linking together different forms of socialist production. In the Post-Stalinist period of Georgia, this design took the form of a kind of “traditional modernism” or “ethnographic modernism” exhibited particularly by an appropriation of traditional Georgian design elements and themes (the Khevsurs, a traditional mountain group whose folk art is
heavily given over to abstract design form a salient source of both elements and themes for such art) within a generally socialist modernist aesthetic. Such “traditional modernist” designs, starting as a local version of a Union-wide reaction to Stalinist aesthetics in the 1960s (Buchli 1997, Reid 1997), provided the characteristic décor that linked Laghidze’s café to other late socialist Georgian restaurants, cafés and other buildings. This was the style that dominated virtually every public establishment and all goods from Georgia when I did my fieldwork in the early 1990s, now it has been virtually eradicated. This recognizable late socialist Georgian style also decorated Georgian socialist brand goods, for example, sample perfumes for men and women released for the jubilee of the medieval poet Shota Rustaveli (from the mid 1960s), named after male and female protagonists of his poem, or cigarette brands like “Kolkheti” (from the late 1980s):

Figure: Traditional modernism, the design of late Georgian socialism: left, perfumes “Avtandil” and “Tinatin” (1960s); right, the cigarette “Kolkheti” (1980s).
Unlike these design features of the café, the characteristic technical dimension of preparation and presentation of Laghidze’s waters found in the café were portable and could also be had from street carts which used essentially the same equipment to store and pour the syrups, mix them with gassy water, and wash the glass cups (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: The Laghidze’s Process**
Stage 1: pouring the syrup (in this case, Tarragon flavor syrup): the glasses are washed in the round low container at back, the syrup is stored in the large tear shaped glass containers, from which a small amount is decanted into a measuring cup.

Stage 2: mixing syrup with carbonated water

Stage 3: Drink up, we’ll be needing that glass back.

Perhaps there is also something distinctively socialist, like the “design of socialism” of the café, even here, in a style of presentation that is in itself a technical process of production transparently displayed to the customer. Certainly, as we will see, this particular technical method of preparation of these drinks becomes just as strongly
associated with the Laghdize’s “brand” as the café or the syrups. The early period of socialism (before the hegemony of kulturnost in the 1930s) was dominated by the idea that the monism of socialism would overcome the various dualisms of bourgeois culture created by the capitalist commodity form itself, including the opposition between consumption and production. This monism was typically a form of productivism, valorizing human self-objectification through labor, thereby grounding everyday life in labor, consumption in production (on these points see Kiaer 1997).xvi As argued above in the section on socialist wealth, the fetishistic properties of capitalist commodity are created by its distinctive attribute of exchange value (and yet another form of fetishism is implied by the property of brand, as we will see) the socialism commodity, viewed as an expression of productivism, can be imagined instead as being animated by its use-value, rather than its exchange value, becoming almost an anti-commodity (Kiaer 1997: 111).

The ideology of kulturnost, in part, reintroduced some of these bourgeois dualisms into socialism (Dunham, Fitzpatrick, Kelly and Volkov 1998), the opposition between private and public life, the opposition between production and consumption as autonomous spheres, whose revolutionary erasure might be left for the endlessly deferred utopia of communism. The primary difference was that, being socialist, socialist consumption was class-free, made available for the masses (Kelly and Volkov 1998: 305). By the 1980s, there is no question, there was a strong sense that consumption was a sphere autonomous from production, although kulturnost was a principle applicable to virtually all spheres of socialist life, private and public, spiritual and material, production and consumption (Kelly and Volkov 1998: 297), that Laghidze’s factory and Laghidze’s
cafés were very different kinds of places for very different and disconnected activities of production and consumption.

But the valorization of consumption in the ideology of *kulturnost* in a manner uncannily similar and yet eerily different from the commercial consumerism of the capitalist West, does not necessarily imply either a wholesale identification between the two consumerisms (based on the unfortunately widespread idea that consumption is a transhistorical form of agency), nor does it imply that a kind of productivist monism does not remain relevant to understanding Laghidze’s as a product. Even the Laghidze’s café dispenses drinks not as isolated prepackaged commodities whose production process has terminated long since, but as part of a further act of production that flows seamlessly into the experience of consumption.

