The World of Georgian NGOs: Struggles of Cultural Capital, Social Change and Geopolitics

Irine Osepashvili

A dissertation submitted to the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research

In Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Kent

January 2023

Abstract

Like elsewhere in post-socialist states, Georgia's NGO sector owes its existence to Western democratisation assistance, which envisioned it as an important contributor to the transition to democracy and capitalism. Despite being praised as active and vibrant, the sector has remained donor-dependent, non-participatory, and rather detached from the wider population. This thesis aims to problematise the NGO-population mismatch by going beyond the "weak civil society" argument and contextualise it in global and local hierarchical processes instead, that have been embedded in the post-socialist transformations. Guided by Bourdieusian sociology, the study revolves around individuals inhabiting the sector: it situates them in relation to the wider population and in the light of the above hierarchies, looks at their symbolic distinction, the ways they are responded to by different segments of the laypeople, and the rethinking that goes on inside the sector itself.

Concerned with participants' own experiences and perspectives, the study draws on qualitative in-depth interviews with 34 NGO representatives, 39 laypeople and 8 donor organisation representatives in Georgia. The NGO representatives make the primary sample for the thesis, complemented by the data from two other target groups. One chapter is entirely dedicated to the laypeople's perceptions, while interviews with the donor representatives help to make sense of the context in which the NGOs function.

The thesis borrows from the adaptation of Bourdieusian theory to Central and Eastern Europe, where on one hand, local divisions reflect geopolitical dependencies, and on the other hand, non-economic resources (cultural, social) acquire a significant role in social stratification. Putting emphasis on unequally distributed Western-marked forms of cultural capital, which is also embodied as a habitus, the study positions the NGO representatives closer to a young urban

middle class - further shaped by and shaping the NGO environment. The research also reveals how they tend to construct the "othering" classifications in context of Georgia's development, typically imagined as a symbolic journey from the East to the West, and how these classifications are embraced, rejected, dismissed, or responded to in an ambivalent manner by different segments of the population. The study additionally sheds light on the internal struggles in the sector between liberal and left-leaning camps, which cannot entirely escape geopolitical constraints either. Finally, while I approach the problem from the perspective of struggles for symbolic profit, I do not imply disregarding the participants' agency, reflexivity and dedication to changing things for the better, examples of which are further highlighted in the study.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not be possible without the immense encouragement and support I received during these years.

First of all, I thank the research participants for kindly agreeing to talk to me and sharing their perspectives. This thesis is entirely made of their experiences and thoughts.

I am very grateful to the University of Kent for granting Vice Chancellor's Research Scholarship and making my Ph.D. journey possible, opening the door to new ideas and people I dearly respect.

I consider myself exceptionally lucky to have Dr. Jeremy Kendall and Dr. Balihar Sanghera as my academic supervisors, from whom I learned so much. I thank them for creating a safe and open environment for discussions, helping me to gain more confidence, encouraging creativity, and challenging me to grow. I am also very grateful to Dr. Eddy Hogg and Dr. Veronika Stoyanova for their precious feedback at the early stage of the research. For guiding me through administrative matters during these years, I sincerely thank Meher Basit and Kalliopi Glezakou.

I want to express my greatest love and gratitude to the Center for Social Sciences (CSS), the research centre which has contributed to the growth and development of many young scholars in Georgia. I particularly thank Dr. Marine Chitashvili who always supported me and encouraged me to continue with the Ph.D. and Dr. Lia Tsuladze who first showed me how fascinating sociology can be and influenced my academic trajectory the most. This study largely draws inspiration from her research about discourses on Europeanisation. I am further grateful to Diana Lezhava, Keto Gikashvili, and the whole CSS team for their encouragement and kindness.

Nothing would have been possible without the constant support of my family and friends. I wholeheartedly thank my mother who shared all ups and downs of this journey with me, my father who always has my back, and my brother without whose friendship I would be lost. I thank my friends for being so supportive throughout these years. Thank you Anano, Buda, Teo, Sopo, Dakota, Tamuna, Keto, Ketevan, Tornike, Nino, Mariam, Ana, Kristina, Jane, Natia, Buka. Special thanks to Lamriko and Babutsa for driving me to Gori municipality and for their wonderful hosting.

Thank you!

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, the presented dissertation is my own work and the result of the original research conducted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology at the University of Kent, Canterbury. I confirm that the thesis has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Kent or any other institution.

The thesis is no more than 99 000 words including bibliography and appendices.

Printed Name: Irine Osepashvili

Signature: 

January 26, 2023

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List of Abbreviations

CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	European Union
EaP	Eastern Partnership
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
FLEX	Future Leaders Exchange Program
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IR	International Relations
LGBTQ	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
TSU	Tbilisi State University
UN	United Nations
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Preface

In Georgian public and political discourse, the aid-dependent NGO sector and its inhabitants tend to be depicted in one of two contradictory ways. On the positive side, they are typically regarded as a progressive minority trying their best to ensure Georgia's democratic and European future. On the negative side, they are viewed as corrupted "grant-eaters" with no sincere motivation whatsoever. The first portrayal oversimplifies things and misses the point, the other is simply untrue.

In "missing the point" I imply the lack of contextualisation of the sector into global hierarchical processes, whether it is economic, cultural, or geopolitical, which largely affects the local processes, practices and divisions. In this thesis, I am far from doubting the value-laden character of NGO-based work and the dedication of the people involved - managers, staff, interns, and volunteers alike. Yet, I try to look at the NGO community from a different angle that is more sensitive to global and local asymmetries traversing the sector they are socialised into.

Below I will introduce the reader to the research project in more detail. First, I address the existing knowledge gap. While it is true that there are plenty of studies dedicated to the NGO sector in ex-socialist states, in Georgia, they remain rather limited, particularly from the perspective I take in the study. After discussing the literature about Georgian NGOs, I set out the goal and concrete aims of the study. The chapter is concluded with the outline of the thesis and a brief review of each chapter.

1.2. The knowledge gap

There is much talk about the NGO sector in Georgia but a lack of empirical research. Neither the sector as a world of its own, which various scholars have already well illustrated in NGO ethnographies from the former socialist region nor the lay thoughts on this matter have been studied thoroughly in Georgia (See Hemment 2004; Ishkanian 2008; Mandel 2001; Mikuš 2018; Sampson 1997, 2002, 2003; Vetta 2019; Wedel 1998). Overrepresented by rather descriptive reports, the available literature is typically concerned with two main questions: 1. whether the sector is up to the standards of ideal associational life linked to Western liberal democracies and what strengths and weaknesses it conveys, including the breadth of public participation in the fashion of active citizenship (Gurgenidze 2005; Nodia 2005; Pokleba 2016; Puig 2016; Sumbadze 2013); and 2. to what extent Georgian population is informed and positively thinking about NGOs, primarily "to understand how susceptible Georgians may be to misinformation from different local and international actors", indicating local authorities in the domestic arena and Russia from abroad (CRRC-Georgia 2018; Gilbreth & Sichinava 2015: 10; Kachkachishvili & Mezvrishvili 2002).

The findings are often not too optimistic. First, there are only a handful of relatively strong organisations - the core NGOs, so to say (Nodia 2005; Puig 2016). And, while the sector is described as active, experienced and vibrant at their expense, the drawbacks such as extreme dependence on Western donors, elitism, or the lack of volunteering practices are also noted (Nodia 2005; Pokleba 2016; Puig 2016). In this sense, whether stronger or weaker, we must also distinguish the above donor-dependent NGO sector, the interest of the current study, from the vast number of non-profits existing on paper. Currently, there are up to 29 051 organisations of various kinds officially registered in Georgia (National Agency of Public Registry 2022). Yet, many are believed to be non-functional or one-

person organisations, their whereabouts typically being unknown (Asian Development Bank 2020). The reports with a focus on citizen participation find that involvement in registered organisations of any sort has been quite minimal (CRRC-Georgia 2018; Kachkachishvili & Mezvrishvili 2002; Sumbadze 2013). The lack of participation often tends to be attributed to various cultural reasons from citizen passivity and deficit of the civic culture to the prevalence of what Putnam (2000) calls bonding social capital (such as kinship networks) in Georgian society, much resulted from Soviet legacy (Aliyev 2015; Pokleba 2016; Sumbadze 2013).

On the other hand, the studies, concerned with the public knowledge and attitudes towards the NGO sector, reveal that the population is more aware of such organisations compared to the early 2000s, and can correctly identify an NGO from any other type of entity more often than not (CRRC-Georgia 2018; Gilbreth & Sichinava 2015; Kachkachishvili & Mezvrishvili 2002). Their source of information is mostly TV, to a lesser extent - social media and their own milieu (CRRC-Georgia 2018). However, the laypeople's perspectives are not that straightforward. While the NGOs do not tend to be particularly disliked and are in fact, thought to be linked to the country's further development, most of the participants consider the state should not take their perspectives into account (ibid.). The NGO community is often seen as rooted in the West and more aligned with the EU and US interests rather than the interests of the local public, paying less attention to poverty, increased prices, and unemployment which are seen as more important matters (ibid.; Gilbreth & Sichinava 2015). They are further associated with careerism and knowledge of English and computer - the skillset especially esteemed in the first decade of Georgia’s independence (CRRC-Georgia 2017). This ambivalence is likewise reflected in popular trust towards NGOs, where regardless of the respondents’ demographic background, a disproportionately high number of responses fall under

"neither trust/nor distrust" and "do not know" options (CRRC-Georgia 2018; CRRC-Georgia 2008-2021). The reasons for ambivalent public attitudes also tend to be ascribed to the Soviet past, lack of awareness and the NGO sector's failure to communicate with the population properly (CRRC-Georgia 2018; Gilbreth & Sichinava 2015).

Lately, more critical viewpoints have also emerged that ask different questions, pointing at the Eurocentric and neoliberal character of Georgia's modernisation and civil society as one of its pillars (Beraia et al. 2019; Khelaia & Chivadze 2022; Luciani 2020; Rekhviashvili 2019). In this sense, they deviate from the above perspectives and view the sector not as an ideal to be reached as part of Georgia's further liberal democratic development, but rather as a site of hegemony, itself embedded in complex power relations. Yet, in doing so, they either avoid much focus on the NGO sector itself or do not pay sufficient attention to how power and asymmetry are ingrained in actual people among the NGO community and beyond. In the study below I will attempt to fill the knowledge gap and address the issue.

1.3. Research goal and aims

The present research adds to the above scholarly literature by focusing on the disjuncture between the NGO community and laypeople from a critical perspective. Drawing on the critical realist framework and Pierre Bourdieu's relational sociology, the goal is to explore how the potential gap unfolds and to explain the underlying causes. To do so, I have identified the following research questions:

> **Q1** What kinds of capital tend to be prioritised in the aid-dependent NGO sector and how does it contribute to the gap?

Q2 How does the NGO community distinguish itself from the population and how are they perceived by different segments of the laypeople in return?

Q3 What internal classificatory struggle takes place among the NGO community and how does it address the NGO-population gap?

The questions are informed by Bourdieusian conceptual vocabulary, which will be thoroughly discussed in the theoretical chapter. Thus, they are tailored to consider both objective asymmetries as reflected in capital distribution (Q1) and subjective constructions by the participants (Q2) contributing to the gap. At the same time, I bring attention to possible differences and internal struggles taking place in the sector regarding the issue (Q3).

To respond to the above questions, I interviewed 81 participants overall, belonging to three different target groups. My primary sample, the study most extensively draws on, consists of 34 NGO representatives linked to stronger as well as weaker organisations working under the major democratisation umbrella. To address the second research question, I further interviewed 39 lay people varied by age, gender, place of residence and class. Finally, I additionally spoke to 8 donor community representatives to better understand the context in which aid-dependent NGOs generally function. The research method and related details will be addressed more comprehensively in the methodology chapter.

Facing the vast data after the fieldwork, as well as the importance of thematic coherence in the thesis, the first research question went through some modification. Instead of focusing on capital configurations, I decided to give more extensive space to cultural capital in the thesis, which seems to be especially decisive in people's social trajectories. This, obviously, does not imply the irrelevance of other forms of capital. The scholars have outlined the crucial role of social capital in the sector for example, whether it is

internal informal networks or the networks with the donor community (Aliyev 2015; Vetta 2019; Wedel 1998). Moreover, if one looks at the backgrounds of NGO representatives, privileged cultural capital and good social networks often go hand in hand. At the same time, coming from the starting point of cultural capital, I chose not to overlook its more embodied type that can simultaneously be understood in terms of habitus, such as the internalisation of the aid language, as well as the incorporation of the English words and phrases in Georgian speech, characteristic for the young cosmopolitan segment of the local middle class. These issues are discussed in chapters 5 and 6, while the second and third research questions are dispersed in chapters 7, 8 and 9 respectively.

1.4. Outline of the thesis

The research monograph is divided into ten chapters, which include an introduction, a review of the Georgian context, a theoretical framework, a methodology, five empirical chapters and a conclusion.

The present opening chapter has aimed at introducing the reader to the research topic and explaining why it is a matter of interest. After identifying the gap in the scholarly literature, I presented the main goal of the research and its aims, concluding with the thesis structure.

Chapter 2 focuses on Georgia as a setting where research takes place, its contested geopolitical identity and recent history, which is important for contextualising the research findings. After, I move to the birth and trajectory of the Georgian NGO sector itself and the way it is embedded in the above environment.

Chapter 3 takes the reader to the theoretical framework of the study. It is further divided into three parts. The first sub-chapter is concerned with defining a non-governmental

organisation. The second sub-chapter follows the emergence of the sector in the post-socialist region and its liberal theoretical underpinnings, which is contrasted by a more radical school of thought. In the third sub-chapter, I outline my theoretical framework dependent on Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit. Here I focus on how Bourdieu understands inequality and how it might apply to post-socialist states, where cultural capital emerges as a crucial factor in social stratification. I link this to the NGO sector and its dynamics. I further discuss Bourdieu's ideas on habitus and classifications, as well as related struggles that arise.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the research methodology. Here first I define the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the thesis and contextualise Bourdieu's theory in the critical realist philosophy of science. Later I describe the process of data collection and data analysis in detail. I also focus on ethical considerations related to the study and given that the fieldwork is conducted in one language and analysis – in another, I further bring up translation-related challenges.

Chapter 5 is the first empirical chapter that attempts to pinpoint the crucial cultural resources valued in the NGO sector. Here I primarily draw on interviews with NGO representatives and distinguish three kinds of Western-marked cultural capital facilitating smoother access and navigation: educational background in transition-friendly professions, education gained in the West and proficiency in the English language. This also contributes to internal symbolic hierarchies in the sector.

Chapter 6 continues the focus on the language, exclusivity of its mastery and power to classify social reality in a way that fits the liberal democratic political order. This chapter consists of two main subchapters. The first one looks at the NGO community's reliance on random English words and phrases while speaking in Georgian, which locates them closer to the Anglophone middle-class urban youth. In the second sub-chapter, I focus on

the NGO terminology blend, alienating the outsiders, and its discursive power of constructing the social reality. This language is further challenged and but also further burdened by left-leaning vocabularies that emerge in the sector and struggle for alternative meanings.

Chapter 7 further concentrates on dominant classifications targeting the wider public, as diffused by interviewed NGO representatives. First, I look at their perspectives on Georgia's further development, typically formulated in terms of transition and Europeanisation and contrasted to Russia and the Soviet Union. Next, I discuss NGO representatives' distinction and perception of their own role in regard to the local population in line with their developmentalist reasoning.

Drawing on the laypeople sample, chapter 8 is a response to chapter 7. It investigates how NGO-diffused classifications are responded to by the different groups of lay people. Here I distinguish four groups based on their thoughts on the NGO community: enthusiasts (mostly made by young urban cosmopolitans), ambivalent (largest and demographically mixed segment), rejectors (older, relatively worse off participants) and detached (more peripherally residing, worse off or older participants).

Chapter 9 is the final empirical chapter. It shows how mainstream classifications, discussed in chapter 7 are being challenged from inside the sector. This plays out as an inter-generational struggle, where a younger left-leaning segment doubts the inherited ideals of the NGO community and guided by both - normative concerns and the logic of symbolic distinction, tries to establish its own cultural capital as more legitimate. At the same time, it happens in a framework where they do not substantially deviate from the major norms of the sector and thus do not suffer the loss of recognition.

Chapter 10 is a conclusion. It summarises the main findings of the thesis, engages in discussion and explanatory analysis, lists contributions and limitations of the study and identifies the possible directions for future research.

Chapter 2

Contextualising the NGO sector in Georgia

2.1. Introduction

To contextualise the research in its setting, in this chapter I will first briefly introduce the reader to Georgia, which, as the title of the Georgian history book by Rayfield (2012) suggests, has long experience of living at "the edge of empires". The emphasis on Georgia's peripherality and existence amid external geopolitical pressures is crucial here not only as an introductory passage about the country but also as the context in which the study findings are deeply embedded. After introducing Georgia, its past and present, I will move to the NGO sector per se, the way it emerged and what trajectory it went through since the early 1990s.



Image 1. Georgia on the World Map
The light green colour stands for Abkhazia and South Ossetia territories, officially considered under Russian military occupation by the Georgian state

2.2. Georgia in-between the continents and powers: On geography, history, and contested identity

Situated on the verge of Europe and Asia there is no easy way to locate transcontinental Georgia in world geography without referring to the constructed character of the labels. Different people might introduce the country differently, referring to it as Eastern Europe, Eurasia, Caucasus, or Western Asia.

Speaking geographically, these denominators can all be true and none of them is entirely true or neutral at the same time. They are always constructed and never free from bias in favour of different global or regional powers. If Georgia's Eastern Europeanness, the dominant identity discourse internally, aligns the country with the European Union and the "West" more generally, the emphasis on Eurasia places it closer to Russia and its Eurasian geopolitical project, even though Hann (2016) for example, argues for the broader and more inclusive usage of the concept (Čanji & Kazharski 2022; Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015; Morozov 2015). Some Georgians might even regard the "Caucasus" as equally tainted by associations of being Russia's Southern periphery and try to escape from such self-representation (Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015). Yet, the latter label can in fact be open to diverse interpretations and agendas from more isolationist to those anyway contextualising the Caucasus in one way or another (Jones 2003; Minesashvili 2021). To situate Georgia in Western Asia, on the other hand, puts it in relation to other strong powers in the region, such as Iran and Turkey, the geography of the latter being likewise debatable (Jones 2003). This contested nature of spatial denominators and selection of European identity from different possibilities also reminds me of what Mizielińska and Kulpa (2011: 21) write on Poland, problematising the labels as part of the global symbolic hierarchies:

> "[…]is Poland an 'Eastern European' country? The answer depends on who is asked. For Poles themselves, no; Poland is either simply a 'European' or a 'Central European' country. 'Eastern Europe' is outside Poland's eastern borders. In the UK and other Western European countries, 'Central and Eastern Europe' and 'Eastern Europe' are interchangeable, denoting the same."

Here too the answer depends on who is asked. Like the above example, which as well reflects the Poles' desire to drop the "Eastness" and symbolically relocate more towards

the West, Georgia's self-identification with Europe is a manifestation of a similar appeal (ibid.; Zarycki 2014). For the Georgians, or more particularly for Georgian political and intellectual elites the country is European, more specifically Eastern European (Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015). To be precise, Georgia is seen as Europe-in-making: Europe in a historical and civilisational sense but needing further cultural progress to become a "real" Europe (Tskhadadze 2018; Tsuladze et al. 2021). While the importance of improvement is likewise emphasised among the Georgian laypeople, their identities are more confused and ambivalent, perceiving Georgia in diverse ways – from the European country to the one "at the crossroads", neither entirely European nor entirely Asian (Tsuladze 2017; Tsuladze et al. 2016: 195). On the other hand, Georgia's self-branding as Europe seems to be lacking the same recognition and legitimacy in the West, and it often gets excluded from the already constructed category of Eastern Europe as "too Eastern" to qualify. Instead, along with various geographical terms, the country typically tends to be defined by its Soviet past – the temporal-spatial denominator "post-socialist" or "post-communist", which along with attracting some criticisms, is also less preferred within (Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015; Mizielińska & Kulpa 2011; Müller 2018).

Historically, Georgia has gone through a number of transformations till its modern form: from South Caucasian proto-Georgian polities in the 2-nd millennium BC to the unifying and splitting kingdoms in mediaeval times, often subject to invasions and lengthy periods of foreign rule imposed by different powers, including Romans, Byzantines, Ottomans, Mongols, Arabs, and Persians; from the Georgian governorate (*gubernia*) as annexed by the Russian empire in the 19th century to the short-lived independence as the Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1918-1921, disrupted by the Red Army; from the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic to yet another independence declared after 70 years, in 1991 (Rayfield 2012; Suny 1994).

After the independence, Georgia found itself at the periphery of the Western-dominated world order and came to be labelled by the teleological term "transitional" - moving towards democracy and capitalism as its final destination. The country embraced international conventions on human rights and got involved in the global economy (Jones 2003); although as some authors argue, coinciding with the neoliberal turn of the time, not on advantageous terms (Eradze 2021; Lazarus 2013; Rekhviashvili 2019). To achieve the fast transition, Georgia received a substantial amount of foreign aid - up to $700 million from the US in 1995-2000 and €420 million from the EU in 1992-2004, far increased after the Rose revolution (Jones 2006: 41; Tudoroiu 2007).

At the same time, the country turned into an area of contested geopolitical interests, as Russia also retained its powerful position in the region. As Metreveli (2016: 4) puts it, "Georgia gained (geo)strategic importance for the West (for Russia, Georgia never lost its geo-strategic importance) […]", attempting to maintain the influence through various normative, economic and military means (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili 2015; Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015; Tudoroiu 2007). On one hand, Georgia has led a steady pro-Western foreign policy for the last 30 years, resulting in the status of an EU-associated country and the EU membership perspective, as well as alignment with NATO (Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015; Lomsadze 2022). On the other hand, relations with Russia have been strained, reaching its peak with the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 which resulted in Russian military presence in breakaway regions onwards (see Image 1).

As argued by Zarycki (2014) in relation to post-Soviet Eastern Europe, growing Western influence combined with previous and current power asymmetry with Russia, largely impacts the way domestic fields and discourses are organised, most crucially in the political sphere. So, instead of the left-right poles traditional for the West, the divisions in Georgia are articulated based on the reaction towards external domination, expressed in

more powerful pro-Western and relatively marginal anti-Western fractions, overlapping anti-Russian/pro-Russian division accordingly. Consequently, it also serves as a discursive tool to legitimise own actions and marginalise the opponents: the major political actors, both the ruling party and the opposition, constantly try to present themselves as pro-European/pro-Western as possible, while blaming the opponents in holding pro-Russian stances (Kobakhidze 2021; Tsuladze et al. 2021).

The "West", as perceived from the internal perspective and applied accordingly throughout the thesis in an essentialist manner, typically combines North America (especially the United States) and Europe - the EU as well as European (especially Western European) states on their own. While this general label blurs how distinct these countries can in fact be, neither numerous differences inside Europe nor the EU's self-distinction from the US as more ethical and civilian power has utter relevance in the local context (Kaina & Karolewski 2013). Instead, all these actors harmoniously merge their interests and positions in relation to Georgia and as a result, even the terms "Europeanisation" and "Westernisation" tend to be applied interchangeably (Emerson 2004; Jones 2003). Some even argue that what has been widely known as Europeanisation in Georgia has in fact been Americanisation (Ó Beacháin & Coene 2014). Simultaneously, as Tskhadadze (2018) notes, the "West" should be seen as more than just a geographical term, rather existing as a prevalent hyperreal idea that embodies normalcy, progress and security for the locals. The West is "a normative ideal of 'how things should be"- a moral and cultural high ground that must be reached through transition, democratisation, and Europeanisation (Mizielińska & Kulpa 2011: 22). Such perspectives are quite similar to what Kiossev (1999) calls self-colonisation - an uncritical submission and reproduction of orientalist cultural hierarchies without being actually invaded by the West. Orientalism here denotes the essentialist discourse about the East

and the West, where the latter is imagined as radically different, and inherently superior and civilised compared to the former (Said 1978). Such perspective, Kuus (2004: 474) argues, is deeply embedded in the EU and NATO enlargement policy, introduced as a "learning process" for post-Socialist states.

What the category of "the West" excludes in the given case is Russia, instead perceived as its opposite – a non-Western "other" against which Georgia's European identity is constructed: if the West represents security and progress, Russia is viewed not only as threatening but also as a backward power in both elite and popular discourses (Brisku 2013; Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015; Tskhadadze 2018; Tsuladze et al. 2021). While subscribing to orientalist classifications, the construction of such dichotomy has its reasons in the complex configuration of power asymmetries affecting the local arena: First, for the Georgians the independence largely symbolised emancipation from Moscow and an opportunity to detach oneself from Russia's lengthy domination in its various forms, itself characterised by what Tlostanova (2008: 1) calls "secondary orientalism" towards its peripheries (Jones 2003; Suny 1994). Concurrently, the West, which many Soviet citizens already held strong attraction towards, emerged not as merely an attractive imaginary outside the iron curtain, but rather as an ultimate ideological winner: Western democratic and capitalist order, as well as individualism compensated by cooperation in the civil society domain, acquired the reputation of the "end of history" model (Derluguian 2005; Fukuyama 1992, 2000; Gilburd 2018; Wedel 1998). Russia, on the other hand, as a key Soviet republic, came to represent the devalued Soviet Union, which had essentially defined its identity vis-à-vis the capitalist West (Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015). Accordingly, Russia's imperial prestige which had been prevalent in Georgia since the 19th century also got worn out, especially in comparison with the West that now became directly accessible. This has been further reflected in the devaluation of the

Russian language - previously preferred tongue of the upper strata - and its replacement by the increased prestige of English; in post-Soviet hype over Western brands and so on (Cheterian 2008; Driscoll et al. 2016; Manning 2009; Tsuladze 2012).

The West-Russia discursive binary has been further strengthened after Russia applied military muscle in Georgia in 2008 and the fears of repeated invasion intensified. Now the Russians became defined as "barbarians of the 21st century" in opposition to the civilised West, who had artificially disconnected Georgia from native Europe in the past and were still trying to interrupt its journey back (Brisku 2013: 193). Russia's strategic reinvention of itself as a conservative actor and the guardian of traditional Christian values against Western socially liberal norms contributed to the dichotomy more (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili 2015; Pataridze 2019; Rekhviashvili 2018a). For example, as articulated by the Russian state media discourse, "opting to cloak itself in a 'European suit,' Georgia turned away not only from Russia but also from its own traditional values and lost its culture to decadence" (Yatsik 2021: 36-37). This way, as Koplatadze (2019: 193) also points out, the country found itself surrounded by multiple pressures and orientalisms coming from the foreign powers (Europe and US on one hand and Russia – on the other), as well as self-orientalist discourses diffused by the local elites. Identifying with the West, the latter have also turned this discursive weapon back to Russia.

Georgia's pro-Western aspirations were rather vague right after the independence and not translated into a clear foreign policy direction. There was not much opportunity for this either: in a short period afterwards, the country was caught in the swirl of ethnic and civil wars. The situation that unfolded was far from the Western-like democracy and free civil society some intellectuals in late Soviet Georgia hoped for (Derluguian 2005). Instead, the country ended up with a radical nationalist government, which quite contributed to the alienation of the ethnic minorities residing in the autonomous regions (ibid.; Rayfield

2012; Suny 1994). Two ethno-territorial wars that followed resulted in the de-facto independence of these regions and hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (UNHCR 2003). The government was quickly overthrown by the opposing groups, escalating into the 1991-93 civil war in addition (Rayfield 2012; Suny 1994). The armed paramilitaries were roaming in the streets plundering the population, there was total chaos and unlawfulness around (Nodia 2005).

In these circumstances, the political power returned to former Soviet nomenklatura to stabilise the country and enable the transition. Now they also got baptised as Orthodox Christians to demonstrate devotion to national identity, given that religion arose as its strong marker (Rayfield 2012). While the unrest declined after some time, the collapse of the Soviet economy and infrastructure left the population in poverty, unemployment, and harshly deteriorated living conditions. The steady access to electricity, water and other vital commodities seemed like an utter luxury, while corruption, mafia networks and criminality thrived (Narayan et al. 2000; Rayfield 2012).

As a result of accumulated frustrations, the Rose Revolution in November 2003, which was led by a young Pro-Western political elite and had sufficient backing from the West, gained considerable support among the population (Cheterian 2008; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009). Yet, above all, as Cheterian (2013: 175-176) puts it, the revolution represented the urban middle-class uprising who were gathered around newly born NGOs and related movements. Many of them, like the young opposition, have studied at Western universities and were much inspired by both - the Western settings and then popular theories of transition that promised the possibility of remaking Georgia in the same fashion (Cheterian 2008). After the revolution, the opposition leaders shared the key positions in the government with the former NGO community which now turned into political elites, and the radical experiment began, reflecting the “desire to wipe the old

Georgia from the face of the earth and erect a new Georgia in its place" (Manning 2009: 1; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009).

The experiment penetrated every sphere: economic, political, cultural, social, educational, architectural, etc. In the economic domain, as Gugushvili (2014: 8) notes "unprecedented" neoliberal reforms were carried out to achieve economic growth quickly, merging Europeanisation with a far more libertarian economic approach than the EU even required and approved (Appel & Orenstein 2017; Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015; Lazarus 2013). The markets were opened to attract foreign capital, while the labour protective mechanisms were entirely demolished (Gugushvili 2017). The public sector was downsized, and the new staff was provided with training and more decent salaries (Gamkrelidze 2019; ibid.). The levels of corruption drastically decreased, turning Georgia into one of the least corrupt countries in the post-Soviet region by the early 2010s (Engvall 2012).

Georgia was rapidly leaving the post-independence difficulties behind - access to electricity got stable, the streets turned safe, and the Georgian cities became unrecognisable, mimicking those in the West. The grey Soviet buildings in the urban areas were painted in a variety of colours and instead of old-school bazaars new supermarkets and downtown shops emerged, offering Western brands to the middle-class urbanites - the symbols of Western capitalism, prosperity and modernity (Manning 2009).

Pro-Western foreign policy, towards which the road was already paved by the previous government, now became the number one priority and less abstract too. The plan was to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures. Seen as a sole way to modernise the country and keep it secure, the elites circulated a strong identity discourse of Georgians being the ancient Europeans, now heading back home (Gamkrelidze 2019; Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015; Lebanidze et al. 2011). The narrative was further strengthened by

Dmanisi (Georgia's southern region) archaeological discovery of the earliest humans found outside Africa, promoted as "the first Europeans" (Brisku 2013; Jones 2013).

The discourse of Georgia's ancient Europeanness largely made use of the country's Christian identity as its main argument (Ó Beacháin & Coene 2014). As some argue, Eurocentric modernisation and promotion of secularism awkwardly merged with strengthening the church and usage of religious symbols as part of the state building (Metreveli 2016). Entangled with national identity, the traditionalist church already managed to become an influential actor and has been further empowered and excessively funded by all governments after the independence (Brisku 2013; Metreveli 2016). The institution emerged as a strong reactionary power, less enthusiastic about Westernisation and socially liberal values diffused in its name. As some scholars indicate, despite Christian culture being packaged as an entrance ticket to Europe, the church itself subscribed to conservative discourse and felt closer to the Russian Orthodox Church (Brisku 2013; Rekhviashvili 2018a).

Turning Georgia upside down after the revolution brought new challenges in terms of stark economic and cultural divisions among the population, even though the "dark 90s", as the Georgians commonly call it, were left behind. Rapid economic growth, which was supposed to trickle down to everyone, did not in fact translate into economic equality (Gugushvili 2017). Quite on the contrary, Lazarus (2013) suggests that the reforms benefited the transnational capitalist class the most, while the inequalities deepened. On the other hand, brand-new Georgia seemed to be more appreciative of the emergent young urban middle class – Westernised, Anglophonic, stylish, competitive, and more smoothly fitting into the globalised economy (Cheterian 2008). In congruence with Makovicky's (2014) observations elsewhere in post-socialist space, Cheterian (2008: 706) highlights that the liberal-democratic, responsibilised and enterprising self of the latter

came to be pitted against the "inept" majority, particularly represented by more marginal rural inhabitants and the preceding generations, who came to be stigmatised as Soviet "leftovers, incapable of doing anything", deserving what they got. Applying Russia and the Soviet Union interchangeably, the dichotomy of West/Europe - Soviet Union/Russia is probably best described in the following quote by one of the representatives of the Georgian intellectual elite: "If you realise you must do something in case you want a better life, you become European. If you are waiting for the heavenly manna and the ready-made food bites, you are pro-Russian" (Tsuladze et al. 2021: 153).

Besides the active-passive binary typically applied in relation to the market and civil society domains, the Westernised minority has been further associated with tolerance, secularism, and education vis-à-vis xenophobic, dogmatic and illiterate "Gruzins"[1] and "Sovoks[2]", constructed as their internal other (Tskhadadze 2018; Tsuladze et al. 2021). This way, the failure of the latter has been continuously seen as a matter of individual moral and intellectual deficit, in addition to the widespread local cultural backwardness.

One should also mention the irony that while Russia currently represents a non-Western actor and marks local backwardness, very similar "othering" of the local population has occurred right in the scope of the Russian empire's enlightenment mission and the Europeanisation of Georgia in the 19th century. While the local stratum of Georgian noble intellectuals enacted the role of enlightened European elites by then, the backwardness of the lay people was further linked to Asian influences from Turkey and Persia that maintained parts of Georgia under their power prior to the Russian rule (Manning 2012). The Soviet modernising state, on the other hand, no less influenced by Western enlightenment ideals, created a very similar dichotomy: the image of an educated Soviet proletariat versus peripheral backwardness of predominantly agrarian societies that

[1] "Georgian" in the Russian language; applied as a derogatory term
[2] Derogatory term of Russian origin to describe the person of Soviet mentality

had to be properly civilised by mass education programs and energetic Communist party youth (Barkaia 2018; Derluguian 2005). Education, industrialisation, secularism, cosmopolitanism, and the international Russian language were all part of the picture of this progress (Derluguian 2005). The NGO sector, on the other hand, has emerged at the vanguard of the Euro-American-dominated modernising project years later, defined by the English language, the norms of liberal democracy and strong pro-Western orientation (Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009; Nodia 2005).

2.3. The birth and the life of the NGO sector in Georgia

What the previous subchapter has attempted is to describe the general setting - the habitat from which the local NGO community arose as part of the post-communist transition. Like elsewhere in the post-socialist space, the sector was engineered and shaped by Western governments and foundations (Ishkanian 2007; Nodia 2005). Coming to birth in the early 1990s, NGOs particularly took off in a few years, after the situation relatively stabilised (Nodia 2005; Rekhviashvili 2018b). Mostly supported by the US-driven democratisation agenda at first, after 2003 the EU gradually emerged as no less important donor, especially active in the scope of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative (Aliyev 2016; Ishkanian 2007; Luciani 2020; Rommens 2014).

In such a context Georgian NGO community has acquired two main functions in Georgia: to facilitate the transition, especially through pushing for democracy and human rights, and to perform the role of civil society as understood by liberal tradition (Hamilton 2000; Ishkanian 2007). The common belief among the donors was that in post-totalitarian conditions civil society had to be created from scratch, so the local institutes, such as universities, churches, or research institutions, that often served as sights of “shadow”

civil society, were left aside in the process (Mandel 2002; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009: 688).

From the very beginning, the sector was populated by a socially privileged stratum of intellectuals, young urban graduates and students, who soon grew into professionals of transition (Broers 2005; Hamilton 2000; Puig 2016). Many of them had roots in the anti-communist national liberation movement priorly, especially active after the Perestroika (Broers 2005; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009; Puig 2016). While the movement sought a democratic future and emancipation from the authoritarian regime to a larger extent it was guided by the idea of national self-determination, later being hijacked by radical nationalists (Nodia 2005; Tevzadze 2003). Part of the dissidents got converted from nationalist reasoning to liberal democracy and its ideals, making a large share of the very initial NGO community (Broers 2005; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009; Tevzadze 2003).

Yet, keeping the organisation alive required much more than just embracing liberal democratic ideas. Even if the number of registered organisations quickly reached several thousand, most of them died out amid the tough competition for funding (Nodia 2005). Gaining Western grants was hard without very rare skills in English language and computer literacy, as well as good social networks, both local and foreign – not quite at hand for a common Georgian by then (Muskhelishvili 2003; Wedel 1998). These skills and foreign contacts, Outhwaite (2008) argues, have been key for landing lucrative jobs in newly independent former Soviet states, so they came to be regarded as highly prestigious for themselves in these societies. Once funded, NGO personnel could secure much higher salaries in comparison with the majority of the 1990s' impoverished population (Jones 2013). As Wedel (1998: 91) describes the situation in the post-Socialist region by that time, "even small sums of hard currency could be enormously life-enhancing to the beneficiaries" not because of its immediate material benefit alone but also because it

increased one's status and legitimacy, returning as further financial profit, as well as social and political advantages.

Many authors think that along with strength, influence and vibrancy, the sector has developed quite an elitist stance in Georgia and tends to be detached from the wider public (Broers 2005; Lustevych 2013; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009; Nodia 2005; Reisner 2018; Stefes & Paturyan 2021). According to Hamilton (2000), from the very beginning, the donor community, consisting of multilateral and bilateral agencies, international NGOs and international private foundations, kept portraying newborn NGOs as bearers of civility and the sources of progress, pushing the country towards democracy and development. In turn, as Muskhelishvili and Jorjoliani (2009: 687) put it, "a broadly shared 'avant-gardist' feeling emerged within the sector, placing NGOs in the role of the 'vanguard' of democratisation, rather than in the role of institutions representing the views or interests of various (and thus plural) strata of the population." Setting Georgia's modernisation as their main mission, NGOs, and their staff (at least its major bulk) have largely positioned themselves vis-à-vis the state and the general population (ibid.). On one hand, this meant holding the authorities accountable in line with good governance principles and ensuring that they do not deviate from the route towards liberal democracy; on the other hand, they have set themselves as enlighteners of the local public about the requirements of the above social order, enthusiastically disseminating the notions of good governance, rule of law, human rights, rights of women and minorities, and so on (Muskhelishvili and Jorjoliani 2009; Nodia 2005).

In the NGOs, many also saw themselves as ideological competitors of the overtly strengthened Church, which quickly managed to secure the public trust amidst the rise of nationalism and socio-economic collapse and was not quite fond of NGO-promoted ideas of religious pluralism and other freedoms (Asian Development Bank 2020; Nodia 2005).

Nonetheless, many kept avoiding direct confrontation with such a strong institution (Nodia 2005). In sum, embodying the progress in terms of the liberal democratic future, the NGO sector has defined itself against both versions of the recent past - Communist and ethno-nationalist (See also Vetta 2019 on Serbia).

The above-discussed 'avant-gardist' feeling has been much embedded in what Sampson (2003: 303) calls the Eastern European NGO community's "lift-off" practice from the local society and associating themselves with the Western centre. As different authors (Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009; Nodia 2005) suggest, identifying with Western lifestyle and political ideas, the sector saw itself as the bearer of modernity in Georgia, which the population had to catch up with. Although as Sampson (2003) argues, the Western democracy models that both donors and NGOs actively kept promoting, were in fact the "ideal types" - not only distant from the local settings but also often far from the actual reality in the West itself.

To return to the geopolitically influenced dichotomies discussed in the previous sub-chapter, the NGO community has developed a strongly pro-Western and anti-Russian (anti-Soviet, anti-occupation) stance (Yatchenko et al. 2022). While they have been fierce supporters of Euro-Atlantic integration and active in terms of popularising the EU in Georgia, they have shown equal dedication to protesting the Russian occupation and challenging the Russian influence through various projects (Asian Development Bank 2020; Puig 2016).

Emerging as a pro-Western modernising segment with the function of assisting transition, the sector has been an important player in Georgia's political trajectory, particularly during the 2003 Rose Revolution. Creating an alliance with pro-Western opposition leaders, they played a crucial role in the regime change. Reinforcing already existent

public resentment towards the ruling elite, NGOs mobilised peaceful anti-government rallies and raised the issue of election fraud which then triggered mass demonstrations. (Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009; Nodia 2005).

After the revolution, a substantial share of the NGO community moved to key government positions and transformed into the new political class. The Western funding also changed its direction and instead of civil society assistance now went straight to the new government, which became more of the subject of support rather than monitoring (Lazarus 2013; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009; Nodia 2005). As a result, the sector got emptied out and gradually weakened due to shortage of financial and human capital, given that most of the active NGO community was now testing their ideas on the ground from government offices. Nevertheless, the modernising spirit of the authorities quickly got coupled with the autocratic measures and stark violation of human rights, far outdoing even the previous political elites. So, the cautious criticisms re-appeared here and there in the sector, often being subject to (self)censorship (Broers 2005; Khelaia & Chivadze 2022; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009; Puig 2016). As some authors argue, this time the Western donors were more reluctant to strengthen the opposing voices and rather tended to legitimise strongly pro-Western authorities (Kakachia & Lebanidze 2016; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009). Yet, at a later stage, they once again began strengthening the sector (Puig 2016). Consequently, in the early 2010s, Georgia's NGO sector woke up to a second life with a new supply of younger cadres and the same old intention to support Georgia's evolution towards a truly Western-like society. While to a lesser extent than before, they once again played the role in government change in 2012, this time occurring through elections (Kakachia & Lebanidze 2016).

The new ruling coalition party led by billionaire businessman Bidzina Ivanishvili initially tried to ideologically self-differentiate itself from the previous government as more

social-democratically oriented, even though still largely maintained the same economic approach, now also adjusted to the oligarchic interests of the governing elite (Gugushvili 2017; Khelaia & Chivadze 2022; Kononczuk et al. 2017; Lomidze 2019; Tsuladze 2021). Apart from that, if the previous authorities were completely made of the Westernised elite, the new one was an amalgam: while still prioritising the English-speaking and Western-educated for the key positions, they have additionally absorbed those cultural and intellectual elites, who were previously alienated as vessels of Soviet and conservative mentality (Kakachia & Lebanidze 2016; Tukvadze et al. 2021). One should add that these elites were also the ones against which NGO-based intellectuals have traditionally defined themselves in the first place (Nodia 2002).

Georgia's strong pro-Western foreign policy direction and the discourses of Europeanisation and modernisation were maintained, resulting in the signing of the association agreement with the EU and the visa-free entry for Georgians (Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015). Visa liberalisation has been likewise viewed by the current elites as an opportunity for the locals to travel to the West and culturally upscale (Tsuladze et al. 2021)[3]. At the same time as Kakachia and Minesashvili (2015: 175) note, relative to the earlier period the relations with Russia also got skewed towards "normalisation", raising dissatisfaction among the civil society actors that the government was not sufficiently resisting the Russian occupation (Asian Development Bank 2020; Khelaia & Chivadze 2022; Yatchenko et al. 2022). Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the new government has kept a similar practice of blaming its opponents for serving Russian interests (Kobakhidze 2021). Apart from that, while keeping the modernisation rhetoric well and alive (although toned down compared to previous times), more socially conservative narratives have also appeared in their message box for now and then (Wheatley 2021).

[3] One should mention that over the last year, relations with the West deteriorated (well reflected in granting the EU membership perspective to Georgia instead of actual candidacy in June 2022), but by the time of the fieldwork this was not the case.

Consequently, the NGO sector returned to its traditional positioning as a neutral/impartial modernising-minded minority sided by pro-Western intellectuals and the urban youth, differing both from the wider population and the political elites. Although some changes did occur. Now next to the Western-funded NGOs few different organisations also emerged, arguably Russian-funded and serving its normative power (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili 2015). Even though they hold a marginal position, according to the participants of this study, referring to these organisations as "NGOs" is typically avoided to emphasise their difference from the pro-Western, "real" NGO community. The increase of Russian soft power has been further manifested in the priorities of the major Western powers, also reflecting the intensified West-Russia tensions translated into the multiplicity of projects about the issue (European Parliament 2019; USAID 2019). On the other hand, some diversities began to appear among the Western-funded NGO sector itself. If previously the sector was quite united in self-perception, now some left-leaning stances have emerged, questioning the logic of transition, and distinguishing themselves from the mainstream (Luciani 2020).

Even beyond the latter differences, the Western-funded organisations are obviously not completely homogenous, differing in strengths and prioritised themes (Gurgenidze 2005; Nodia 2005; Puig 2016; Tevzadze 2003). Among them, one can differentiate between stronger first-tier and more marginal second-tier organisations, as Puig (2016) does. The first-tier NGOs include the elite Tbilisi-based organisations primarily serving as watchdogs and involved in topics around democracy and human rights, as well as the rights of women and minorities. While they are not too many, these NGOs are the most influential players, recognised by the public and often applied synonymously with the whole sector.

While these ones secure most of the Western funding, the second-tier organisations tend to be considerably poorer and often reside in the regions (ibid.). They might be working on diverse issues from disabilities to civic education or the environment. Although one can notice that thematic and functional lines can be blurrier between the richer, medium-strength and poorer community-based NGOs than the classification entails, as the latter also fits into the democratisation and human rights agenda in some way. The difference is that they typically do not position themselves as watchdogs against the government, instead taking educational or a service delivery function targeted at particular beneficiaries.

However, even this distinction is not completely clear, given that the richer watchdogs can also fulfil the service delivery role, most frequently reflected in providing free legal services for various marginalised target groups. In other words, as different authors also argue, it is not that there are no differences among the range of organisations at all; it is that they have been formed under the very same donor-driven democratisation agenda where the elite NGOs typically set the norm, and they tend to favour Western liberal democratic model, making sure Georgia moves forward that direction and no backsliding takes place (Nodia 2005; Muskhelishvili 2003; Tevzadze 2003).

2.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the setting where the study takes place. First, I followed Georgia's recent history of Europeanisation and transition. I discussed how the Georgian context, including its identity, is shaped in response to strong global and regional powers. This is further reflected in the narratives of participants - both NGO representatives and laypeople. Next, I focused on the NGO sector that itself emerged as part of the transition

assistance by the Western states and organisations. I discussed the trajectory of the sector from the very beginning up till now and concluded with a brief summary on the diversity of the organisations, that are typically implied under the "NGO" umbrella.