This seamless hybridity of production and consumption brings to mind the Moscow Laghidze’s store of the 1930s. The store had a strange name. It wasn’t a store, or café, but a “store-laboratory”. This hybrid name unites production (laboratory) and consumption (store), almost an icon of a socialist productivist monism which seeks to ground consumption in production, overcoming the typically bourgeois dualism of production and consumption, factory and café. From a purely technical perspective, the productivist perspective of the factory and not the consumerist perspective of the café, Laghidze’s essences are essentially the same there in the factory as they are in the café. From such a productivist perspective, the secret of Laghidze’s waters lies ultimately not in their presentation, but in his secrets of production, the theme of the next chapter. Laghidze’s status as a productivist socialist commodity only becomes clear retrospectively, as I will show, from the difficulties of assimilating Laghidze’s to the
order of the capitalist commodity under postsocialism, in comparison with prototypical capitalist commodities like Coca-Cola.

The list includes 167 sardapis (wine cellars), 15 ‘houses to spend the night’ (ghamis gasatevi saxli), 15 restaurants, 8 hotels, 7 dukans (the Arabic derived word for ‘shop’ in Georgian has the connotation of ‘tavern’), and three buffets.

As part of this social arrangement, it was necessary to obtain the obedience of the poor to a bourgeois conception of what it meant for a space to be a modern city. The ideology of colonial modernity posited a duality between the city and country in which the city was seen as orderly, hygienic, scientific, technologically superior, and ‘civilized’. As opposed to the loose disorder of the village, conduct in the city was more standardized. To institute such regimentation of conduct, the colonial administration had to employ certain standardizing techniques (Kaviraj 1997:84-5)

Of course, Kaviraj is talking about a different colonial modernity under a different colonial regime, one, as it happens, not any more able to fully realize its civilizing mission of what constituted proper uses of ‘urban public space’ than the Russian imperial colonial regime in Georgian Kutaisi.

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Harsha Ram, citing Marshall Berman, has recently diagnosed the Georgian urban condition in cities like Tbilisi of this period as being a particularly extreme case of a more general ‘modernism of underdevelopment’, one not limited to specifically colonial contexts, where “a warped and truncated modernization” had taken place, generating a modernism that had been “forced to build on fantasies and dreams of modernity, to nourish itself on an intimacy and a struggle with mirages and ghosts, ... forced to be shrill, uncouth and inchoate.” How much more fantastical might modernity have appeared in Tbilisi, a city situated on the periphery of the Russian and European cultural systems, where the “modernism of underdevelopment,” already distorted by its distance from the centres of modernity, was superimposed over local traditions of oriental commerce, colourful festivity and urban bohemia. (Ram 2004: 369)

The brilliance of the Viceroy’s court, the numerous balls and receptions at the newly built palace, and Princess Vorontsova’s insistence on fashionable attire for the women of Tiflis forced the local nobles to spend great sums on their increasingly Europeanized style of life. Renting homes in Tiflis and acquiring the latest Parisian fashions kept the nobles focused on consumption with little effort to increase their income. Not surprisingly, the debt of the nobility of Tiflis province grew from 100,000 to 1,800,000 rubles in the years of Vorontsov’s administration” (Suny 1988: 74)

Of course this interest in Laghidze’s seems to be in the middle of Gorbachev’s anti-drinking campaign of the late 1980s (the subject of a vast number of Niangi cartoons from the same period), the rest of this article is on the topic of Georgian non-alcoholic wines.

Judging from the style of the artwork it belongs to the hand of Niangi artist from the 1930s, a certain Doni (the two names look almost the same in Georgian, Doni is an abbreviatory pseudonym for the initials D.N., possibly making it the work of Davit Nacvlishvili who drew under that pseudonym)

Reprinted in translation in the Georgian paper Komunisti 1986 may 30, p. 4
Tsitsivili 1998 makes this argument in effect by juxtaposing ethnographic and late socialist examples of design in pictures, but her discussion focuses exclusively on the ageless traditionalism of Georgian art, making it clear that the intent of the juxtaposition was to show the timeless aesthetic unity of Georgian folk design traditions.

Productivism was not exclusively a property of socialism, as I and others have argued elsewhere, see Manning (citations).