The next chapter is dedicated to the theoretical framework. I will continue with the discussion on definitions of "non-governmental organisation", how NGOs arose as part of the post-Soviet transition and what was the theoretical underpinnings. I will discuss conflicting scholarly perspectives on civil society and continue with Bourdieu's theory that can help us better understand the NGO community in relation to the wider society.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework: towards Bourdieusian relational sociology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter continues with the goal of contextualising the thesis, this time in theoretical debates and sets out a theoretical framework for the study.

I first operationalise the notion of "non-governmental organisation" relying on a broader definition of non-profits proposed by Salamon and Anheier (1997), with further clarifications on what distinguishes it from other kinds of non-profits, particularly in relation to the post-socialist region. Next, I look at how the formal NGO sector was promoted by the Western states and organisations as means to develop post-socialist societies in direction of democracy and capitalism, being underpinned by a liberal theoretical tradition of civil society and coinciding with the neoliberal turn of the time. This school is juxtaposed with the Marxist tradition, best represented by Gramsci, which understands civil society as a domain of the class struggle, rather than harmonious associational life. From this, I move to develop a Bourdieusian framework that gives more attention to the struggle for culture and internalised nature of inequalities.

Here, I review the main theoretical concepts proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, while linking them to the study's aims. First, I discuss his notions of social space, capitals, and fields, and how they can be adapted to peripheral contexts such as Georgia, where cultural

capital associated with the centre becomes a power on its own. This helps position the NGO community in a wider social space as defined primarily by cultural, rather than by economic capital. In this sense, the aid-dependent NGO sector as a field repeats the same logic, as it is particularly appreciative of Western-marked cultural capital, which tends to translate into a higher status in society. Next, I discuss the notion of habitus as a set of dispositions that makes people feel at home in the sector and worth being part of, although agree with some of Bourdieu's critics in negotiating the concept of habitus with more reflexivity. Then I move to how (culturally) more powerful groups, in this case, the NGO community, manage to legitimise a particular version of social reality which benefits them better through the power of classifying, while the people who do not conform are dismissed and silenced on the basis of cultural and moral deficit. At the same time, neither global nor local hierarchies are being questioned and are continuously naturalised as given. Next, I discuss how these classifications affect the different layers of society and their responses, fluctuating between submission and resistance. Finally, I conclude with how common classifications are increasingly questioned by a small segment of the newer generation in the sector that is taking more critical viewpoints.

3.2. Defining the NGO

One must always start with a clear definition of the key concept. Yet, defining a non-governmental organisation (NGO) is far from a simple task. In a conceptual sense, NGOs that emerged in Georgia have not been that different from what are known as voluntary organisations or non-profits in typical Western contexts (Lewis 2014a). Consequently, the metaphor of "loose and baggy monster" illustrating the conceptual haziness around the non-profits, which tend to be described and categorised in many overlapping ways, also

applies to them (Kendall & Knapp 1994: 65). NGOs, like the non-profits generally, can be more than one thing: from modest self-help groups and associations to the bigger and influential organisations, from those being run by volunteers to those with the paid staff, etc. (Lewis 2014a; Vakil 1997). Additionally, there are almost fifty confusing acronyms signifying various types of NGOs that differ from one researcher or practitioner to another and are not unequivocally accepted (Lewis 2014a: 55). These acronyms are not even static and might further change. Lewis (2014a) argues that when NGOs could not fully justify the expectations, they often went for other terms to distance themselves from the previous self, such as CSO (civil society organisation) for instance. This trend can also be noticed in Georgia, further confirmed in the interview with one of the local (Georgian) representatives of the donor community.

Despite such conceptual ambiguity, together with their cousins in the West, NGOs can be captured by an all-encompassing structural-operational definition of the non-profits proposed by Salamon and Anheier (1997), which I also rely on (also see Vakil 1997). This broad definition follows several criteria an organisation should typically fulfil to be regarded as such: they must be legally registered or non-registered entities with some organisational identity, fixed members and concrete mission; self-governing and independent from the government agencies; not distributing the profit; and with voluntary involvement to some degree. Although some argue that this definition is not completely free from the grey areas either (Muukkonen 2009).

First emerging from the environments such as the League of Nations and the United Nations, there is an additional connotation the term “NGO” carries, which distinguishes it from the rest of organisations. It is typically more associated with the development and foreign aid, often referring to the international NGOs from the global North or the local NGOs from the global South and ex-socialist states (Fowler 2011; Lewis 2003). As for

the NGOs in Global South, some authors suggest adding the focus on poverty reduction and development to Salamon and Anheier's (1997) conceptualisation presented above (Lewis 2003, Vakil 1997). On the other hand, in the post-socialist region NGOs tend to be more skewed towards democracy promotion to compensate for the totalitarian past and so the human rights NGOs are more common (Askartova 2006; Ishkanian 2007; Lewis 2014a). Although many of the problems raised in the introductory chapter and exemplified by the thesis remain shared (See Bernal 2017; Bulloch 2017; Hilhorst 2003). Particularly focusing on "transitional" contexts, Askartova (2006) adds that besides being officially registered, these organisations typically see themselves as representing public interests and tend to rely on paid professionals and fundraising activities directed at foreign donors.

The scholarly literature about non-profits and NGOs also seems to be split. As Lewis (2014b) mentions on a critical note, despite certain commonalities, such as problematic accountability, contribution to the roll-back of state, etc., two parallel isolated worlds have been formed, depending on where the organisation is located: the world of third, non-profit or voluntary sector mostly studied from the social policy field in the West, and the world of NGO sector in so-called developing countries, often a matter of interest for the development scholars.

3.3. NGOs amidst conflicting theoretical traditions of civil society

Channelling aid through NGOs became a quite popular development approach towards the Global South in the 1980s. There were several reasons behind this. First, for the development agencies, it was a tool to bypass the corrupt governments who mishandled

the received aid, while development practitioners welcomed it as a more people-centred step and a way out of utterly abstract theoretical tensions between the modernisation and dependency schools, going nowhere (Lewis 2003). On the other hand, the donor community, overrepresented by the US interests and financial contribution, was influenced by two other intertwined trends of the time which merged neoliberal economic policies with the heightened significance attached to civil society: American democracy promotion-focused foreign policy and Washington Consensus (Ishkanian 2007; Mandel 2012). The latter – policy recommendations for developing countries elaborated by international financial institutions (IMF, World Bank) and the US Department of Treasury - advocated for the minimisation of the state role in favour of the free market (Mandel 2012). The state involvement on the other hand was replaced by the idea of a "big society" looking after itself, manifested in NGOs taking over the social service delivery function instead (Ishkanian 2012). Although such an approach relatively softened since the 1990s and the rhetoric of "socially responsible capitalism" gained popularity among the donors, focusing on minor technical remedies instead of any substantial change (Howell & Pearce 2001; Mandel 2012).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Western donors turned their attention to the former socialist states, representing the demise of competing developmentalist ideas (Askartova 2006; Mandel 2012). Unlike the global South, conceptualised as "underdeveloped", these ones came to be understood as "misdeveloped" instead, now on their way to catch up with the West (Wedel 1998: 21). To do so, they had to quickly transition from the authoritarian past to democracy and from the planned to market economy (ibid). Both directions, democracy and capitalism, were regarded crucial by the donors and while typically addressed in separate programs, entailed parts of one ideological package informed by

neoliberal turn: market reforms and democracy promotion were going hand in hand with limiting the state's role in ensuring social security (Ishkanian 2012; Mandel 2012: 224).

NGOs in the post-socialist region were primarily created and strengthened in the scope of the democracy promotion track (Ishkanian 2007; Nodia 2005). Initially dominated by the US, democracy promotion through civil society also came to be associated with the EU, being an important part of the enlargement policies or the initiatives directed at its neighbourhood such as ENP and EaP (Howell & Pearce 2001; Ishkanian 2007). Besides the above or the other state actors from Global North, various independent or semi-independent international non-governmental organisations of American or European origin have been active in the field with a strong focus on civil society (Howell & Pearce 2001; Ishkanian 2007). For example, one can specifically emphasise the major contribution of the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation) to an extent that the name "Soros" became an embodiment of the entire donor-funded NGO sector and represented the national decadence itself in the rhetoric of earlier NGO sceptics (Ishkanian 2007; Nodia 2005).

The democracy promotion agenda painted NGOs as key vehicles for fostering democracy in their societies through monitoring the state, advocating for good governance, the rule of law, fair elections, and human rights and promoting active citizenship, also contributing to market reforms (Ishkanian 2007; Mandel 2012). The human rights framework further incorporated the focus on women and minority groups, which emerged as globally significant issues, resulting in donor-driven "tamed social movements" (Kaldor 2003: 589; Rekhviashvili 2018b). As critics argue, the donors and NGOs articulated the above inequalities as a matter of culture solely, approaching them in the scope of transition and Europeanisation (Ghodsee 2004; Rexhepi 2016). Framed in terms

of freedom, tolerance, and European values, these issues got defined vis-à-vis local backwardness, legitimising the moral and cultural superiority of the West (Rexhepi 2016).

Apart from facilitating democracy, the sector was also expected to give a push to Western-like institutionalised civil society in "transitional" contexts through nurturing social networks and spreading democratic values among the population (Howell & Pearce 2001; Ishkanian 2007; Lewis 2014a). Vibrant associational life, taken from American and Western European contexts was juxtaposed against the former totalitarian state inhibiting citizens' autonomy and the image of an active, involved, and responsible citizen was promoted (Hann 2004; Mandel 2001). While the Western categories came to be marked as universal and superior, democratisation, transition and Westernisation/Europeanisation became almost synonymous concepts (Stoyanova 2018).

Civil society, especially by the 1990s, was so morally charged and uncritically approached, that to emphasise its sacred status among the donors and academic circles Hann (2004: 39) even applies the metaphor of "the church of civil society" (See also Mandel 2001). However, the dominant normative understanding the donors promoted, reflected only one side of the coin, not univocally shared among the scholars. Having strong underpinnings in American theoretical tradition, which Howell and Pearce (2001: 39) refer to as the "Americanisation of the debate", the conceptualisation of civil society was monopolised by Tocquevillian liberal approach, more compatible with capitalist development and theorising it as a separate domain from the state and the market. This vision is best represented by the set of voluntary associations of free and equal citizens, helping each other out and standing strong against the despotic government, ensuring democracy (de Tocqueville 2006; Edwards 2014; Howell & Pearce 2001). In this context, the democracy promotion agenda largely draw intellectual legitimation from the ideas of Neo-Tocquevillian scholars, especially of Putnam (1994) and his notion of social capital

fostering the associational life, thought to be a precondition for democracy and economic progress (Edwards 2014; Howell & Pearce 2001). As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the very same tradition has been dominant among Georgian scholars too (See Gurgenidze 2005; Pokleba 2016; Sumbadze 2013).

The alternative radical approach, more rooted in European theoretical tradition, conceptualises civil society differently - far from being a container of harmony and collaboration. Best represented by Gramsci (1999), it draws on Hegelian insight that civil society is destined for inherent inequalities and conflicts among private-interest-driven people (Edwards 2009; Ehrenberg 2017; Perez-Diaz 2014). In contrast to the Tocquevillian perspective for which the civil society stands against the tyrannical state, from the Gramscian point of view, it is itself the part of the state, acting to maintain the existing order which exclusively benefits the economic interests of the upper classes. If for the liberal approach civil society is the site of freedom, here it is characterised by exercising hegemony - applying subtle cultural tools, rather than direct force, to generate consent from the masses and reproduce the dominant ideology. As a result, the lower classes believe their rights are protected by the state, even being able to compete with other groups in the realm of civil society. This way, for him civil society becomes an arena of class struggle, however because of the ideological influence, dominated groups mostly compete within a framework provided, and hardly question the overall structure (Ehrenberg 2017).

Thus, from the critical perspective NGOs can be typically portrayed as conservative rather than change-oriented actors, preserving and naturalising the given social order. Various scholars think that the diversity of organisations does not exclude the existence of the counter-hegemonic ones as well, others remain sceptical due to constraints NGOs operate in (Howell & Pierce 2001; Katz 2006; McSweeney 2014; Petras 1999). Conflicts

in the scope of civil society are also recognised by Habermas (1992) who focuses on the public sphere rather than the associations per se. Taking from both Marxist and liberal approaches, he proposes the theory of communicative action where he sees the public sphere as an arena of rational and critical debates yet distorted by the forces of the market and the state (Edwards 2009; Howell & Pierce 2001).

Some authors argue that the reviving concept of civil society in Eastern and Central Europe by the 1980s was quite contested and to some extent also relied on the above ideas, later completely absorbed by the Tocquevillian school of associational life (Baker 1999; Howell & Pierce 2001; Ishkanian 2007). According to Chandhoke's (2007: 608) disappointed exclamation, "people struggling against authoritarian regimes had demanded civil society; what they got instead was NGOs!", emptying the civil society of any contradictions and movements. The above discussions on civil society were more marginal in ex-Soviet states including Georgia, which moved to the associational model almost directly, illustrated in the previous chapter (Iskhanian 2007).

As criticised, the Tocquevillian approach focusing on cooperation and consensus turns blind eye to various asymmetries and struggles taking place in society, failing to consider the context in which NGOs emerged. On a global scale, the school fails to grasp economic and cultural asymmetries between the "West" and Georgia, often compared to that of a teacher and a student in elite and popular discourses (Luciani 2020; Tsuladze et al. 2016). On a local scale, it neglects how the NGO sector emerged not merely as associational life, but rather as a vanguard of transition and Europeanisation (Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009; Stefes & Paturyan 2021).

Gramscian approach, on the other hand, sees domination as an inherent quality of civil society. From this perspective NGOs in a post-socialist context are perceived as an inseparable part of the "hegemonic project of transnational integration and

neoliberalisation, which was the actual social content of ‘transition” (Mikuš 2018: 18; also see Chivadze & Khelaia 2022; Stoyanova 2018). These scholars argue that representing dominant classes and their interests, NGOs naturalise existing economic order through depoliticised approaches while staying silent on economic inequality and its rootedness in the neoliberal economy (ibid; Katz 2006; Shivji 2007).

At the same time, Vetta (2019: 193-194) notices that dedicated to the approximation to Western modernity, what the NGO community steadily practises, is a “culture of culturalisation”, symbolically distinguishing themselves through the “performance of practical cosmopolitanism”, and pathologising those who do not live up to the ideal. While the Gramscian approach focuses on culture as a domain of class struggle motivated by economic interests, it remains relatively dismissive of the struggle for the culture itself, where certain groups become marked as more legitimate and more valued in the first place. This takes us to the Bourdieusian approach towards the culture and inequalities among the wider population not limited to the civil society domain, which will be discussed below.

3.4. A look inside the NGO community in the light of a Bourdieusian theory

Turning subtle ways of domination into the centre of his theory, Bourdieu’s perspective can be seen as pretty much in line with Gramscian thought (Burawoy 2019). Derluguaian (2005:81) even points out that it is Bourdieu’s theory of practice that shows how to apply Gramsci’s insights in practical research. But beyond the surface-level similarities, there are substantial differences between these two perspectives: First, while Gramsci focuses on class struggle per se, Bourdieu pays more attention to classificatory struggle; Second,

while Gramsci understands the domination as a result of manufacturing the conscious (even though manipulated) consent from the dominated, Bourdieu maintains that power structures are reproduced rather intuitively through culture by the dominant and dominated alike (Burawoy 2019; Sayer 2018). At the same time going beyond economic capital and focusing on how different resources can serve as a source of power in the society capable of translating into specific perspectives towards social life, Bourdieu offers useful insights into addressing the gap between the NGO community and different segments of the population.

As soon as the sector emerged in the post-socialist space, it almost naturally selected relatively privileged groups holding required cultural, social or political resources: those who spoke English, enjoyed networks with foreigners, were already politically active in anti-communist movements or in some cases were associated with Soviet nomenklatura, represented high-status professions (engineers, teachers, university professors, etc.) or were young students with an experience of studying abroad (Hemment 2004; Mandel 2001; Mikuš 2018; Samspon 1997; Vetta 2019; Wedel 1998). As some notice, typically excluded from the male-dominated political and economic spheres, NGOs particularly welcomed educated women, considering that gender equality-related issues made a "proportionally small, yet ideologically significant" part of civil society aid (Hemment 2004: 219; Ishkanian 2000; Salmenniemi 2014).

Offering a conceptual framework to grasp the peculiarities like those above, there are a number of authors who find Bourdieu's toolkit useful in civil society research. Salmenniemi (2014) for example, articulates the classed and gendered nature of civic activism in Russia in Bourdieusian terms, while Ivancheva (2015) looks at professionalisation of the movement against domestic violence in Bulgaria. Some scholars in the West further see social movements through the same prism (Crossley

2003; Husu 2012). Others have applied Bourdieu's framework to tackle third sector-related power struggles, also stretching it to the organisational level (Jeffrey 2007; Gordon 2008; Greenspan 2014; Guerra & Mswaka 2016). Beyond classical Bourdieu, there are also whole new theoretical models that lean on his idea of the field. Barman (2016) distinguishes two such schools, namely New Institutionalism and Strategic Fields theory widely applied in non-profit research. Nevertheless, apart from the primary focus on the organisational rather than individual level, they substantially detour from the original framework of the power struggles (Amelina et al. 2021).

In this thesis, I follow Bourdieu's original approach. Less interested in the ways organisations make use of the capital combination to push for the desired changes or compete for the resources, I rather wonder what brings people to the NGO sector at all, how their dispositions and the environment influence one another, and how they position themselves vis-à-vis the general public while contributing to Georgia's development. This instead requires more emphasis on locating the participants in the wider social space, rather than focusing on internal field dynamics narrowly. Nevertheless, the field itself is a sight of various more or less homologous tensions that should also be acknowledged. For instance, there can be power-laden relations among different professional groups that reside in the NGO sector, between those located in Tbilisi and those in regions, between liberal democratic and left-leaning fractions, between those residing in wealthier top organisations and those linked to relatively weaker ones, those at watchdogs and those at NGO-ised social movements and so on. Some of these conflicts are also addressed in the study.

Below I will be discussing the premise of the theory and the way it links to the given study. First, I will focus on key concepts such as *social space*, *field* and *capital* that captures the uneven distribution of different resources in society. Here I will particularly

distinguish *cultural capital* and its power in a post-socialist context. After that, I will move to *habitus* and its embodied nature, particularly observable in the classed and professionalised nature of NGO representatives' speech that creates symbolic boundaries between insiders and outsiders. After this, in three sub-chapters I will explain the nature of *classifications* in relation to the sector, how this can be responded to by less powerful groups and how we can conceptualise the classificatory struggle inside the sector.

3.4.1. Objective inequalities and distribution of power

Approaching social relations from a topological perspective, Bourdieu (1985) introduces the notion of a hierarchically arranged *social space* where all individuals (agents) occupy certain objective positions in relation to one another, defined by the package of resources they possess (Crossley 2012). One can picture a map where the agents with a similar configuration (volume and composition) of resources tend to be grouped together and make "probable" social classes, sharing the life chances, lifestyles, and expectations about their place in society (Bourdieu 1985: 725, 1987a; Crossley 2012). However, it is also crucial to consider the temporal dimension reflected in the social *trajectory* of the person: the configuration of accumulated resources - that Bourdieu terms as *capitals* - are not static; instead, they are products of evolution through time (Bourdieu 1987b).

The *capital* itself can be understood as a crucial currency for navigation in any given society. Here Bourdieu (1986, 1987b) goes beyond the economic connotation of the notion of "capital", granting additional meanings to it. Aside from economic capital, he argues, there are other kinds of resources also serving as a source of power, such as cultural (educational, linguistic, etc.), social (networks, group membership) and symbolic (status, prestige) capitals. The latter is a power gained as a by-product of holding other

capitals and is further dependent on what kind of resource is particularly appreciated around. The nature of capital is that it is convertible into one another, for example, economic capital typically gives access to other types of capital, while other capitals can also be translated back into economic capital, social capital largely depends on economic and cultural capital and so on (Bourdieu 1986; Crossley 2012).

For Bourdieu (1984) there are two capital forms that chiefly define class formation: economic and cultural (Crossley 2012; Swartz 1998). He particularly distinguishes between three types of cultural capital: objectified, institutionalised and embodied (Bourdieu 1986). The first refers to cultural goods, like the books that people might own. The institutionalised cultural capital can be equated with the recognised academic qualifications one populates their CVs with - diplomas, certificates, etc. that tend to measure a person's "worth" in terms of education. The embodied cultural capital on the other hand is what accumulates through time from such experiences, including implicit learning from own family members and close social circle, further turning into individual dispositions (ibid). The appreciated forms of cultural capital, however, are neither neutral nor natural in their essence. Instead, they are norms of more privileged groups who have the power to affirm their culture as universal and legitimate. Consequently, it is them the dominant culture prioritises in the end. The powerless, on the other hand, are either forced to mimic or step aside entirely (Bourdieu 1984).

The concept of cultural capital has been productively applied by scholars interested in post-communist social stratification where social and cultural capitals indeed emerged as especially appreciated assets after the independence (Cvetičanin & Popescu 2011; Eyal et al. 1998; Outhwaite 2008; Pop 2018). Even if the NGO ethnographies I mentioned before do not necessarily or entirely depend on the Bourdieusian language, they likewise throw light on how relevant cultural and social resources have allowed better navigation amidst

expanding Western influence and consequently got resulted in heightened prestige and recognition. Global (Western-associated) cultural capital has been especially significant here. The immediate conditions these societies found themselves in have facilitated easier convertibility of the English language and Western networks into economic and symbolic gains after the Soviet Union collapsed (Outhwaite 2008). Yet, the critical value of Western-marked cultural capital in these societies is not limited to the practical skill of speaking English only. As Spasić (2011) argues, it further shows itself in the domain of highly appreciated Westernised lifestyles and the values of openness and cosmopolitanism, access to which seems to be equally distributed at first glance, but in fact, is not (also see Cvetičanin & Popescu 2011).

On the other hand, academics pay more attention to the historically rooted character of the primacy of cultural capital in Central and Eastern European societies (Eyal et al. 1998; Stoyanova 2018; Zarycki 2015). They follow Bourdieu (1984) in ascribing the key role to cultural and economic capital in class formation, and due to the historical particularities of the region prefer a dual stratification model for these societies, influenced by Weber. In such an order, the logic of class (economic capital) and the logic of rank (cultural capital) are presented as interconnected to some extent, yet relatively autonomous from each other than in a typical Western context (Zarycki 2015). Unlike the latter, the scholars argue that for example in countries like Poland or Bulgaria, the stratum of national intellectuals - the descendants of the feudal aristocracy - historically held a strong position and typically asserted themselves as progressive leaders of the nation, overshadowing the weaker national bourgeoisie - the circumstances very much shared by Georgia (Derluguian 2008; Stoyanova 2018; Zarycki 2015). According to Zarycki (2015) in such a setting cultural capital is not only viewed as an asset useful in terms of economic returns but rather becomes a critical value for itself, attracting much recognition in these societies.

Symbolic power attached to the cultural capital played a significant role after the independence too, as the intellectuals emerged as the norm and lifestyle-setters, leading their countries towards modernisation and Europeanisation (Nodia 2002; Derluguian 2008; Zarycki 2015; Stoyanova 2018).

Focusing on NGOs, in this thesis I operationalise cultural capital more narrowly and not the generalised way it is applied to the intellectuals. I primarily focus on Western-marked cultural capital which I indicate as helpful assets that symbolically or technically help the task of transition and Europeanisation, and thus gain an inflated appreciation in the society - namely the relevant professions that are useful for the reforms, as well as English language skills and degrees from Western universities, enabling socialisation in "correct" value systems. Although, competence in aid language and internalised compatible normative framework could also be understood as kinds of cultural capital.

There is indeed a partial overlap between the NGO community and intellectuals. Being an equally powerful stratum in the Georgian context, NGOs have served as a habitat for what Stoyanova (2018) calls expert-intellectuals - partly intellectuals and partly the experts of transition, trained in the field of donor-driven democratisation (Nodia 2005). However, these are only a portion of the NGO community. The sector has opened employment opportunities for a larger middle-class segment who rather make technical specialists of transition in various forms. However, unlike post-independence relative material privileges of the NGO leaders, many NGO employees now find themselves "trapped within very precarious labour relations of exploitation and moral obligations of do-gooding", especially those in more peripheral positions and outside of the top NGOs (Vetta 2019: 24). A significant part of the sector rather make what Vetta (2019) calls "local projectariat", being involved in persistent competition and earning unstable salaries not much higher than the national average (Mikuš 2018). Consequently, while cultural

(and social) capital plays important role in accession to the sector, it does not always go in parallel with corresponding economic gains, having in mind that the NGO community itself ranges from better-off top NGO managers to precarious project freelancers and interns. Nevertheless, one should not underscore the symbolic and cultural gains the NGO representatives hold relative to the other groups that lack both economic capital and compatible cultural capital valued in the current social setting.

I will now move to another crucial concept in Bourdieu's vocabulary – the *field*, which repeats the competitive logic of the social space described above. Fields are more or less autonomous overlapping sub-spaces the social space is divided into. Having fuzzy boundaries, they emerge as nets of relations among particular social positions. In this case, the Western-funded democratisation-oriented NGO sector can be understood as a field itself with its own rules and practices. Although, depending on what we are interested in, fields can be defined in plenty of different overlapping ways. Each field is highly competitive and hierarchical. The agents are involved in constant power struggles for capital accumulation and legitimising one's own capital. Each field has its dominant and dominated segments: those at higher positions determine specific discourses and activities in the field, including the type of required capitals. Considering this, those with a good amount of appropriate currency manage to enter, obtain their positions or become more powerful themselves, further reproducing power-laden rules of the game (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Segre 2016; Thomson 2012; Webb et al. 2002).

Despite their own peculiarities, existing fields correspond to the logic of the field of power to various extents. The field of power is "the space of the positions from which power is exerted over capital in its different species", in other words, the dominant class consists of the most powerful agents in social space (Bourdieu 2020: 34; Hardy 2012). As Bourdieu (2020) notes, the field of power is itself a site of struggle between economic and

cultural capital, where the former holds a more dominant position (Swartz 1998). Warczok and Zarycki (2014) argue that the national field of power in peripheral contexts is structured somewhat differently rather than in terms of conflicting economic and cultural capital. Instead, the main struggles here happen based on the reaction towards external domination, where the holders of economic and cultural capital rather tend to act in harmony, and the cultural capital is far from being subordinate. In such a situation the crucial split in the dominant class takes place between pro-European modernisers vs. Euro-sceptic traditionalists, that also tend to be homologous for various fields from the political and intellectual to the religious fields, etc. In former Soviet states, which are further pressured by Russia, similar splits also occur around Russian domination. These poles often overlap each other and additionally tend to result in pro-Western/anti-Russian (anti-Soviet) and pro-Russian (pro-Soviet)/anti-Western fractions. Obviously, it points to a general pattern and does not mean there cannot be certain cases when one does not necessarily coincide with the other (Zarycki 2014).

As addressed in a previous chapter, the geopolitically influenced line of conflict likewise seems to structure different fields in Georgia. Not surprisingly, the NGO field, fundamentally shaped by Western economic and cultural influence (one should say the rules of the game and acceptable practices are first and foremost regulated by the Western donors), gets to be dominated by pro-Western modernising fraction primarily defined by Western-associated cultural capital. Marked by cultural capital, the NGO community gains symbolic power to assert itself as a norm-setter and a moderniser in the wider social space. On the other hand, those linked to key Tbilisi-based NGOs act as gatekeepers in the sector itself, being mimicked by those occupying more peripheral positions in the field.

3.4.2. Habitus: how to feel at home in the NGO sector

Bourdieu argues that as people navigate in social space, as well as in a particular field, their actions tend to be strategic and aimed at maximising (not necessarily material) profit. This does not mean they do it on a conscious level though. Instead, they are guided by what he calls *habitus*. As itself structured "structuring structure", this concept aims to reconcile the duality of structure and agency and implies internalised dispositions mediating between these two (Bourdieu 1984:170). Having cognitive, normative and embodied dimensions, it includes the perceptions of social reality and the sense of where one belongs, tastes, attitudes, and values, also showing itself physically - the way we speak or dress, even in the gestures we make quite automatically (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1992; Edgerton & Roberts 2014; Segre 2016).

Developing over time, the habitus reflects the agent's social trajectory and current position in the field or in social space, such as a class habitus (Bourdieu 1984). For example, chapter 6 in the thesis shows how habitus is embodied in a specific way NGO representatives tend to speak, their language being a mix of urban middle-class Anglicised Georgian, aid-related slang, as well as legal and social science terminologies linked to their professional habitus. Yet, what makes perfect sense for the insiders who are synchronised in their speech, can sound confusing and ridiculous for the outsiders, especially when they do not share the urban class position with them. From the perspectives of the relatively powerless, even from inside the sector, NGO representatives' speech often sounds pretentious in contrast to the preferred down-to-earth speech. This illustrates that as part of habitus, the significance of language even goes beyond different embodied styles of speech and involves how one relates to the language itself (Bourdieu 1991; Sayer 2017). Chapters 7 and 9 further focus on value systems and

judgements which are the product of both - the class positions and socialisation in the sector.

Compatible habitus is crucial for people to navigate any given field smoothly and feel natural in their environments. On the contrary, incompatible habitus leads to feeling out of place, tense, unsure and awkward. For Bourdieu (1984) the habitus is the main reason why certain regularities take place in our society even if people do seem to have a free choice. For example, driven by class habitus, different classes engage in different shared practices and lifestyles because it intuitively feels right for the people like themselves. Returning to the NGO sector, this implies that the lower classes might just not see themselves in the NGO community even if there were no external barriers, such as an overstated lack of information or an explicit lack of the required skill set.

In the specific field, the habitus is responsible for the "feel for the game", where people take the dominant norms of the field as taken for granted and see their practices as meaningful, implicitly understanding what to do to maximise symbolic gains (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:128; Maton 2012). For example, Sampson (1997, 2002, 2003) and the other scholars describe how bizarre the aid sector can, in fact, be with its own logic and practices whether it is grant writing procedures, terminology or the training for trainers (Lashaw et al. 2017). But the people, for whom it is a part of everyday life, do not typically experience the sector as something odd or "unnatural". This is because most NGO representatives are already conditioned by the environment in the sector and they in turn further continue shaping it.

The habitus largely overlaps the notion of cultural capital. The extent of such overlap is understood differently by different scholars, yet they are typically seen as distinct concepts (Edgerton & Roberts 2014; Moore 2012; Reay 2004). For Bourdieu (1984, 1992) the habitus, capitals and field are all separate notions, generating the practice

together. If the habitus tends to be pointing at how smoothly the agent orientates in the given environment, cultural capital is understood as more of a currency in a symbolic exchange (Edgerton & Roberts 2014). For example, as indicated, I mainly treat the specific brand of NGO language, mentioned above, as a sort of linguistic habitus – the physical reflection of NGO representatives' positions in social space and the different fields they navigate into simultaneously. However, the NGO language is at the same time a competence automatically acquired as cultural (linguistic) capital that ensures better chances in the symbolic competition, as well as in outwardly manifested competition for the donors' funding (Bourdieu 1991).

Beyond conceptual ambiguity, the notion of habitus often tends to be criticised for its rigidity (Crossley 2003; Edgerton & Roberts 2014; Reay 2004; Sayer 2010a, 2010c). It is argued that the concept hardly leaves any space for individual reflexivity and presents people as cursed to reproduce the existing power structures over and over again. Yet, in fact, social reality is less than static and as Bourdieu notes himself, what is taken for granted today is a result of yesterday's struggles for legitimacy (Crossley 2003). Consequently, those who are sympathetically critical towards Bourdieu, offer some useful modifications to avoid the trap and emphasise individual agency. For example, Sayer (2010c) thinks that while habitus, allowing intuitive orientating in the environment, is indeed a helpful concept, we should not completely dismiss the lay reflexivity that emerges from people's everyday concerns. Even though what individuals will be reflexive about, tends to be shaped by their class habitus, the normative judgements and evaluative emotions that stem from their life experiences and struggles cannot be simply reduced to unconscious strategic games. Crossley (2003) on the other hand focuses on the reflexive practices of the radical activists engaged in new social movements, which start from conscious self-interrogation and gradually turn into a long-term habitual disposition.

However, he agrees with Bourdieu that involvement in debates of a political nature is more typical for the middle classes who hold the required cultural capital.

3.4.3. On "progressive" and "backward": classifications and symbolic violence

Based on an empirical study about social classes in France, Bourdieu (1984) notices that different class habitus predisposes people towards different lifestyles, norms, and tastes, shaped by their proximity or distance from material urgencies. However, not all lifestyles are considered to be equal within society. The dominant groups, who develop the "taste of freedom" from necessity, are able to legitimise their cultural practices as natural and universal, so it is their culture that becomes the standard for all (Bourdieu 1984; Swartz 1998:166).

Such naturalisation happens through the power of dominant groups to define and classify social reality. Classifications in this sense are dichotomies of judgements (ex. sophisticated – simple, distinguished - vulgar, etc.) which strengthen the position of the powerful and are simultaneously internalised by the dominated. Being culturally "one step ahead" is further manifested in clothing styles, manners, speech, etc., which signifies distinction from the "common" and enhances one's status. Continuously presenting these practices as a matter of choice, knowledge, or inherent personal traits conceals that it is objective inequalities that produce intuitive socialisation into legitimate tastes and values. Thus, for Bourdieu (1984) it is cultural domination that maintains the class hierarchies. Through imposing their norms and classifications the dominant classes subject the subordinate groups to symbolic violence and doom them to secondary status. This sort of

violence remains misrecognised and the social reality, favouring the powerful, is never doubted as arbitrary, shaped in a particular historical context.

As discussed in chapter 2, in a peripheral country, such as Georgia, cultural othering has traditionally played out as the dichotomy of "European elites - Oriental masses" and is largely framed in terms of proximity with the idealised West. In such a construction Western tolerance, secularism, diversity, gender equality, education, etc. are pitted against local barbarism and illiteracy (Tskhadadze 2018; Tsuladze et al. 2021). This is very similar to what Spasić (2011) and Jensen (2008) notice in the Balkans, where the very same classifications have been produced prioritising more privileged middle-class cosmopolitans as far worthy citizens: "pro-Western or European (vs. Balkan), educated (vs. illiterate), autonomous/individualist (vs. conformist-collectivist), gender equal (vs. patriarchal), tolerant (vs. exclusivist), peaceful (vs. violent), heterogeneous (vs. homogenous), sophisticated (vs. boorish), connected (vs. isolated), welcoming towards otherness (vs. xenophobic), going forward (vs. standing still), etc." (Jensen 2008: 88).

Also reflected in the above categorisations, the dichotomy is further shaped by new economic rationale revolving around individualism, personal responsibility and freedom that merge the notions of political liberalism with neoliberal imperatives, highly appreciated as part of the "Western values" package (Tsuladze et al. 2021). The ideal of a free, responsible, and active citizen, and a creative entrepreneur in the domains of civil society and the market is juxtaposed with the passive useless majority (Makovicky 2014; Stoyanova 2018). While the first epitomises Western modernity, the second tends to be represented as Homo Sovieticus (Buchowski 2006). The labels are typically congregated under a broader geopolitical West-Russia binary, where Russia emerges as the West's mirror opposite for a number of reasons (see Chapters 2 and 7): if symbolic proximity to

the West is socially rewarding, the opposite category is imagined as a backward and gullible victim of Russian influence.

The stigmatising categories primarily target on the basis of class and age, as older and poorer groups find it harder to live up to the ideal, although are not limited to them. As Melegh (2006) indicates, focusing on Central and Eastern Europe, the mission of Europeanisation is directed at the population overall, including the opposing political groups. The scholars point out that neoliberalism has increased the culturalisation of class inequalities even in richer traditionally class-based Western contexts, and the emergence of more hostile othering of less privileged groups (Tyler 2015). The middle class now becomes defined by far as valued individualist, responsible and flexible selves against the poor, while the latter experiences uneasy feelings of being looked down on by them (Skeggs 2005, 2011; Tyler 2015). Such cultural classifications in turn conceal the rooted character of the economic inequality in the scope of which even the middle classes face financial uncertainties (Tyler 2015). Vetta's (2019) study finds a similar problem among the NGO workers in Serbia, who actively produce the marginalising classifications, yet themselves are being caught under precarious work conditions in the sector, which is understood in terms of freedom and flexibility. This has also been my own observation during the fieldwork.

These imperatives affect not only how the sector is arranged as a working environment itself, but also how NGOs often work. As Zamfir (2015) observes, referring to NGO representatives as "professionals of othering", even those focusing on poorer groups particularly, tend to see the problem in terms of cultural deficit. Refraining from structural explanations of poverty, they further educate the poor in taking individual responsibility, which fits into neoliberal mode and contributes to the problem instead.

Borrowing concepts from Bourdieusian, postcolonial and world systems theories, Zarycki (2014) relates the above to two basic doxa existing in the CEE region (although he focuses on power dynamics vis-à-vis Western Europe particularly). These doxa are systems of unquestioned beliefs which conceal local and global power relations, both economic and cultural, and instead, package them as natural and desirable. The first is a dependence doxa, which naturalises Western domination through "catching up" discourse and reduces the complex power asymmetry to local cultural backwardness. Another is intelligentsia doxa, implying that those with high levels of recognised cultural capital act as middlemen between the West and the locals. They actively engage in culturally civilising the latter, legitimising not only global but also local cultural and economic hierarchies in the process.

Both observations apply to the NGO community and the discourses they produce. The NGO representatives likewise tend to be defined by cultural capital, which helps in approximation to Western modernity through practical project-based and task-oriented activities. Claiming objectivity and disinterest, NGOs have their strong share in portraying Western political, economic and cultural models as the top of the universal development ladder, which Georgia logically has to go up step by step (Lavergne 2010 as cited in Stoyanova 2018; Thornton et al. 2015). In doing so, they strongly contribute to the construction and reproduction of moral and cultural labels that differentiate those who are closer to the development ideal from those who need to be further educated.

The distinction of the NGO community is further ingrained in the aid language packed with morally charged terms such as "good governance", "human rights", "gender mainstreaming", "tolerance", etc., that already understands social reality in particular ways compatible with liberal democratic and capitalist development. At the same time, these words bear the symbolic power of the West and the imperative for approximation

with the Western ideal, especially given that it is Westernisation/Europeanisation which is seen as the ultimate way of modernisation. As an indivisible part of the NGO environment, its representatives internalise this language, see the world this way and produce corresponding classifications, which is addressed in chapter 6. Their exclusionary classifications, which have strong power in the country, having gone through rapid elite-driven Westernisation, are responded with differing reactions of enthusiastic acceptance, ambivalence, rejection or dissociation by distinct groups in the society, as shown in the interviews with the population.

While Bourdieu (1984) understands the distinctions and judgements as conscious or unconscious moves to enhance one's own status and legitimise accumulated cultural capital, Sayer (1999) charges him with sociological reductionism. Instead, he argues, we should not delve into complete cynicism and miss that there are also normative grounds behind beliefs and practices, even if at times it is uncomfortably interlinked with domination. The NGO community sees itself in terms of positive involvement and acts under the do-gooding mantra: "provide services, protect minority rights, save the nation, achieve democracy" (Sampson 2020: 116). They might be accumulating cultural, social and at times even political capital, but they are also guided by strong moral commitments towards improvement. Even though often framed in terms of Western values and best practices, the problems they bring up are obviously real and their interlinkage with discussed power hierarchies should not diminish their actuality. As Gagyi (2015: 20) remarks, "normative tropes of evolution in time (away from backwardness), space (away from the East), and politics (away from Communist authoritarianism)" are also how social change-oriented middle-class groups in the post-socialist region often tend to articulate their own concerns about the unfulfilled promise of a better and secure life. This framing

is further aggravated by threats and tensions of geopolitical nature stemming from Russia's powerful role in the region.

3.4.4. Lay reproduction and resistance

As Bourdieu argues, the nature of the dominant categorisations of social reality is that they are being taken for granted and are hard to be questioned. It pushes the dominated groups to submit but there is also constant conflict between submission and resistance: anxious attempts to fit in reproduce the doxa, while resistance, prone to take place on unacceptable terms, excludes the dominated even more (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Reay 2018).

Sayer (2005, 2010a) calls for paying more attention to emotional reactions and normative judgements that emerge in response to such subordinate positions, not merely as part of habitual dispositions but also because it tells something about people's everyday concerns. Such emotions can be a shame, pride, anger, resentment, etc. Shame is strongly associated with class, he notes, which derives from actual or perceived failures for not living up to the valued standards. For example, Satybaldieva (2017) focuses on the self-worth of poor groups in Kyrgyzstan amidst increased market pressures, who rely on available religious and traditional moral discourses and construct "caring" and "pious" selves as a source of self-esteem and positive self-distinction against market-based values of the upper classes.

At the same time resistance arises in response to a globally subordinate position. Drawing on Kiossev (2002), Tsuladze (2013) shows how lay Romanians, Poles and Georgians employ mirror-opposite defence strategies against stigmatising and enlightening discourses engrained in the Europeanisation process, and how these are interlinked with

subsequent emotions of shame and pride. On one hand, they tend to radically self-distance themselves from their own nations and being ashamed of their own stigmatised nationality, try to blend in with Western Europeans when abroad (they are also ashamed of being ashamed). Alternatively, they go in the opposite direction and turn to exaggerated national pride instead.

In such a peripheral context local and global power asymmetries cannot be detached. As argued before, the stigma of backwardness is not distributed equally. Ascribed to the abstract "masses", it tends to be pushed towards more marginalised ones, who epitomise the backward traditional Georgian. The latter is deemed responsible not only for individual failures but for national failure, which constantly falls short of the Western ideal.

3.4.5. Internal classificatory struggles in the NGO sector: challenging the doxa?

As discussed in the previous sub-chapters, the NGO sector emerged with a specific mission to assist the transition technically and ideologically. Led by intellectuals and the urban middle class, it developed some shared identities and visions (Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009; Nodia 2005). Setting themselves as flagman of Europeanness, tolerance and rationality against "Georgian conformism, passivity and patriarchal [culture]", they further saw their archenemies in older intelligentsia adhering "mythopoetic nationalism", as well as corrupt former Soviet nomenklatura (Nodia 2002: 12; Zurabishvili 2002: 49). After initial struggles for legitimacy, their vision was naturalised as the sole and universal

course of development, especially after 2003, when the change in government was followed by rapid modernisation and Europeanisation.

All doxa, "which determine the limits of the doable and the thinkable", are solidified results of previous classificatory struggles, so they might come into question again (Crossley 2003; Maton 2012: 58). The fields are spaces of reproduction, but they are also spaces where the opposition between orthodoxy and "heresy" can emerge (Bourdieu 1975; Swartz 1998). Moreover, the orthodoxies are prone to trigger heterodox perspectives as agents tend to be driven by the principle of distinction from the conventional. Such conflict may take place between those established in the field ("old guard") and the newcomers (ibid). Although the challengers should be holding sufficient capital to be taken seriously.

As for the Georgian NGO sector, the mainstream classifications are increasingly doubted by a small left-leaning segment of the younger generation entering the field around the 2010s, although without a homologous fraction in the political field. They are keener to emphasise economic inequalities, understanding them as embedded in the economic direction Georgia took as part of the transition. Classifying themselves by the label "left", this part imposes alternative classifications on the sector and diffuses its own vocabulary to counter the NGO language. In doing so, they assert moral and cultural distinction from the mainstream: by presenting themselves as closer to people's concerns, encouraging their agency, and emphasising that their activities are being informed by critical social science and familiarity with contemporary academic debates. In the sector, the heterodox rhetoric emerged in a more powerful sub-field of lawyer-dominated watchdogs, but also among activists with blurry boundaries with NGOs. The latter got exposed to various green, feminist, social democratic and post-Marxist frames characteristic of the Western movements, often supported through smaller centre-left donor agencies (Gagyi 2015).

Additionally, one can also find some isolated left-leaning stances in different organisations that voice criticism.

While aligning with critical frameworks particularly pertinent in Western academic and political circles, this segment also derives symbolic capital and local legitimacy from the West - as long as they negotiate it with local geopolitical and discursive constraints, and the requirements of the donor frameworks (Zarycki 2014). As Gagyi (2015) argues in regard to the CEE social movements, while local activists shifted from the "transition" framework to frameworks more typical for the Western social movements, it increased their reputation among their Western peers and opened the door for additional resources. However, when it comes to securing funds from larger donors, it might also backfire, as NGOs are expected to be neutral in the first place and stay in tune with the donor priorities (Luciani 2020).

But these changes cannot be understood as motivated by the logic of distinction alone, obviously. There are strong ethical concerns involved, the importance of which I have already discussed in the previous parts, requiring a reflexive engagement with one's social environment. For Bourdieu, such reflexivity can take place in two ways: in social science/academic domains, and during a crisis when the environment suddenly becomes at odds with the habitual predispositions of lay agents (Crossley 2003; Swartz 1998). Although, as reviewed before, some scholars disagree with Bourdieu in this, arguing that reflexivity can emerge in lay contexts in relation to what matters for the people, or that it is built into habitus itself (Crossley 2003; Sayer 1999).

Such observations are also relevant here. Many from this segment, in fact, come from social science and related interdisciplinary educational backgrounds (although people of such backgrounds are quite active in the sector generally), or were drawn to it in process of activism. Others first started questioning the wider social environment around them, as

well as their own role in the sector. Here obviously, the class-based predispositions, competencies, and opportunities to be exposed to different ideas also matter (Crossley 2003).

One can read this differentiation of perspectives as a process of challenging the "old guard" that rises the taken-for-granted to the level of discourse (ibid). The more prominent part of this fraction can be considered as a new generation of intellectual elites, who while far from the Bourdieusian ideal of autonomous intellectuals, respond to their environments in existing constraints (Burawoy 1999). While in this thesis I do not focus on specific activities taken by this segment, organisational aspects or internal disagreements, in the last empirical chapter I highlight that the sector is far from homogenous and mainstream classifications are being challenged by relatively well-positioned groups from inside.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter aimed at setting out the theoretical framework for the study.

I started with the definition of non-governmental organisations, followed by a discussion about competing theoretical traditions of civil society. I moved from Gramscian outlook on civil society to Bourdieu's framework which resembles the former in giving primary attention to subtle domination. At the same time due to the theoretical focus on capital variety and the power of classifications, Bourdieu's theory of practice was prioritised as the key theory the study draws on to understand and explain the data. In the chapter, I summarised Bourdieu's theoretical toolkit and linked it to the aims of the study: I introduced fundamental notions of capital, social space and the field, habitus, distinction, and symbolic violence. Drawing on Zarycki's (2014) insights, I focused on how these

concepts can be understood in peripheral post-socialist contexts and how they relate to the upcoming chapters. I also focused on some issues that are less elaborated in the theory, such as reflexivity and change.

The next chapter focuses on the methodological framework of the study. It discusses the positioning of the research and the particular package of methods involved in data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1. Introduction

The theoretical chapter revealed how objective capital distribution, also internalised as part of habitus, and subjective constructions might play a role in the potential gap between the NGO representatives and some segments of laypeople, as well as in the emergent struggles among the NGO community itself. The current chapter, on the other hand, describes the methodological path taken to answer the research questions derived from above.

The following research questions have been identified, also presented in the opening chapter:

- What kinds of capital tend to be prioritised in the aid-dependent NGO sector and how does it contribute to the gap?
- How does the NGO community distinguish itself from the population and how are they perceived by different segments of the laypeople in return?
- What internal classificatory struggle takes place among the NGO community and how does it address the NGO-population gap?

I start the chapter with ontological and epistemological contextualisation of the study in the critical realist philosophy of science. This continues with a detailed description of the research methods applied: how participants were selected, how the data was gathered, what were the ethical considerations during the research, how was the data analysed, and how I dealt with the translation-related issues.

4.2 Research paradigm

Following the Bourdieusian understanding of the social world, the analysis has been guided by the principle that "the field of positions is methodologically inseparable from the field of stances or position-takings (prises de position), i.e., the structured system of practices and expressions of agents" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 105). While the "space of positions tends to command the space of position-takings" they are to be understood and analysed together, as neither the objective distribution of resources nor agents' subjective social constructions exist independently (ibid.). In this sense, Bourdieu (1988: 777) takes the middle ground between what he calls "false antinomies of social science" expressed in subjectivism and objectivism, materialism and idealism, micro and macro-sociology, etc. Looking from his own theoretical prism, he sees similar dichotomous labels as part of the academic classificatory struggles instead (ibid.). Yet, if the labelling must be involved, he rather refers to his own stance as "structuralist constructivism" and "constructivist structuralism" simultaneously, emphasising the duality and interrelatedness of the opposites (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 11). What mediates these alternatives for Bourdieu is habitus, the structured and structuring structure, existing in "ontological complicity" with the field (Bourdieu 1988: 783).

Nevertheless, Bourdieu tends to remain less clear about how he envisions the ontology itself (Evens 1999). It is argued that his positioning bears similarities with the critical realist philosophy of science and would only benefit if backed by it, which likewise tries to reconcile the opposites while making bolder ontological claims about the nature of reality (Vandenberghe 1999; Wainwright 2000). Simultaneously, critical realism presupposes more agency for the actors and enriches Bourdieu's perspectives by emphasising greater reflexivity and potential for emancipatory change (Decoteau 2016;

Elder-Vass 2010; Sayer 2010c). In this sense, this study adopts critical realist insights regarding what the social world is and how it should be understood. I will discuss the basic tenets of critical realism and the way it connects to the theoretical framework.

Critical realism, most commonly associated with the name of Roy Bhaskar (2008), emerged in response to the limitations of the mainstream contradictory approaches informing social scientists – positivism on one hand and a variety of constructivist, relativist and interpretivist stances on the other. If for the positivists the social world functions according to the universal laws allowing further predictions, the other camp, largely sceptical of the positivist claims, sees it as constructed by meanings instead (Gorski 2013). Critical realists join the latter in scepticism towards positivism but also reject the disillusionment with objective reality beyond linguistic constructions, as well as the dismissal of causal explanations and the quest for seeking truth (ibid.). In doing so, they shift attention from epistemology to ontology itself (Bhaskar 2008; Patomaki & Wright 2000).

What critical realist ontology implies is that despite complexities that positivists fail to acknowledge, there is still an objective reality out there, regardless of what the researcher or the laypeople may experience and know of it (Sayer 2004). So, instead of reducing it to social constructions, the world should be understood as a complex stratified domain of interrelated objects and their (potential) causal powers and tendencies, situated at different layers of the real. Deriving from such a layered character, the nature of the real is emergent - certain objects from the more fundamental layer come together to form certain configurations on another layer. They differ from the sum of their elements and can also react back (ibid; Elder-Vass 2010). For example, while NGOs are constituted by individuals, as organisations they become distinct from those who make them. They are further affected by the donor entities, broader structures of a global nature and so on,

including the NGO representatives themselves. If instead of focusing on the organisational level per se, we give more attention to people as part of the sector, as I do in this study, we should imply that there are overlapping and multifaceted interlinkages between these agents and different structures, including particular organisations they belong to, the overall sector and its patterns, class structures, cultural systems, and so on.

At the same time, what we know about the world is mediated by available descriptions and discourses. These subjective interpretations are also part of reality, given that they too have the power of impacting social phenomena, and thus should be studied at their level (Fleetwood 2004; Sayer 2004). Consequently, in order to understand the social world, critical realist epistemology calls for combining explanatory and interpretive approaches (Patomaki & Wright 2000). Yet, in doing so, critical realists are particularly wary of "collapsing extra-discursive entities like social structures into discursive ones", characteristic of constructivist accounts (Fleetwood 2004: 33). Social structures, whether it is class or gender hierarchies, or even organisational structures, exist independently of discourses about them, thus they should not be reduced to the latter. In this sense, Sayer (2004: 31) makes a clear differentiation between "construals" - mental representations of reality, and "constructions" – social entities that have been constructed by agents yet have factual existence beyond how we speak about them or if we speak about them at all.

Stemming from the realist ontology, truth is an important concern for critical realists (Sayer 2004). Although considering that our knowledge of the world is always imperfect, it should not be understood in absolute terms. This rather implies that it is very possible for certain beliefs which influence society to be false, and it is important for the researcher to untangle and remain critical of them. So, instead of producing descriptive accounts, the pursuit of truth requires reflexive and examined engagement with what we study (ibid, Patomaki & Wright 2000).

Critical realism encourages theory- and concept-guided research which is not the same as being completely theory-determined. The fallibility of the knowledge, discussed above, suggests that our preliminary ideas and theories may also turn out to be wrong, or partially wrong when applied to practice and compared to other theories (Sayer 2004, 2010a). In a similar fashion, while I predominantly depend on Bourdieu's approach that aims to explain how inequalities are reproduced through the culture, I further amend it with context-specific modifications, for example by drawing on Zarycki's (2014) ideas on the peripheral field of power. Applying the terminology of the words systems and post-colonial theories, he emphasises that the global economic and cultural hierarchies substantially shape the particularities of the social space and the fields in peripheral countries.

Where Bourdieu most stumbles when contextualised in critical realist philosophy is the collusion of structure and agency in his theory. In contrast, there is explicit ontological differentiation of structures and agents in the critical realist tradition, based on the assumption that both come with their own powers affecting one another and that agents are capable of reflexivity leading to changes in the social world. In this regard, Bourdieu is harshly criticised by Archer (2010). Yet, these criticisms are not unanimously shared by other critical realist scholars who see Bourdieu's habitus as a quite useful concept instead, defending the idea of social practices being both intuitively and reflexively driven (Elder-Vass 2010; Decoteau 2016; Sayer 2010c). Furthermore, as Elder-Vass (2010) points out, the internalisation of structures in Bourdieu's theory does not necessarily mean that they become the same as agents. Rather, it implies that stemming from their experiences, people develop beliefs and dispositions in relation to the social world which then affects their practices.

Placing Bourdieu in the critical realist tradition, I will now continue the chapter with a detailed description of what has been done in the practical methodological sense in the course of research.

4.3. Research methods

Guided by critical realist assumptions, the study adopts intensive as opposed to extensive research design, the latter instead being concerned with the large amounts of representative statistical data (Sayer 2010b). While intensive research design lacks such representativeness, it tends to be more explanatory in nature and making use of retroductive strategies, seeks to find out how certain causal powers work in the specified case. Taking a more detailed approach to figure out the "logic of the situation", my focus also goes beyond the NGO representatives per se and further includes agents from the donor community and different groups of the population (ibid:166).

Based on a combination of explanatory and interpretivist epistemological approaches centred on participants' experiences and perceptions of the social world, the study relies on a qualitative research method (Bryman 2012; Sayer 2010b). Capable of generating rich and in-depth data, the qualitative method can best help to understand the dynamics in the sector, the values of its representatives and positioning in relation to the general population, as well as outsiders' perceptions of the NGO community.

The study is based on 81 semi-structured in-depth interviews with three target groups: the representatives of aid-dependent NGOs, laypeople, and donor representatives. Below, I will explain the methodological choices and steps taken in the research, the rationale behind and their execution in practice.

4.3.1 Sampling and participant recruitment

To identify the study participants, I relied on purposive sampling, considered to be the key sampling method in the qualitative study (Bryman 2012). Instead of probability sampling, characteristic of quantitative research, in this case, the researcher specifically selects those participants who can provide the most helpful information depending on the purpose and the aims of the study. Usually, the researcher further introduces additional criteria to ensure that the sample is diversified (ibid.) In this section, I will go through the details of how I selected and recruited the participants, while first briefly summarizing the sampling strategy adopted.

The study draws on an extensive number of 81 interviews given that I distinguished three different target groups – the NGO community, the laypeople, and the donor community - whose perceptions and experiences provide important material to answer the research questions, while also ensuring that there are enough interviews in each group to reach necessary data saturation (Bryman 2012). To incorporate different perspectives, two fieldwork sites were identified in Georgia - the capital (Tbilisi) and the regional area (Gori). The interviews were carried out in three stages. First, I spoke to 39 laypeople from Tbilisi and Gori who neither work nor volunteer in NGOs, differentiated by residence place, age, class, and gender. This was to adopt a more bottom-up approach so that the NGO sampling also reflected the laypeople's opinions, as well as to address the second research question regarding how the NGO community is perceived from the outside. This sample is the largest out of all three due to being the most heterogeneous, incorporating very diverse segments of Georgia's population. Considering this information, I selected 22 NGOs in Tbilisi and Gori, both leading and peripheral, working under the broad democratisation umbrella and recruited 34 participants from them. In the case of more sophisticated well-established organisations, two participants were recruited from one

NGO to incorporate both managerial and staff positions. The perspectives and experiences voiced in these interviews are the major focus of the research questions, consequently, the study relies on them to the largest extent. Finally, I spoke to 8 representatives from foreign donor entities (multilateral and bilateral agencies, international private foundations) to gain additional insights and better make sense of the general patterns in the donor-dependent sector. This sample is the smallest given the limited number of key donor entities in the field. It should be noted that initially, I intended to conduct 25 interviews with NGO representatives, 30 interviews with laypeople and up to 10 interviews with donor representatives. However, as shown above, in the end, I interviewed more people from both the NGO community and laypeople groups, responding to how the fieldwork unfolded. In contrast, I managed to speak to 8 participants from the donor community.

Below I will describe the sampling and recruitment process for each target group in more detail. Instead of taking a more chronological approach, I will start with the NGO representatives as they are the primary source of information the thesis depends on, followed by the laypeople and the donors. While one empirical chapter is entirely dedicated to the laypeople's perspectives in the thesis, the laypeople and the donor interviews mostly serve as complementary, rather than main data in most chapters.

4.3.1.1. The NGO representatives

Given that the aim of the study is neither to investigate organisational dynamics inside NGOs nor to find out to what extent they succeed in their advocacy or negotiate with the donor entities, the organisations are not taken up as a unit of analysis. Instead, here I treat

NGO representatives as a group itself who are embedded in development agendas as part of their work. Participants of my interest were to be employed or volunteering in aid-dependent formally registered non-governmental organisations as conceptualised in chapter 3. This is a key criterion in terms of defining who I mean by "NGO representatives" or the "NGO community" in this thesis. At the same time, as the findings suggest, often it can happen so that the very same person is associated with several organisations at once or has a history of moving from one NGO to another. This peculiarity, I came across post-factum, further justifies the broader take on NGO representatives rather than seeing them only in the scope of one specific organisation.

While the organisations are not the unit of analysis itself, identification of them was an important first step in the participant selection process. Thousands of non-profits being registered, when identifying the organisations of my interest I was guided by both - scholarly literature and laypeople's opinions. As discussed in the theoretical chapter, NGOs are typically associated with foreign aid and democratisation agenda. As authors note, human rights and democratic governance make the main thematic pillar of the sector in Georgia, taken up by high-profile organisations (Nodia 2005; Puig 2016). The interviews I held with laypeople beforehand, further helped me to refine the sample as they named common themes and activities most associated with the NGO sector from their perspectives. Considering the research goal, it was crucial for me to ensure that what I mean by "NGO representatives" in this study more or less coincides with what the population means by it. The named themes mostly had to do with the protection of human rights, particularly of women's and minority rights, ensuring fair elections and monitoring the authorities, and to a lesser extent protecting the environment and protecting labour rights as well.

Driven by the above logic, I took the liberty to go beyond more narrow fields such as women's rights, anti-corruption, etc. and focus on democratisation-related themes at large instead. The participants are mainly involved in issues linked to human rights (including those of particular groups such as women or minorities), government monitoring, civic participation and active citizenship, promotion of tolerance and diversity, service provision and advocacy for certain groups. Due to such focus, people from a variety of professional or other kinds of associations, humanitarian organisations, etc. have been omitted from the sample. I also excluded those associated with think tanks, even though a few participants have overlapped them at some point in their lives.

To make sure that the sample is internally diverse and the perspectives of people holding differing power positions in the sector are represented, I introduced three additional criteria: organisational strength, geographic location, and the participant's position inside the organisation.

First, I made sure that people linked to organisations of different power are represented. Following Puig's (2016) classification of Georgian NGOs based on organisational strength, I involved participants from first-tier and second-tier NGOs in the study. The first segment, consisting of well-established organisations, is primarily involved in supporting human rights and democratic governance, including the focus on women's and minority rights. Another group, consisting of relatively weaker or small organisations, is associated with the promotion of civic participation, diversity, education and awareness-raising activities, service provision for specific target groups, etc. However, as referred to in chapter 2, when it comes to themes and activities in some cases the boundary between these two categories can be blurry. Shortly, the sample includes participants from a range of organisations, from easily recognisable and well-established ones to relatively weaker

or tiny organisations that are involved in more or less similar topics around democratisation.

The strength of the organisations to a large extent overlaps the issue of geographic location, which was the second criterion. To enrich the sample, besides those attached to Tbilisi organisations, I spoke to participants from Gori-based NGOs. Being the capital of Georgia with the largest population and the most influential organisations, Tbilisi was selected as a primary fieldwork site (Geostat 2022; Nodia 2004; Puig 2016). Unlike Tbilisi, Gori - the major city of the Shida Kartli region in Eastern Georgia – has a population of just around 45 000 and fewer organisations (CSO Georgia 2022; Geostat 2022). While the portal for civil society organisations lists 447 organisations for Tbilisi, there are only 55 indicated for the Shida Kartli region overall (although the list only offers very approximate data). I included it as an example of a small peripheral city with a weaker NGO basis. Gori per se was selected because of two reasons. First, as a municipality centre, it still has a substantial NGO presence compared to much smaller towns. Another reason was due to convenience. Gori is situated at a 1.5-hour long drive from Tbilisi, where most of the interviews were conducted, making it easier to move back and forth between the two cities. As the fieldwork was quite extensive, it made me much more flexible in terms of scheduling the interviews. Of the 34 participants that I interviewed, 7 come from Gori and are involved in issues related to democracy and participation, as well as supporting women and vulnerable groups.

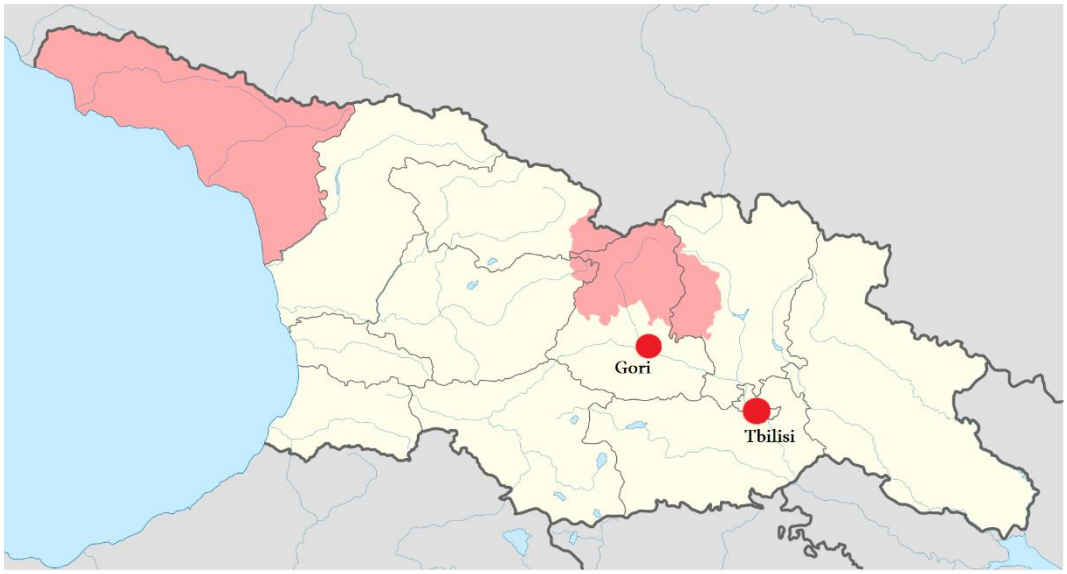


Image 2. Map of Georgia: Fieldwork sites

Finally, I included people in different positions of power that they hold inside their organisations. Typically, two participants were recruited from more sophisticated organisations: those in managing positions, such as a director, deputy director or programme director, and those in a wide range of non-key positions – other staff members, interns, volunteers, and even project-based freelancers linked to the organisation temporarily. However, involving two persons from one organisation was not always achievable due to the busy schedule of the participants. In the case of small organisations with less sophisticated organisational patterns, only one participant was recruited.

The sample is diverse in terms of gender. Although not a specific criterion for the participant selection, the women sufficiently outnumbered the men. There are 26 women and 8 men in the sample overall. Apart from that, given that the sector is already overrepresented by the younger cadres, there is much less diversity when it comes to the age range of the participants. While there are two respondents in their 50s and 60s, the

sample is largely skewed towards those below 40. In this sense, one could say that the interviewees typically represent the second generation of the NGO community, who primarily entered the sector around the 2010s. Some organisations they are associated with were also founded by this time; others have joined much older organisations from the post-independence period.

Overall, I spoke to 34 participants associated with 22 different organisations. Even though, as mentioned earlier, sometimes one person could have been linked to other organisations as well. Major organisations in Tbilisi were identified based on prior familiarity with the context, as well as information emerging from the interviews with laypeople and NGO representatives themselves. For the participant selection process, I typically relied on organisational websites and contacted the potential respondents via indicated contact details. For confidentiality reasons snowballing method was applied only minimally in this sample. In some cases, I made use of my networks and recruited participants with whom I already had some prior familiarity. As for Gori, which I was less familiar with, I identified 5 organisations (one from the nearby village) and related participants. While Gori-based laypeople mostly remembered Tbilisi organisations when asked about NGOs, these interviews were not particularly helpful in selecting organisations in Gori. I identified and reached them through my contacts, as well as with the help of a designated web portal that lists Georgian civil society organisations in different regions (CSO Georgia 2022). From these organisations, I recruited 7 participants. It is important to once again emphasise that the organisations were used to help me in the identification of the respondents, rather than were treated as objects of analysis itself.

Given that the participants coming from the active part of the NGO sector were secured both in Tbilisi and Gori, I took a more relaxed approach, following how the fieldwork

unfolded. For example, I included more activism-oriented participants, distinguishing themselves from an "NGO guy" that fitted into the emerging theme of internal distinctions. To involve diverse experiences, I also spoke to two participants associated with hardly or nominally functioning organisations in Tbilisi, access to which was provided through my personal networks. At times I relied on the opportunistic sampling method when the researcher makes use of an unanticipated opportunity to interview someone who might be of interest in the study (Bryman 2012). For instance, in the sample, I further included an overseas volunteer temporarily based in one of the organisations, whom I accidentally came across during the fieldwork period. While she was not necessarily someone I intended to speak to in the scope of this research, I thought the outsider perspectives would in fact enrich the study and asked her for the interview. On another occasion, the participant whom I recruited as a layperson, turned out to be a former volunteer in smaller diversity and tolerance-oriented organisation and displayed strong self-identification with the NGO community overall. Consequently, during the interview I switched to the questions I had in mind for the NGO representatives, I coded the interview accordingly and moved her into the sample of NGO representatives.

4.3.1.2. Laypeople

As the laypeople, I refer to those participants from Georgia's population who are not engaged in non-governmental organisations as employees, interns, or volunteers and rather look at them from outside. Overall, I spoke to 39 participants. The main criteria I adopted to target them were in terms of geographic location and age. At the same time, I ensured that the participants are diversified in terms of class and gender.

As in the case of the sample for the NGO community, I interviewed people from Tbilisi and Gori, including those who come from its surrounding villages. While the laypeople interviews were conducted first, the selection of Gori per se was elaborated in line with the above sampling of NGO representatives. It was to guarantee that besides the opinions of the capital inhabitants where most NGOs are situated, regional and rural perspectives and experiences are also presented. In total, I managed to speak to 26 people from Tbilisi and 13 people from Gori municipality, both from urban (6) and rural (7) areas.

Another main criterion was the participants' age. All participants I interviewed were above 18. Age diversification was crucial when selecting the participants. Some people have grown up in the country NGOs were already part of, for others, it was not so. So, I wanted to make sure that people of diverse ages and corresponding experiences participate in the study: those who went through socialisation in the Soviet Union, those who went through socialisation during the transitional period (both prior to and after independence), and those who went through socialisation in independent Georgia. I tried their ratio to be more or less balanced in the sample: 15 participants are in the 18-35 age group, 11 participants are in the 36-45 (transitional) age group and finally, there are 13 participants in the 46 – 65 age range.

Hearing people of diverse class backgrounds was also very important as issues they care about can be different. Class backgrounds were identified based on participants telling me about themselves, their subjective evaluation of how they live compared to others and their occupations. The sample includes diverse people from those engaged in creative and technology fields, entrepreneurship, etc. to those involved in manual labour and service spheres, as well as the unemployed and pensioners.

Finally, I ensured that both men and women are represented in the sample. In total, I spoke to 17 men and 22 women. They were more or less equally distributed along the age

categories, except the older group, where the women quite outnumber the men. Among those older than 45, I managed to interview 3 men and 10 women, as the men often shied away from participating in the research.

To identify the participants, I relied on a combination of purposive, snowball and convenience sampling methods (Bryman 2012). I first started looking for them by spreading the word about the research through my contacts both in Tbilisi and Gori and spoke to anyone expressing interest in the study. As the younger segment turned out to be the most enthusiastic, the sample soon became disproportionately skewed toward them. To balance it, I went on looking for people more purposefully with the criteria in mind. Apart from the snowball sampling method and the personal networks that helped me share the information to find relevant participants, I also recruited the respondents from different sites, like the park and bus station. It is also important to add that the NGO sector was not a topic particularly close to participants' everyday lives. Consequently, I also got a few refusals as potential respondents felt they did not have much to talk about.

4.3.1.3. The donor representatives

In the last stage to further contextualise previously gained data, I conducted interviews with the representatives from foreign donor entities. Relying on purposive sampling, I identified active donors in the field involving bilateral and multilateral entities, as well as international private foundations. I used publicly available contact details on official websites to contact the local offices and was typically redirected to the relevant person. Where possible, I contacted the responsible person directly. At times personal networks were also applied to recruit the participants. Due to the relatively limited number of major

donors, I planned to conduct 10 interviews in total. In the end, I managed to interview 8 participants. Three of them were local representatives of the donor entities, while five of them were from overseas.

See Appendix 1, 2, and 3 for the pseudonymised list of the participants.

4.3.2. The data collection

In the data collection process, I relied on semi-structured in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviewing is a common method in qualitative research for a reason. Compared to the strictly standardised interview technique, it allows flexibility for the researcher and the emergence of unanticipated new themes. Depending on the concrete situation, the questions might be asked in a different order during the interview or certain questions might deserve a little more attention than the rest. At the same time, along with permitting spontaneity, the interview still revolves around the priorly prepared interview guide. Because of this, the interviews maintain a similar focus and are to some extent comparable (Brinkmann 2018; Bryman 2012).

I prepared three separate interview guides in advance, aimed at each target group (see Appendix 4, 5, 6). Having the research questions in mind, the instrument was designed to cover a range of themes in a more general sense. The interviews with laypeople were structured around their information and engagement with NGOs, perceptions of the NGO sector and its community, their relevance for them, and important issues in Georgia generally. On the other hand, during the interviews with NGO representatives, we discussed how they ended up in the sector and how it affected them, their perspectives on desired social change, laypeople, donor policies, Europeanisation, and internal discrepancies in the sector. Lastly, the interviews with the donors focused on the donor

community and its priorities, as well as their thoughts on the NGO sector in Georgia. The initial guides prepared before starting the fieldwork were slightly amended responding to the emergent data. I also relied on further prompts based on what participants said, including the field notes from the previous interviews.

The extensive fieldwork was carried out in 2019-2020. I conducted the first interview on 15.08.2019, and the last one - on 25.11.2020. The interviews with laypeople and NGO representatives took place in August-December 2019. As described above, I interviewed these target groups in separate stages, starting with the laypeople. However, to fit in the timeline, there was some overlap between the stages. The donor representatives were interviewed later, throughout September-November 2020. While these interviews were anticipated in 2019 as well, the recruitment of people associated with the top NGOs took longer than I expected. Despite being very welcoming when I got in touch regarding the research, their busy and hard-to-schedule workdays often made it hard to plan the interviews in advance. At the same time, the fieldwork coincided with ongoing demonstrations for electoral reform and such a politically tense period further affected their timetables. After December 2019, I went back to the UK and returned to Georgia only later considering the Covid-related crisis. Consequently, the donor interviews were conducted after one term, in September-November 2020.

Apart from these latest interviews that took place in 2020 during the pandemic, all interviews were conducted face to face, both in Tbilisi and Gori. As for the laypeople sample, our meeting places were diverse, typically depending on the participants' preferences. Usually, I visited their homes, or we met in the café over a cup of coffee. Visiting the participants' homes was considered when I shared the contact person with them, from whom they heard about the research, so no safety concerns emerged to the interviewer. There were also alternative sites as I mentioned before. For example, one

interview was conducted in an empty minivan ("Marshrutka") as the driver had some free time to talk to me. In a few cases, we spoke in the park. On the other hand, I typically visited NGO offices to talk to NGO representatives. Although a café was the second common location here as well. As Covid cases were on the rise by 2020, interviews with the donor representatives were conducted online via the Zoom platform.

Typically, the interviews lasted from 40 minutes up to an hour and a half. The majority of the participants were Georgian-speaking, so the interviews were primarily held in Georgian. Six interviews, however, were conducted in English with the overseas participants: one with the NGO-based volunteer and the rest with the portion of donor representatives.

With prior permission, all interviews were recorded via voice recorder, except one. In that case, the participant felt somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of recording our conversation and asked me to make handwritten notes instead. All participants were provided with the plain language information statement beforehand. The leaflet explained the main elements of the research, as well as the issues related to confidentiality. The participants' consent was usually obtained via a signed consent form. As the interviews with donor representatives were conducted online due to the Covid outbreak, the participants were asked to send back the scanned versions of the signed form. In a few cases, when because of their busy schedules they were unable to return it in advance, the consent was gained in a verbal form before the interview. Before the interviews began, I always repeated the information on the leaflet and the consent form and encouraged the participants to ask me any further questions. All participants knew that they could stop the interview or withdraw their interview at any time. Below, I will discuss the ethics-related issues in more detail.

4.3.3 Ethical dimension of the research

Before the fieldwork took place, the study got ethics approval from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at the University of Kent, the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research. The plain-language information leaflet, consent form, preliminary interview guides, and overseas fieldwork form were all attached to the application I submitted. The documents were prepared in the English language, while understandably, it was the Georgian version I primarily applied during the fieldwork.

The ethical considerations in the study are multifaceted, given that there is a wide range of participants, differing from each other in substantial ways. Some interviews, particularly involving donor representatives and relatively leading figures in the sector could even be termed elite interviews, loosely implying "those with close proximity to power" (Lilleker 2003: 207). On the contrary, the study also engages with diverse segments of the population, including more marginal ones, where somewhat distinct ethics-related issues emerge. In this section, I will delve into different ethical questions attached to the study and particularly distinguish several matters: positionality of the researcher in the field, power imbalances during the interview, issues related to confidentiality, and sensitive topics. Some of these issues have been considered in a formal ethics procedure, but some are more of an implicit nature that often slips our attention.

In qualitative research, it is part of the reflexive practice to pinpoint the researcher's own positionality as an insider or outsider in the field. It affects the research process – access to the participants, rapport during the interview and how things are interpreted (Bukamal 2022; Herod 1999). At the same time, given the complexity of the world and our

identities, such positioning can rarely be absolute: we share certain facets with the participants but not the others. Just to start with, I am a Georgian PhD researcher associated with a UK university, so this is already pretty much an in-between position. The involvement of different target groups in the study makes concrete positioning vis-à-vis the field even fuzzier: obviously, depending on nationality, class, or other biographical experiences I have more in common with some respondents than with others. So, positionality often cannot be fixed. As Herod (1999: 321) argues, instead it may "translocate through categories and identities, such that at some times and places the researcher might emphasise certain positionalities and identities and not others."

Apart from spending most of my life in Georgia and sharing cultural scripts with the locals, my insider positionality has been most evident during the interviews with NGO representatives. I have been linked to the sector myself with more than five years of experience in the non-profit research centre, involved in academic and applied social research. Similar research-oriented organisations and associated personnel were not the targets in the study, but I still shared a lot with my participants from the sector: I am well aware of the procedures of grant writing, reporting, NGO slang, and the values of social change that drive the sector. While I was not personally familiar with most of the participants, primarily recruited through official organisational websites, during the interview I did not particularly hide the fact that I was no stranger to the sector myself. At the same time, I also interviewed people I knew to varying degrees and thought that adding their perspectives would be valuable for the study.

Yet, despite some shared understandings, there were aspects of the NGO staff experiences I had much less in common with, ranging from the hectic work schedules to engagement with beneficiaries, or even proximity to political or other elite circles in some cases. One should add that once the sample was internally diverse, involving lawyers, interns,

activists, researchers, distinct thematic preferences, district geographic locations, etc. even the participants themselves did not completely share everything with one another. So, we can say that I was an insider to an extent only.

Such, even though ambiguous, insider position certainly contributed to a more trustful and open attitude towards participation in the study. Due to sharing a common habitat, the NGO representatives typically tended to be less guarded during the interview. For example, a few of them, whom I did not personally know, even shared some private details of their lives, which were not used in the thesis. Consequently, some participants might have had expectations for NGOs to be presented in an explicitly positive light in the research. Nevertheless, even though the critical stance adopted in the study might in fact differ from how many of them perceive the sector, my approach does not stem from the detached position. Itself a product of an insider's self-interrogation, it also retains empathy towards the participants and acknowledges their concerns and struggles.

On the contrary, I did not bring up this facet of my biography with the donor representatives and the laypeople I interviewed. If in the first case, it had the potential of translating into a better rapport, in the latter cases this might have created certain awkwardness as we were speaking about NGOs and the NGO community. When it comes to approaching elite participants, particularly among the overseas donor community, the link to the UK university might have played an important role. Even if my status was of a PhD student, they enthusiastically agreed to participate in the research and were typically very supportive. At the same time, in terms of habitus, I bore many similarities with the laypeople who can be described as urban middle class. I even shared the ways of speaking with them, addressed in chapter 6, while with other groups I remained more conscious of how I talked.

The features and social practices the researchers bring with themselves influence the fieldwork. Besides leading to rapport, they might contribute to implicit power imbalances in the field. In a way, the interview is already a power-laden process and typically in favour of the researcher. Qualitative research often prides itself on giving more voice to the participant, especially when it comes to marginalised groups (Bryman 2012). Yet the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee is never truly equal. It is the interviewer who determines the direction of the conversation, has the authority to ask questions, follows a somewhat non-obvious agenda stemming from the research questions, builds a connection with the participants strategically, and retains a monopoly on the interpretation of the data (Brinkmann 2018). Even during the elite and expert interviews, where the power dynamics instead tend to be shifted in favour of the respondent, the participants still recognise that whatever they say, will be scrutinised by the researchers later (Lancaster 2015; Morris 2009).

The power asymmetries, which this thesis already considers, have particularly played out in the laypeople sample. Establishing credentials and marking oneself as "Western" can be helpful ways to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the donor community (Ishkanian 2008). But the introduction of oneself as linked to the Western university, which was well indicated on the information sheet, instead highlights inequalities, and creates barriers when speaking to more marginalised groups; moreover, when the topic of discussion already touches upon development and Westernisation to some extent. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Western credentials are charged with high symbolic power in the Georgian context, the alumni being perceived as direct contributors to Georgia's development. This in turn creates certain expectations about what Western-associated interviewers would want to hear. They might be further perceived as holding the power to judge the interviewee and charge them with "backwardness", in some cases leading to

participant anxiety and production of socially desirable narratives. According to Bourdieu (1984) in the case of interviewer-respondent asymmetry, participants try to select from their own cultural assets whatever feels closest to the legitimate culture they think the researcher possesses. In my interviews, it can be expressed by selective choice of pro-Europeanisation discourses, as well as by confused and inconsistent narratives that are described in chapter 8.

The distance was further increased by introducing official ethics documents as part of the interview, such as a consent form to sign. This turned what could have been more of a relaxed conversation into a somewhat formal procedure with bureaucratic aspects. While no problems emerged in signing it, many participants in the laypeople segment did not even see the point to do so. This is a double-edged sword issue. Such bureaucratic procedures are in fact important to ensure that the respondents know what they are participating in and what will happen to their data. It is better than nothing. But at the same time, as argued, ethics procedures that come from Western universities and reflect rights-based and individualistic approaches might lack the same legitimacy in other contexts and communities, remaining rather a superficial form of protecting the participant (Israel 2018).

In a more general sense, the ethical concern also emerges in relation to what extent the study actually gives a voice to relatively marginal groups it has recruited for the research. Even if I tried to gain insights from the laypeople first, further refining the sample of NGO representatives based on their opinions, my research still has a very top-down approach. Instead of exploring different popular protests, for example, it puts NGO representatives at its centre and is focused on how they are perceived, embraced, or resisted by different segments of the population. Such an approach already set an agenda for an interview, yet the NGO sector was not something a number of people, for example

in Gori municipality village and to an extent in Tbilisi, even deeply cared about. It was not part of their everyday lives, and it was not something they could effortlessly talk about. So, despite them consciously agreeing on the interview, at times I felt that the topic was rather imposed on the participants. While I did try to incorporate their own concerns in the interview process, the conversation was still largely NGO-theme-driven. So even if I aim at problematising the power asymmetries in the thesis, there is still a risk of implicitly reproducing the same asymmetries in the research practice itself: portraying the local population in a rather passive light, or further echoing different orientalist narratives in the analysis (See Beurkens et al. 2022).

Whether the study can practically and immediately contribute to those who have kindly participated in the research is further questionable even in the case of the interviewees from the NGO sector and the donor community. Some of these groups directly emphasised that they got interested in the study in hopes that I would find the technical problems in the aid sector and in the end offer practical solutions to fix them. For the Gori participants, for example, the problem was the disparity between stronger Tbilisi-based and regional organisations. In such cases, I had to be explicit that the study takes a rather sociological direction and might not be able to produce any concrete practical solutions immediately.

The interviews with all three target groups were confidential to create an open environment for the participants to speak their minds without any concern. Confidentiality is often a particularly crucial concern for the elite participants (Lancaster 2015). While it allowed the donor representatives to speak at ease and express their personal opinions, the protection of identity was deemed particularly important in regard to NGO representatives: in case they voiced some criticism towards the donor agencies their organisation largely depends on, it was important to remain unidentifiable.

I transcribed the recordings myself and kept the data in a password-protected folder on my personal laptop. All participants have been pseudonymised during the data analysis process and none of the organisations has been mentioned by name. Despite utilising some background information and experiences of the interviewed NGO representatives in the thesis, I omitted or generalised the identifiable details in their stories. While their educational backgrounds are more openly mentioned, it is due to the commonness of these professions in the sector. Relatively outlier professions in my sample are united under broader labels, such as "social sciences" for example. To make sure that participants are not identified, I also decided not to name the Gori municipality village where I conducted the interviews, including with one of the NGO (community organisation) representatives.

Nevertheless, I was also frank with the respondents that given that the core part of the sector is quite small in Tbilisi, moreover, the sector is even smaller in Gori, there is no absolute guarantee that someone might not be indirectly identifiable, even if I try my best. This particularly refers to the outlier experiences and ideas that are voiced in the study. Nevertheless, if this somehow happens, I believe no actual harm will be caused to the participants or their image. While more critical opinions emerging inside the sector that are presented in the thesis have not been previously researched, these ideas are typically expressed openly in the public sphere. At the same time, having to deal with already extensive material with limited resources, I did not focus much on NGO-donor relations per se to be able to put concrete networks at risk, instead making NGO-population relations a priority.

Finally, given the research aims, the emergence of personally sensitive or traumatic experiences capable of upsetting the participant in the interview process was neither anticipated nor typically occurred. While some biographical elements were touched upon

in the study, usually it was more of a discussion about the specific educational and professional trajectory that led the participant to the sector. On the other hand, I was interested in the interviewees' perspectives and opinions in a more general sense that did not involve references to their private lives. Nonetheless, engagement with the NGO sector is not just a career path but often involves personal experiences and values. Few participants shared private biographical details of their lives more openly; they also spoke of emotional exhaustion as part of working in the human rights organisation and its toll on mental health. While I never intruded in the respondents' lives with too personal questions, these themes were raised by the participants themselves. This further shows the multifaceted dimension of the sector and reveals the very personal emotional struggles of the people involved.

4.3.4. Data Analysis

All the recordings collected during the fieldwork were transcribed, coded and later analysed via thematic analysis. Below, I will go through each stage in more detail.

I transcribed the recordings manually and prepared for the coding. Coding is usually a vital first step in qualitative data analysis (Bryman 2012). It is the stage, when the researcher carefully follows the raw transcript and differentiates its sections by attaching distinct, at times overlapping, descriptive labels. To make this process more efficient, I relied on the Nvivo 12 Pro software program - one of the authoritative software in qualitative data analysis. As the interviews were conducted with three different target groups, three Nvivo project files were created for each group and the data was coded separately. My first attempt was to incorporate everything under one project in the programme, but given that the interview guides were different, the overlap among the

codes was only marginal. After the merging of the distinct interviews ended in the complication of the data organisation process, I later created three independent projects and code systems.

My approach towards the coding was relatively more theory-influenced in the case of NGO representatives due to being the main focus in the study, than in donor and lay people samples. The very first codes I created were extremely broad and borrowed from the theory, such as *"capital", "habitus", "doxa",* or *"social trajectory".* Each code was further divided into lower-level codes emergent from the data. For example, *"capital*" was first divided into cultural, social and symbolic capitals and later into other relevant sub-codes: particular professions, education, skills, different kinds of networks, etc. Much of this information was simultaneously coded as *"social trajectory"* - another broad code. In that case, the participant biographies were more coherently presented. As part of the working process, based on this code, I additionally schematically outlined educational-professional biographies in the Microsoft Word document for each participant. This helped me to better visualise the patterns of how people ended up in the NGO sector.

In the same way *"habitus"* included the codes related to the shared values in the sector, roles NGO representatives associate themselves with, linguistic particularities, etc.; *"doxa"* particularly incorporated the codes about ideas on Georgia's further development, its geopolitical dimension, and so on. Nevertheless, not all basic codes were coming from theory. For example, code such as *"experiences in the sector"* focused on various frustrations or achievements NGO representatives spoke about or the code *"NGOs and population"* included a number of lower-level codes wherever the population was concerned. Different broader codes were created for the data referring to the donors, Georgian government, West, Russia, etc. This way, I attempted to make the link between

the data and the theory from the very beginning, while at the same time leaving space for whatever came up in the interviews, not neatly fitting into theoretical concepts.

The coding strategy for the donor and laypeople interviews was more inductive and emergent from the data. For example, the typical major codes in donor interviews included "donor priorities", "opinions on NGO representatives", "relationship among the donor community", etc. In the laypeople interviews, broad codes such as "NGO themes", "NGOs' role towards population", "Georgia's development", "connection to NGOs", etc. were identified. Although the general code such as *social trajectory* was also introduced in the latter sample to incorporate the short biographies of the participants.

From the extensive amount of data, not everything ended up in the final thesis. Instead, I rather focused on the most significant themes that emerged from the interviews and were helpful in answering the research questions. For example, unsurprisingly, the ideas referring to development, Europeanisation, and democratisation came up as overarching themes, touched upon by all participants in some way. The geopolitical West-Russia dichotomy was closely related to the above. How NGO representatives think of themselves and the general population, or how laypeople think about NGOs/NGO representatives are closely linked to these ideas. At the same time, coming from a theoretical standpoint, the perspectives expressed should be analysed in relation to agents' objective position in social space (or the field). Fitting into the same themes of development and modernisation, here I particularly focused on different forms of cultural capital the participants possess or think are appreciated in the sector. A number of themes were left aside or partially incorporated in the analysis, such as social capital, relations with donor agencies, relations with the government, particularities of the labour in the sector, and so on. The relevant data from the donor and laypeople interviews were employed to complement and "speak to" the above themes identified in the NGO sample.

To further analyse the data, I applied the method of thematic analysis, considered one of the most foundational and accessible data analysis methods (Braun & Clarke 2006; Bryman 2012). It does not come attached with concrete theoretical or epistemological positions, so can be comfortably applied in any kind of qualitative research across the disciplines. In thematic analysis, the researchers identify, analyse and report thematic patterns emergent from the coded data. They actively engage with it, detect, select, and observe the links between different themes. Besides epistemological and theoretical elasticity, the thematic analysis also allows flexibility in the data analysis process itself. The analysis can range between being more theory-driven or more inductive; it can be focused on the semantic aspect of the data (content) or take a more interpretative turn, characteristic of the constructivist positions (Braun & Clarke 2006). Given that the data I analyse includes information about both more objective positions, trajectories and related experiences on one hand, and constructed perspectives and the ways of classifying social reality – on the other, such flexibility becomes especially important. Consequently, in the analysis I fluctuate between focusing on the surface-level content of the data and more in-depth engagement in what was said, linking it to the social and political context.

As the linguistic gap between the NGO community and the laypeople itself emerged as one of the themes when coding the data, in one chapter I draw particular attention to the language of the NGO sector. From the Bourdieusian perspective, the ways of speaking – accents, pronunciations, words used, sentence structures, etc.- do matter, as the language is deeply classed (Bourdieu 1991). The way we speak can be understood as linguistic capital which reflects a concrete position in social space (field), tends to be embodied as habitus and becomes a subject of the struggle for symbolic profit. Concerning NGO representatives, I focus on more directly observable English words and phrases that are randomly incorporated into Georgian speech, as well as the usage of specific NGO slang

and sentence structures characteristic of the sector. While the participants typically reflect on language-related matters by themselves, the thematic analysis was helpfully applied here as well. Nevertheless, sometimes it is complemented by examples of concrete utterances when the respondents use Anglicised language in practice quite unconsciously.

4.3.5. Translation

How the above speech particularities of the participants are reflected in the thesis further takes us to the issue of translation, which is a quite challenging task for the researchers who conduct the fieldwork in one language and write-up – in another. It is important to make sure that the meanings implied by the participants are grasped and preserved in another language as precisely as possible. Considering the language differences, in word-to-word translation, the meanings are often lost, as they become unrecognisable for the English-speaking reader. So, it is careful interpretative work that has to be done in the process of translation to ensure that the data presented remains valid (Van Nes et al. 2010).

Given that the majority of transcripts were already in Georgian, the early stage of analysis, such as identifying the themes and seeking the patterns in data was also done in the Georgian language. The final analysis was written directly in English, where I only translated the quotes to support the narrative in empirical chapters. Complete translation of all transcripts was not considered to be reasonable for two reasons: first, to make sense of the data it is more practical to work with what was precisely uttered and associated meanings in the original language. Second, the overall translation was even technically impossible due to a large number of interviews and limited resources.

While translating the quotes I tried to maintain both meanings and the linguistic styles of the participants as accurately as I could. First of all, I wanted to emphasise that like elsewhere, the Georgian spoken language also differs from the formal academic language and often some words have been shortened or mispronounced by the participants. To show this I typically rely on grammatical contractions in the quotes, for example, I prefer to use "don't" instead of "do not" when translating. This does not necessarily reflect the Georgian grammar where there are no such contractions at all but gives more of an informal aura to how things were said. Nevertheless, this still does not reveal much about the internal differences between the participants, as reflected in their speech: accents, styles, etc.

In the thesis, I drew particular attention to Anglicised Georgian speech, typically characteristic of the relatively privileged cosmopolitan social stratum in Georgia. To highlight such linguistic differences among the participants, I left the English words or phrases incorporated in Georgian speech intact and emphasised them throughout the quotes. For example: "*It's assumed* [Eng.] that whoever listens will get it". "It's assumed" is uttered in English here, but the rest is in Georgian. At times, English words take on Georgian suffixes in the speech, but they are still not established loanwords. To avoid confusion, I rather maintain them in their English form. For example: "because of the Rose revolution we *skipped* [Eng.] certain things, in my opinion." What the participant said here exactly was *davskipet.* Such a word does not exist in the Georgian language and is not recognised as a loan either, rather it is an English word "skip" combined with a Georgian prefix and suffix. Widely applied and recognised loanwords, such as *kompiuteri* [computer], *supermarketi* [supermarket], etc. that are less linked to the class positions, were not given attention and treated as other Georgian words.

I tried my best to preserve the original meanings behind the words voiced by the participants. Where possible, I stuck to close-to-text translation. Where metaphors or phrases were involved, I first tried to look for similar ones in the English language. If I struggled to find it, I used other words to describe the meaning. Besides, there are certain words in the Georgian language, the meaning of which is important for the thesis, but they are not quite precisely translatable into the English language. Where preserving the Georgian word was utterly important, I did so. For instance, the meaning behind *bneli*, referring to "non-enlightened" or "non-educated" is explained in the text and is typically used in its Georgian form. At the same time, the issue of translation and meaning-making is also briefly touched upon in chapter 6, in relation to the terminology favoured in the NGO sector, borrowed from Anglo-American social and political sciences.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter describes the methodology of the research.

First, I point out the ontological and epistemological assumptions that the thesis subscribes to. I contextualise the theoretical framework in the critical realist philosophy of science, which argues that reality is complex, multifaceted, interconnected, and exists even beyond how we experience and speak about it. In terms of epistemology, this tradition provides the flexibility of reconciling interpretation with an explanation.

In the next section, I describe the research methods I applied to collect and analyse the data. I conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews to access the participants' biographies and perspectives. To grasp the interrelations between NGO representatives and laypeople, interviews were conducted with three target groups: NGO representatives, donor representatives, and laypeople. In the section about data collection, I discuss how

participants were selected and recruited for the study, and what were the ethical considerations in the course of the research.

Next, I turn to data analysis. The data was coded in the Nvivo 12 Pro software and analysed using thematic analysis. Finally, I discuss the translation-related challenges in the research and what decisions were made to retain the styles and meanings behind what participants talked about.

The following chapter is an opening empirical chapter that focuses on a specific kind of cultural capital that is particularly appreciated in the sector and that bears Western influence. It also prepares the foundation for the upcoming chapters.

Chapter 5

Western-marked cultural capital: its symbolic value and unequal distribution

5.1. Introduction

In the early 2000s, approximately a decade after Georgia's independence, Shalva Ramishvili – by then a young reform-minded producer of the popular political cartoon "Dardubala" - publicly voiced his idea of the desirable traits for Georgia's following president. Instead of Shevardnadze, the former Soviet party official that his cartoon satirised, Ramishvili wished for someone fluent in English and computer – the skills that came to symbolise modernity in independent Georgia (Nodia 2005: 48; also see Manning 2007). Soon after, Georgia elected Mikheil Saakashvili as a new president - the 36-year-old US-taught lawyer, who surrounded himself with people from the same milieu, many of them previously associated with the NGOs.

The novel government was praised as a "new, Western-educated generation of rulers, relatively free from the Soviet mindset and with closer ties with the West" replacing "political elite entrenched in the Soviet mentality, corrupt, and violators of constitutional norms" (Nodia 2005a as cited in Brisku 2013: 176). Beyond the whole set of reforms, pro-Western modernisation also implied transforming the post-Soviet population accordingly. In the scope of such transformation teaching the English language, or to quote the president - the quest for a "linguistic […] revolution" in Georgia became a particularly crucial issue (Civil Georgia 2010; Gvalia et al. 2011). Additionally, aiming at socialising the local students in the West, the state introduced competitive scholarship

opportunities for Georgian applicants admitted to universities abroad (European Commission 2012).

As noted previously, the NGO sector was already heavily associated with the aforementioned appreciated resources and as a relatively recent popular survey reveals, still continues to be so (CRRC-Georgia 2017; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009). The symbolic and practical value of such cultural baggage has been further evident in the interviews with the NGO representatives I conducted. Borrowing from Zarycki (2014: 16) I consider them as varieties of Western-marked cultural capital, as he argues that the "strong states at the core of the world system have a particular ability to mark their resources […] with a status of symbolic capital making them attractive and respected beyond the borders of their native states".

The interviews also show that the sector, particularly its more prominent part, is further associated with the limited range of professional backgrounds. The strong emphasis on human rights, good governance and rule of law quite naturally welcomes lawyers primarily, as well as those from political and social science backgrounds. While a profession as itself cannot be regarded as Western-marked inherently, the relative dominance of selected ones in the given context surely suggests their usefulness in regards to the idea of teleological progress the sector tends to revolve around. Moreover, after the nationalist cultural elite-driven and the former Soviet nomenklatura-driven post-independence governments, the lawyers and the IR/political scientists have been quite well-positioned in the political field (Tukvadze 2021). The increased prestige of these professions, presumably due to association with the upward social mobility and production of the elite cadres, is also well reflected in the increased popularity of these professions among Georgian students (GeoStat 2011-2021).

Because of their distinguished role in the transition project, such occupations can be seen almost in the same light as English language or European/US credentials in this particular context: i.e. in relation to external symbolic domination (Zarycki 2014). If the increased importance of Anglophonic skills and the Western diplomas are explicitly defined by increased Western influence in the post-Soviet period, so are the prestigious professions of the time – just in a more subtle way. As the data indicates, instead of direct linkage, in the NGO sector these ones are associated with the capability of transporting highly esteemed Western political ideas and putting them into practice locally. Consequently, despite some distinctiveness, I also add the professions dominating the sector to the list of Western-marked cultural capital here.

Following this logic, in this chapter, I will bring together three different (though often intertwined) facets of cultural capital people in the NGO sector are often characterised by, helping their smoother involvement in its predominant segment: 1. Compatible professional backgrounds and consequent skillset; 2. Western education; and finally, 3. English language as an essential linguistic capital that people largely depend on in their work environment. These assets can be regarded as both institutionalised and embodied (Bourdieu 1986). On one hand, they are typically proven by official credentials indicated in the CVs and taken at face value during job interviews. On the other hand, they can be conceptualised in terms of embodied cultural capital which overlaps the very concept of habitus: it is translated into predispositions, schemes and mindset, making individuals feel naturally entrenched in the development-oriented environment of the NGO sector.

Given the unequal distribution of such a combination of cultural capital, it is safe to assume that NGOs seem to be better reserved for the relatively privileged portion of society. Elene, one of the interviewed Tbilisi NGO representatives even describes the sector as a “charity project” for Georgia’s middle class, providing them with jobs and

preventing them from starvation. At the same time, the Western-marked capitals and accompanying dispositions that come with higher symbolic value further contribute to the legitimacy of their perspectives. Nevertheless, such power is not distributed equally even among the people working in the NGO sector.

This chapter is mainly based on interviews with the NGO representatives complemented by the data gained from the donor representatives and the laypeople. Bearing in mind the factual educational backgrounds of the NGO community I talked to, as well as their general observations shared with me during the interview, I will first discuss how particular disciplines and related frameworks appear to hijack the major part of the NGO sector, turning it into the job like any other, though with the value-based, somewhat missionary strive for Georgia's development in a particular way. *What one studied* will be then followed by a discussion of *where one studied*, emphasising the symbolic power of education gained in Western states. Last but not the least, I will discuss the special role of the English language, probably the most important requirement for potential NGO workers.

5.2. The NGO-friendly educational backgrounds

Georgia's NGO representatives are usually associated with "highly skilled and energetic professionals" who typically start out with internships rather than volunteering (Pokleba 2016: 238). Increased professionalisation of the nonprofit representatives is not exclusive to post-socialist space only (See Anheier et al. 2003; Banks et. al. 2014; Hwang & Powell 2009). Even in the core Western states, there is a certain demand for management skills alongside some discipline-specific expertise, relevant to the area of interest. In Georgia,

however, where even the institutionalisation of such organisations was itself first and foremost triggered by the bureaucratic demands coming from donors, the key thematic areas, frameworks, and preferred skillset have been largely predetermined (Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009).

Yet, it would be wrong to assume that the donor-prioritised themes have been simply imposed on locals with no agency whatsoever. In fact, these ideas were very much welcomed by the local intellectuals and the portion of the younger generation, striving for change. Even though it was mostly already politically active people who primarily got involved and made the sector in the beginning, some pressures towards compatible knowledge and expertise can still be noticed (Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009). In this regard emergence of the Western-educated "young reformer" lawyers who soon became the darlings of the donor agencies is well observed by Waters (2004).

The lawyers' contribution has been quite fitting with the general aims of NGO-directed foreign aid towards post-Soviet countries - democratisation and consequent transitioning to the market economy, as well as nurturing civil society itself. The lawyers - more precisely, the "jurists" referring to all law graduates in Georgia - have been the key actors in enabling democracy by protecting citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms against the state; enabling a market economy by defending property rights; and finally enabling the civil society (Gordon 2010; Zullo 2005). Setting themselves in opposition with an older generation of advocates, gathered at legal consultation bureaus with the capitals embedded in devalued Soviet structures, the earliest most successful NGOs were largely made up of these reformist lawyers who promoted civil liberties, provided free legal consultations for the population, and ensured the state complied with the laws (Waters 2004).

The fields being homologous, younger lawyers were sided by similar-minded people from other professional backgrounds. Journalists, for example, including those working at TV stations, turned out to be the close allies of NGOs focusing on media freedom and human rights, as well as exposing electoral fraud and mobilising people against Soviet nomenklatura-driven government in the 2000s (Angley 2013). With a raising focus on national foreign policy, influential political science and foreign policy-oriented think tanks have emerged, contributing to Georgia's approximation with the West (Khelashvili 2020). Many from this cohort emerged as new expert-intellectuals, dedicated to the values of democracy and market economy who defined themselves versus older intelligentsia situated in traditional academic institutions, Soviet-born artistic associations, and state-dependent media (Nodia 2002).

The association between NGO work and professional backgrounds remains even more relevant nowadays, particularly in the case of Tbilisi-based leading NGOs. The participants of the research, who are typically in their 30s or early 40s and made into the NGO sector later, usually went through meritocratic job interviews or sometimes followed their university professors into NGOs. A number of these people see the sector as a place of professional growth where they make use of at least a transferrable skillset acquired at the universities.

"Why would physicists, chemists or those with medical education even be interested in NGO?" – rhetorically asks Mari, who is temporarily associated with one of the Tbilisi NGOs and holds a degree in journalism herself. The other participants almost unanimously agree with her. In their opinion, you typically meet people with degrees in law, social and political sciences, or humanities in these organisations, not quite those that Mari mentions above. Besides, according to the interviewees, it is mostly lawyers that can be considered as an "archetypal case" (Irakli, Tbilisi NGO). They tend to be more

associated with relatively stronger and more prominent organisations. Simultaneously, they fit into a wide range of thematic areas donors prioritise - from fighting against corruption to fighting for women's rights. This peculiarity is also reflected in the sample: while interviewees are not selected based on educational background, those who are associated with the leading NGOs often hold degrees in law.

IR/political science is another widely represented discipline in the sample, though they have a more diverse positioning: some are linked to stronger organisations and have stable positions, while others precariously freelance changing the projects and NGOs. What they work on is similarly varied from thematic contributions to managerial/administrative; themes on the other hand might likewise stretch from foreign policy and good governance to gender equality or minorities. "It just so happens that people who graduate and choose this faculty or speciality (IR) are in fact quite distinguished people." – Nika, from one of the leading NGOs, says, - "They are more interested in such issues, and especially, they are good at research." He emphasises that the cluster of Georgia's highly demanded university programs, which IR and law are part of, somewhat naturally selects smart students who later end up in NGOs.

> If we compare the student distribution and their priorities at Unified National Exams [university entrance exams] - what the best students apply for and the specialities they opt for, it naturally happens that they choose either economy, business administration, international relations, or the law. Intellectually distinguished people generally go in this direction. Accordingly, you find mostly them in such organisations. (Nika, Tbilisi NGO).

Here we see the typical classifying activity that positively distinguishes professions which are perceived to be directly at the heart of democratisation or market economy (such as business administration or economy in the latter case) – these people are regarded to be somewhat naturally brighter than the others. In a parallel way, this correspondingly

classifies NGO representatives as "intellectually distinguished" too, considering that among them, as the participants indicate, the lawyers and the IR/political scientists seem to be overrepresented. This kind of self-classification logically implies the existence of the opposite others who cannot measure up, thus naturalising NGO representatives' role as modernisers at the vanguard of the country's development.

Because of their relevance with Georgia's transition project, people with law and IR/political science backgrounds are usually seen as the main drivers of the sector. As participants also notice, the more central positioning of the lawyers could be due to their key role in the promotion of human rights and the rule of law in Georgia and consequently their irreplaceable significance for the donor projects. "Lawyers very often share these values",- Eka says, although instantly stresses on generational frictions described in the beginning - "depends on age, however. I don't mean old generation lawyers" (Eka, Tbilisi NGO). Megi, her fellow lawyer, also sees her profession "as an instrument to fight against injustice, to defend human rights" (Megi, Tbilisi NGO). Besides the commitment to the human rights framework, the provision of legal services, and representing someone in court strictly requires institutionalised cultural capital such as legal education and credentials. Going hand in hand with the recognised qualifications, embodied subject knowledge is directly applied "to provide real help to the real people" (Eka, Tbilisi NGO).

On the other hand, a "diploma might not play 100% role in practice and somewhat become a part of formality" for IR/political science specialists who often do not particularly work in the scope of their discipline (Irakli, Tbilisi NGO). "We have had people with IR and political science disciplines," – Irakli mentions, –"but so to say, their job was not quite directly related to their professions. Our organisation does not really cover IR. It does cover a lot of things, but not that." Yet these specialists gain extra

advantage as they are associated with heightened consideration of political and geopolitical matters. Not only do they promote good governance, anti-corruption, participation, etc. and this way contribute to democratisation and market economy but also play a key role in ensuring pro-Western foreign policy and/or countering Russian influence – considered to be an existential matter for state security. While this can be generalised on the main bulk of the NGO sector, a number of policy papers and reports on the latter issue in fact come from political science and IR-dominated think tanks, not particularly targeted in this study.

Beka's story, who is a young law student, is quite telling of the power of these two disciplines in the sector. Engaged in various NGO-related awareness-raising activities as a teenager, he always thought of staying in this realm. When the time came for applying to the university, he faced a tough choice between two career options, both associated with NGOs: political science "because obviously politics and the NGO sector are very much related" and the law he also had an eye for. Seeing himself in the sector for the future, finally, he decided based upon practicality and opted for rather specialised legal education.

> I was also thinking about political science because I love politics and history so much. I've always adored history. But then I decided I will just read the history like the rest. You read and you understand but the law is different. You cannot learn the law just by reading. Even we, the law students, barely comprehend what we read. It's hard to have a high-level understanding without a legal education. (Beka, Gori NGO).

As Natia's experience shows, education in law might be handy even when it comes to registering an organisation in the first place. Unlike her colleagues in Tbilisi leading NGOs, her small community-based peripheral organisation near Gori does not necessarily depend on professionalised staff who have sent CVs and gone through job interviews.

Yet, as her mates lacked the skills needed to register an organisation, Natia still got prioritised for the key position exactly because she could handle such legal issues easily. This time her law degree was a lucky coincidence.

Despite predominance, mentioned duo of law and political sciences are not the only popular ones in the NGO sector. During my fieldwork, I talked to people from a variety of other disciplines on the social sciences and humanities spectrum, who equally make use of embodied cultural capital and find their niches in the donor-funded NGOs. Like some IR/political science specialists, they are often involved in various research activities and produce data on topics prioritised by the donors. Not that the research areas are perceived as forced upon and undesirable, but they anyway revolve around restricted approaches and themes, where academic depth or creativity is often not particularly required. For example, despite enjoying a number of opportunities to work on issues of her scholarly interest, Elene feels her concrete academic background has been slowly fading away in this process, and fears there is a risk of not perceiving it as a profession at all one day.

> If you want to be in this particular discipline, you have to work on the given research projects, so to say. And if you are constantly attached to the others' agenda, it will drive you further and further away from it [the discipline] to the point where it is harder to get back from." (Elene, Tbilisi NGO).

As the advantage is given to data production rather than concrete disciplinary frameworks, graduates of the social and political sciences seem to be more appreciated for the shared transferrable skillset regardless of what they studied, such as higher awareness of social and political issues, research and analytical skills, etc. Holding relatively subordinate positions in the sector, social researchers are less associated with stronger democracy-oriented organisations, and some turn to freelancing practice. Many

participants I talked to have worked on a mix of thematic areas prioritised by donors, or at least in the scope of broadly defined themes. Nevertheless, the requirement for flexibility also rings true for lawyers. While specialised cultural capital is needed to navigate in the juridical and policy fields, the topics one focuses on might still vastly vary from elections to the labour code, or else, thus requiring elasticity and stretching the expertise.

On the other way around, some NGO representatives' educational backgrounds seem to have progressed and transformed in accordance with the donor-favoured themes. They have narrowed down their BAs in law and social/political sciences to more advanced degrees in human rights, development studies, EU studies, gender studies, environment studies, etc. often gained abroad. Sometimes even those few who got involved as enthusiastic activists in the first place turned to professionalisation and gained degrees in more relevant disciplines instead of the "unsuitable" profession they held before, for example in technical subjects. This in turn makes NGO representatives better equipped for the funded themes. At the same time, this contributes to further reproducing the donor agenda.

As NGOs are primarily associated with legal assistance, some interviewed laypeople likewise imply lawyers as a major group involved in NGOs; others mention social science alumni primarily in relation to the disadvantaged groups as they are expected to hold professionally acquired sensitivity to "go and help the violence victims or discriminated people" (Bacho, Tbilisi, 25). Like local laypeople, few foreign donor representatives further refer to the predominance of "academics, lawyers" in this space (Paul, Donor representative). "One of my predecessors always said,"-reminds Victor, the donor representative – "if I had studied political science in Tbilisi, I also would have set up an NGO."

While the above-mentioned professionals mostly navigate around the provision of legal services, advocacy, research, training or activism, a bit different role is played by the philologists, especially those who specialise in the English language. Thanks to the required linguistic capital they hold, they are mostly assigned to project coordination, communication with donors and project writing. This obviously does not mean that administrative activities are only reserved for the philologists, but rather emphasises what role they are mainly linked to within the NGO sector. Skewed more towards managerial professionalism, sometimes they eventually get involved in respective thematic areas of the organisation too. The role of the language specialist can be more crucial for relatively peripheral NGOs where the staff is less confident about their English skills. This has been revealed in the trajectories of the few NGO-based philologists I spoke to in frames of the research, who started the job as translators, project assistants and coordinators in the first place, both in Tbilisi and in Gori.

Special expertise being in demand, the NGO sector has unsurprisingly turned into an area where the graduates of law or social and political sciences seek their career prospects. Quite a few NGO representatives I interviewed in fact got socialised into the practical aspects of their professions in these very organisations. As students or early graduates, they attended thematic workshops or made use of the internship, volunteering (often applied synonymously with unpaid internship) and entry-level job opportunities offered. Such openings, they say, usually provide the "common route" where people start out and then further integrate into the NGO sector – either get promoted to upper-level positions in the same organisation, continue working in the others or sometimes set up their own NGOs (Dimitri, Tbilisi NGO). Nia's story is one such example:

> When I was doing my MA, they had a vacancy for an internship program in this organisation. I went through the competition - the job interview and began as an intern, a

> volunteer. I had been working as a volunteer for several months. Then the lawyer's position became vacant, and they asked me to stay as a lawyer and continue working here. (Nia, Tbilisi NGO).

Offering practice and networking opportunities, Tbilisi-based lawyer-dominated organisations have absorbed plenty of law students since the 1990s who regarded the space far more useful for their professional careers than the courses offered by impoverished universities (Waters 2004). Some lawyers I talked to also bring up knowledge-based and value-based differentiation between NGOs and the universities: first, NGOs being richer with objectified cultural capital, such as libraries the universities lacked, have been perceived as a gate towards new knowledge by the students. Second, the NGOs have been linked to the respect for equality and human rights, while the universities are remembered by conservative lecturers who "can be called neither human rights defender nor an attorney" (Nia, Tbilisi NGO). Such differentiation further fits into the already mentioned distinction by the younger NGO-based lawyers from the previous generation.

Others have made similar early career steps, such as Mari with a degree in Journalism. "I got all my experience in the NGO sector rather than in any media entity" – she tells. However, unlike law graduates or even journalists who get a lot of other opportunities outside the sector, for those holding social and political science diplomas "there was not a huge arena of employment options out there" (Inga, Tbilisi NGO). "These subjects are not necessarily useful for the business, so I cannot say I have too much of a choice" – says Khatia, one of the Tbilisi NGO representatives with a background in political science. Plus, as neither impoverished academia nor the politicised government sector seems promising, donor-funded NGOs and research institutions turn into crucial spaces for employment and early career opportunities "to gain some experience and fulfil your

ideas" (Elene, Tbilisi NGO).

The lack of choice is also a prevalent theme as Elene reflects on her path driven by two motives simultaneously: professional development and contribution to social change. In the absence of other opportunities, NGOs do provide spaces for work and activism, yet dependent on donor agenda these spaces still seem to be limiting.

> I think this is determined and defined by socio-economic and political conditions in the country. Our actions are predetermined and so, we do not have much choice. And I don't know whether mine or others' routes would have been the same if there was a choice. We could have conducted studies at the university instead of the NGO and plus we could have been volunteers engaged in activism, rather than in institutionalised activism. (Elene, Tbilisi NGO).

Despite being influenced by the donor perspectives and more open to "compatible" professions, one thing is for sure: professionalised Tbilisi-based leading NGOs that select through candidates' CVs would hardly accept someone who does not measure up to the job requirements, moreover someone with no university degree at all. All Tbilisi NGO representatives I interviewed gained their initial BA degrees at capital-based more or less prestigious universities. As not everyone grew up in Tbilisi, many participants had to migrate internally for this very reason. The chance of getting into relatively respected universities in turn is largely determined by spatial and financial inequalities: besides tuition fees, students living outside the capital face the additional financial burden of accommodation expenses, not covered by any scholarship. So compared to Tbilisians, many tend to shy away from opting for such institutions at all (Chankseliani 2012). This way, poorer segments of society come to be naturally excluded from such organisations and only acquire the role of the beneficiaries, trainees, etc. Nevertheless, it is also important to emphasise that access to university degrees itself does not mean they are

always translated into better opportunities in life later: due to structural unemployment in the country, a large portion of the same graduates still end up unemployed or at lower-skilled jobs prioritised by the local labour market (Amashukeli et al. 2017; Lomjaria & Kurkhuli 2016). In this sense, university degrees and professional affiliations while important, are not the sole kind of cultural capital that fits well with the sector.

To summarise, this section looked at how certain educational backgrounds from law to social sciences enter the NGO sector more comfortably than others. This obviously does not mean that these are the only professions one can find in NGOs, but these are the ones that appear to be the main drivers as they sit well with the aims of democratisation that the NGOs have been a large part of. These professions, especially in law, also disproportionally influence the language the NGO sector operates with, which will be discussed in the next chapter in a more detailed way. Below, I will proceed with how this type of cultural capital is further boosted by education gained in the Western states, in Europe or in the US. If the educational background is thought to be instrumental in terms of reaching Western-like liberal democracy, education gained from Western universities is associated with practical know-how based on socialisation in the countries Georgia tries to mimic.

5.3. Significance of the Western education

NGO staff has been traditionally seen in close connection with Western education. This is mentioned in all interviewed groups – laypeople, donors, and NGO representatives themselves. In fact, almost half (14 participants) of the interviewed NGO representatives have gained their formal education (mostly MAs) in Europe or the US or at least have had short-term exchange experiences at Western universities. A number of them, who studied

for a postgraduate degree, also returned with internship experiences, sometimes from prestigious world-famous organisations.

Characteristic for the Tbilisi-based segment primarily, this kind of cultural capital is not exclusively skewed towards those in key positions in the sample. The foreign educated can be found at both prominent as well as less prominent Tbilisi organisations, holding diverse positions from managerial to rather precarious. Nevertheless, Western education deserves particular attention due to the symbolic value it carries in itself, and as the interviews with NGO representatives and laypeople reveal, is much associated with the NGO sector.

At the same time, Western education is not exclusive to the sector and is highly esteemed in the field of power as well. We can observe certain homology in the political field itself, dominated by the Western-educated (Tukvadze et al. 2021). Various other fields also conform to this logic – the diplomas gained either in the US or in Europe typically tend to get translated into relatively privileged employment opportunities in Georgia (Chankseliani 2016). In a practical sense studying abroad is typically seen as related to English language proficiency, distinguished skillset, and foreign networks, while in a symbolic sense, it is seen as a precondition of personal and cultural advancement (Chankseliani 2016; Lezhava & Amashukeli 2015; Tsuladze et al. 2021). For example, Chankseliani (2018: 282) regards studying in Western states as the "apprenticeships in democracy" where Georgian students learn in practice how democratic institutions work and come back home as contributing citizens, utilising what they learned. In the same way, in popular discourse, it is thought that Georgian students are being equipped with the "ready guidelines" there about what should and should not be done about the country (Lela, Tbilisi, 40). So as the state strives to catch up with the West, merely the fact of going through secondary socialisation in the Western setting turns the alumni into far

more desirable citizens in Georgia, as some kind of missionaries even. In this segment, I will first focus on the opinions and experiences of the NGO community in this regard, continuing with the perceptions of the laypeople.

The NGO sector is not the only place where Western-educated alumni are found but it is certainly perceived to be the best place for them – most compatible with the values they supposedly come back with. In the words of Nia, holding the foreign diploma herself, "Western education usually helps people to form adequate values, and those who return in this country [Georgia] usually find their place in non-governmental organisations, because their views are adequate for these organisations" (Nia, Tbilisi NGO). Thus, living abroad should inevitably lead to returning home with "adequate values" to an extent that Nia thinks any deviation from this norm must be caused by some personal traumas. In her opinion, "typically such people [who deviate] do not work in NGOs; in contrary, they can be seen in politics holding the positions where they can act upon their ideas." In this sense, there is a clear differentiation between Western-educated political party elites who somewhat abuse what they should have obtained abroad and NGO representatives who have truly internalised the Western experience.

Such hierarchy of "local" and "Western", built in what Zarycki (2014) calls "dependence doxa", is constantly legitimised and naturalised by the interviewed participants. As cultural and normative "upscaling" is the key part of gaining education abroad, the alumni are associated with openness, tolerance, and appreciation of democracy and human rights. Following the same logic, Georgian-educated Ana from one of the Tbilisi NGOs is convinced that when it comes to minority rights, it is socialisation in the West that turns people more accepting of non-normative sexualities. On the other hand, those who have not lived abroad are thought to be characterised by the "problem of tolerance" passed from the local agents of socialisation, such as family and the education system.

> People who have lived abroad and studied there, have had some relations with these folks and there they realise that… I mean they have had personal relations with the folks of other [sexual] orientation and they see different approaches there. So, when they come back, they already have a different perspective, don't they? That's why I think there is a difference in how education and family may influence someone. We have the opposite situation: the mother tells the kid not to be friends with such people, not to hang out with them because they [parents] have this kind of mentality. And where does the mentality come from? From education. (Ana, Tbilisi NGO).

Western education – associated with language proficiency, useful networks and stereotypically ascribed value systems compatible with the NGO sector – is also perceived to be creating some common ground with the donors. Keso, for example, thinks the donors prefer being in touch with the Western-educated finding them more trustworthy. "You see," – she adds, - "[Donor organisation] distributed grants for the [Western university], sent a lot of people there, educated them and after the return they either founded own NGOs or started to work with them" (Keso, Tbilisi NGO).

In fact, all Western-educated NGO representatives I spoke to happen to be alumni of the competitive local and foreign scholarship programs, largely made available with the help of foreign donors such as the EU, Western governments and organisations, as well as Georgian state (European Commission 2012). These scholarships typically already revolve around the idea of contributing to the country's progress: in some cases, the condition of returning and working for Georgia is an explicit part of the scholarship deal; where not, "giving back" to the home country is anyway assumed and internalised by the alumni (Campbell 2017). After returning home, the experience is usually translated not only into foreign networks acquired but also into local social capital consisting of alumni networks that also overlap the NGO sector (Campbell, 2016). NGO-based scholarship

receivers often know one another as they have been funded under the same scheme and sometimes even studied at the same university abroad.

Being defined more by cultural rather than economic assets, what allowed these participants to study abroad was not the wealth per se but rather the possession of a competitive skillset and access to scholarship opportunities. Where funding was partial, some even managed to secure two scholarships at once. In fact, self-financing has not been a viable option for a number of them. For example, when Keso finally got accepted at desired full MA program in Europe but without any scholarship, she had to refuse an offer and keep trying again until successful. Tatia's family managed to mobilise some supplementary funds to her scholarship for a short-term research visit because "the scholarship was not enough to live, to eat and everything simultaneously" (Tatia, Tbilisi NGO); nevertheless, they would not have been able to cover the overall cost. Besides the mentioned short-term program, Tatia - like Keso and many other participants – also got her MA degree from Western university thanks to yet another scholarship opportunity.

While not particularly determined by wealth, the necessary skills or access to information about scholarships are still not equally distributed among the population and to some extent depend on prior investments and trajectories. Next to a good command of the English language, typically attained with the help of private tutors, many participants who continued their studies abroad already possessed other advantageous competencies for the competition. In fact, most of them did not merely start working at NGOs after gaining Western credentials but vice versa, gained experience precisely there beforehand - as an intern or volunteer, early-stage employee, or at the very least as a project participant; some even had travelled abroad through NGO-based projects priorly. Besides non-governmental organisations, several interviewees used to work in the government sector or universities before heading to the West for study purposes. As Eka, the lawyer long

involved in human rights-oriented NGOs observes “having that much experience by that age was quite seldom”. “I think this was my advantage, the reason why I got selected in these programs” – she says (Eka, Tbilisi NGO). Or Khatia with a political science background, for example, was already employed in both areas – the NGO sector and university - when she gained her MA scholarship. Like some other participants, she already held her first MA degree from the local university in Tbilisi. As a result, the choice of discipline was often solidly built on previous NGO-based work or volunteering practices demonstrating experience and passion towards the preferred program. Finally, in a technical sense, project writing and fundraising activities taught the applicants “how to present oneself in a likeable manner when you want money” (Keso, Tbilisi NGO).

It is evident that a number of participants were already socialised in the NGO environment to various extents - the space associated with foreign education and networks from the very beginning. However, local universities that offer international mobility can also be the key players in exposing their students to the possibilities of studying abroad. For instance, attending Tbilisi State University (TSU), one of the few institutions that offered exchange programs by the time participants studied there, largely shaped the destination of some in this sense. Besides the actual existence of such programs, it has also contributed to applicants’ success in an indirect way, by giving them access to diverse youth NGO activities on a university basis - an experience that could potentially increase their chances in the competition later.

As different social experiences and the set of capital morph into distinct habitus, even financial investment and skills set aside, studying abroad is not something the majority of Georgian youth have an eye on (Omanadze et al. 2017). On the contrary, some NGO representatives I spoke to emphasise that they did not even intend to obtain a postgraduate degree in Georgia and planned on doing it abroad; moreover, some had to further

strengthen their English skills for this very reason. In specific environments, they navigated into, such as universities, NGOs or the circle of friends and family, participation in the funded programs was organic and accessible, so the plan of studying abroad seemed realistic. For example, while Keso, in her words "got obsessed" with the chance of gaining a scholarship while at the university, Eka was still a child when her extended family member won a school-level exchange program competition and spent a year in the US. Consequently, as she grew up, she already knew about the existence and whereabouts of such opportunities. Tekla on the other hand, who went to school in a small peripheral town and is also an alumnus of the same program, heard about it almost by accident – it was her school that hosted the applicant selection process that year.

> I got really very lucky there. Otherwise, I know for sure I would have graduated from the school without ever finding out about this. There was no alternative way by then. Where could I hear about it? There was no internet available there at that time, and no internet-based social networks to get such information. Today at least [internet] is accessible. […] It was a real *dead end* [Eng.] to study there and I mean it. (Tekla, Tbilisi NGO).

Later, studying at the university in Tbilisi and engaged in youth NGOs, she also discovered that "it turns out it is possible to travel without paying anything and simultaneously learn something" through various exchange programs targeting the students. Besides the foreign degrees, there are other short-term study or professional events linked to the opportunity of travelling abroad, accessible for the NGO staff. As Sampson (2002) reflects on similar organisations in the Eastern European context, there is a constant exchange between the locals and the Western development agencies. While the locals get the money and human resources (such as foreign consultants, trainers and evaluators) from the West, exemplary NGO workers often get invited to conferences, internships and training programs there to "see with their eyes how democracy

works" (ibid: 307). A number of interviewees, from Tbilisi as well as Gori, mention that as NGO representatives they sometimes get chances to travel abroad for training, workshops, meetings, and conferences. Although according to some it happens less frequently than people think it does. Depending on the NGO profile, the nature and content of the meetings differ: they stretch from events that mainly target the youth to workshops for professional enhancement, conferences and high-level meetings.

Association with Western education obviously feeds into the symbolic power of the NGO community as part of overall society, almost univocally considered to be a highly educated segment. Superiority ascribed to Western education is further reproduced by the laypeople as revealed in the interviews. For example, Lela, a public sector employee who lives in Tbilisi finds studying abroad crucial for Georgia's path towards progress.

> I think it is a huge plus when our citizens leave and get educated in another country. I think it is a huge plus. Why? Because they have completely different methods and completely different experiences there. They are much more advanced. Everything new for you is already a routine for them, get it? And they tell you so much stuff, the guidelines already, like "do this way", "that way is bad" and so on. You get so much experience and as you come back… Well, you should be a wunderkind to sit and change things in the country without anything, just with a beginner-level education. (Lela, Tbilisi, 40).

Lela, like almost all laypeople I interviewed, has been locally educated herself. Yet, she ascribes immense importance to foreign education and even contrasts it with Georgian one, referring to the latter as "beginner-level education" in comparison. Quite typically here as well Georgia is seen in the process of catching up for which it requires guidance from already developed Western states. The middlemen in this process are thought to be the Western-educated Georgians, who gain the knowledge of doing things in the right way and consequently can change Georgia for good.

Interestingly, while the dichotomous classification of "progressive West" and "regressive locals" is quite dominant, it might also push relatively worse-off groups to follow the same pattern of self-identification with the West in an attempt to enhance their status. In this sense, any proximity with the latter including through the labour migration could result in symbolic attachment to a more Westernised segment of society. This is quite similar to what Galbraith (2011) observes in Poles' discourses, linking mobility to the EU for work or leisure not only to economic gains but also to cultural and symbolic advancement - quite visible in Luka's narratives. He is in his late 30s representing the laypeople sample. Having spent a few years in Europe as a low-skilled labour migrant, Luka particularly stresses Europe's role in his personal or "civilisational" progress.

> My personal development and birth as a person began there because it was Europe that shaped me as a normal, pragmatic, reasoning person. Europe played a huge role in what I am now, and I am thankful for those years. I don't know who I would have been today if I had not left for Europe. It might sound snobbish but probably I would have been one of those guys who speak with soft "L" -s[4] and tell old-fashioned jokes. I don't know, I would have been similar to some people I see here and dislike, the backward people. (Luka, Tbilisi, 39).

While understanding his own experience in terms of evolution into "normalcy" and "rationality" associated with Europe (see also Buchowski 2006; Galbraith 2011), Luka clearly distinguishes himself from the segment of the local population classified as "backward" – the fate he believes he escaped because of migration. Instead, he expresses aversion towards them, demeaning their taste in humour or pronunciation particularities, the latter typically associated with people from provincial backgrounds.

[4] Associated with the accent of Georgia's rural population

How similar widespread classifications are generally responded to by different segments of laypeople is more substantially discussed in chapter 8. Yet here I will particularly focus on how the symbolic privileges of the Western-educated are resisted by the different interviewed people in a quite ambivalent manner, including by those in the NGO sector itself. For example, the overt focus on socialisation in the West does not particularly favour someone like Mari who has no links abroad but sees her future in the sector. It is not that she questions the superiority of the "Western values" per se, in the contrary, she accepts the symbolic hierarchy as given and even emphasises her own identification with the norms considered Western. What she rejects instead is the discriminatory attitude in the NGO sector implying that it is only Western educated who can be regarded as more legitimate holders of "Western values" than the people like her. To strengthen her point, Mari jokingly refers to the school she graduated from in a Georgian small town before moving to the capital, accentuating her peripheral positioning in both global and local settings.

> Everyone I know has been there [West] for at least some stage of their education or through an exchange program, everyone has been in the West. […] I guess it is like some prerequisite for working in this sphere. Supposedly, if you gain education in the West, Western values will be more… how to say… more part of you. But I don't think I stand too far from Western values myself. What else did I learn at [Georgian small town] school? I have also been asked at the job interview whether I obtained education abroad, participated in an exchange program abroad, or training, like short-term training, or workshops. I've never been anywhere. I'm scared, I cannot risk. And yeah, it happens, it really happens, it's like a necessary condition if you want to be in the NGO sector. (Mari, Tbilisi NGO).

NGO representatives' high symbolic stance based on association with either Western education or visits abroad is also rejected by various segments of laypeople. Sometimes

this is done through subtle forms such as jokes or irony. For example, Levan from Tbilisi with foreign education himself, jokingly compares the NGO sector to the American college fraternity, thus itself a continuation of the Western higher education system. He thinks that through this the "[NGO representatives] identify themselves with relatively *cool* [Eng.] stuff and relatively *cool* [Eng.] stuff is Europe. Because they [Europe] have a lot of money, I guess." (Levan, Tbilisi, 28). On the other hand, Diana, a young woman from the village near Gori who herself hopes to migrate to the US one day, laughs that she would gladly work in such an organisation as she often hears that their staff "travelled to the US, travelled there, travelled here" (Diana, Gori, 27). At the same time, she feels she nevertheless falls short of the people who unlike her "got an education there [in the West]" and thus "know stuff", allowing them to be in the NGOs in the first place.

Others reproduce the discourse of Western symbolic superiority but simultaneously are more suspicious of Western-educated NGO representatives (or just Western-educated in general) who might be acting in their own self-interest. Lia whose son also gained a scholarship for studying in Europe and believes Georgia should adhere to European ideals is not quite sure whether alumni would apply what they learned to contribute to Georgia's development or would go to NGOs for "mercantile" purposes.

> It depends on what environment they will be in and what ideals they will have. If their ideal is the development of the country and to live in a better country, then of course [they will pursue] European ideals. Or if their ideal is that nongovernmental [organisations] are… so to say, to pave the road and go to Europe and make money there. (Lia, Tbilisi, 64).

19-year-old Tornike, the student from Gori similarly considers that "in reality, development and bright future, everything is towards the West of course. They are the ones we should take an example from in terms of economy, politics or everyday life". However, he also reveals some scepticism towards the role of the Western-educated,

emphasising that the population should be thinking for themselves instead of blindly trusting those who graduated from prestigious Western universities. “You shouldn’t easily believe someone just because they graduated from something like Oxford or Harvard, right? Maybe it is in their interest to say these things or convince you of it.” – He says.

Alternatively, one might reject the idea of catching up with the West at all, while still distinguishing NGO representatives based on their cultural capital. Givi in his 60s from a comparatively poor household, who has the least common with the young and middle-class-dominated NGO sector, sees these organisations as part of the larger worldwide conspiracy scheme to wipe Georgia away. In this scenario NGO representatives are “simple poor people who take the money and go talk whatever they are told to”, yet they are still viewed as distinctively talented: these are the most gifted Georgian students who were taken to the US for brainwashing and conversion. It should be also mentioned that as Givi speaks of them, NGO representatives are very much coupled with the 2003’s young political elites, who were in fact largely made up of former NGO staff.

> They had been observing the best students by the end of the Communist times. Then swept everyone and took them to America, taught them, brainwashed, transformed and sent them back. The nation has its limits of the talented people […] They selected and took all of them, sent back already transformed to ruin the country. And all that has remained is a vacuum because every one of the talented people became like that. Get it? (Givi, Tbilisi, 62).

This quote shows that while NGO representatives are seen as linked to the US and harmful to the country, the symbolic hierarchy between the Western states and Georgia is entirely rejected; moreover, these countries are thought to be the victims of the conspiracy themselves. Yet their symbolic value still prevails – NGO staff is nevertheless viewed as

the most talented people in the country, entirely thought to be absorbed by the NGOs and previous political elites.

As this section has demonstrated, foreign education seems to be a particularly beneficial asset that comfortably accommodates one in the NGO sector as well as increases their social status in a wider domain: the Western-educated are thought to be socialised into values of tolerance and democracy, acquiring extra symbolic power to lead the others towards progress. As the data shows, this power is usually legitimised by NGO representatives and laypeople, but sometimes also resisted in subtle forms, especially by those lacking such capital. Even then, often any suspicion or irony is directed to the NGO staff themselves, rather than to West-Georgia symbolic hierarchy itself, which the Western-educated gain symbolic power from.

Simultaneously, this form of Western-marked capital is not equally accessible to everyone and links to familiarity with such opportunities from own milieu and prior investments in language skills. While foreign education is merely a significant benefit but not a "must have" asset in the sector, good comprehension of the English language is in fact one of the key skills required.

5.4. English language as key linguistic capital

In the introductory section, I brought up how the English language became the symbol of the new modernising Georgia. Unsurprisingly, English has traditionally been the language NGO work heavily revolves around, associated with the NGO community. It plays a crucial role in the daily activities of the participants. Given that the local NGOs are almost entirely funded by foreign donors, communication with the funding agencies

necessarily requires language skills. From preparing project proposals to constant reporting back, from email exchanges to face-to-face meetings, everything depends on English. This is the main reason why English language specialists are sometimes prioritised for administrative positions, as illustrated before.

Apart from that, English dominates other types of activities NGO staff is engaged in. These activities often include research, or due to their professionalised nature, require staying up to date with the current knowledge in a particular field, in order "to do your job more effectively and to be more confident" (Nia, Tbilisi NGO). Because of the central position of the English language, vast academic or other relevant sources are only accessible to the Anglophones, leaving others behind. Furthermore, certain events such as local and overseas conferences, donor-funded seminars and workshops often led by invited Western instructors, likewise require fluent English. Even smaller or regional NGOs focusing on youth and diversity cannot rely on Georgian only when setting up youth exchange projects and hosting foreign volunteers. While "English and networks are always beneficial", to some extent they are also interdependent, as international networking requires at least some level of English (Beka, Gori NGO). International connections in turn range from youth networks to networks with international organisations and academic circles depending on the type and strength of the organisation.

Since the 1990s, when speaking English was a particularly rare asset in Georgia, the language has become relatively widely spoken. Nevertheless, the English-speakers have still remained a minority. According to the population-representative Caucasus Barometer survey, the number of those with not even basic knowledge of English make up almost 60% of Georgians, while those with advanced language skills are only 6% and intermediate speakers – 16% (CRRC-Georgia 2019). These numbers were respectively

2% and 10% approximately ten years ago, non-English speakers in turn made up 69%. (CRRC-Georgia 2008). The numbers vary based on age, settlement type and household income. Anglophonic are more prevalent among the 18-35 age group, among Tbilisi inhabitants and relatively higher income groups, and less prevalent among the 56+ age group, rural communities and relatively lower income groups.

Rather limited English language skills are highly demanded in the Georgian job market, excluding large portions of the university-educated population from comparatively better-paying jobs (Amashukeli et al. 2017). Because of the foreign donor-dependent and cosmopolitan nature of the NGO sector which gives even more value to the English language, the space is obviously better reserved for those who speak it. Donors tend to prioritise the leading organisations employing English-speaking staff. Even though they might refer to them as being "Tbilisi-based intellectual… put it in a way… elites" (Alfred, Donor organisation), they are usually the ones in their list of favourites. Aid agencies, entangled in their own bureaucratic threads, get on better with professionalised NGOs with good managerial capacities and prefer when "[NGO staff] don't have a communication problem and speak English" (Giorgi, Donor organisation).

This leaves more chances for the Anglophonic and cosmopolitan younger segment, who, according to a self-critical comment from one donor representative, "not only (…) speak your language, but you have the feeling that you communicate on the same level" (Victor, Donor organisation). On the contrary, peripheral regional organisations receive much less attention and if they do, they are proudly portrayed as poster children for engagement with the grassroots - "truly local NGOs" that are "quite unusual" because of their non-English speaking staff (Alfred, Donor organisation). While smaller donors can be more flexible in offering application forms in Georgian, relatively bigger donors count on leading Tbilisi-based and regional organisations "as they speak English, and they are able

to prepare the proposals to provide input and give sub-grants to small ones" (Anna, Donor organisation). Consequently, non-Anglophonic are largely marginalised at both, individual and organisational levels. The smaller community-based regional organisations often consisting of non-Anglophonic staff hold particularly marginal positions compared to others. In a similar manner, the leading Tbilisi-based organisations are less likely to employ those who cannot speak English at least to a certain extent - the language that is not quite associated with older and poorer segments in Georgia (CRRC-Georgia 2019).

The marginalisation of the non-Anglophonic is seen as natural by interviewed NGO representatives. They point at local and global contexts and say that nothing principally strange happens in the NGO sector which operates at both levels: on one hand, there is a Georgian labour market where "you cannot even work as a barista [without English]" (Dimitri, Tbilisi NGO) and on the other hand "in the rest of the world (…) main working language is English nowadays. The grant language is English in any country" (Keso, Tbilisi NGO). Consequently, this allows its holders higher symbolic power compared to the rest who are not only perceived as lacking technical language skills but are largely deprived of participation in the modern world on an equal basis, their awareness and other competencies being constantly doubted.

> If there is such a person today […] with completely no knowledge of English, I mean literally no knowledge, then they cannot meet other [job] requirements either. It is physically impossible nowadays to remain informed and to comprehend technology [without English]. (Irakli, Tbilisi NGO).

While non-Anglophonic tend to be sidelined and non-fluent English speakers end up feeling less confident, those with relatively good English are able to access and navigate the space effortlessly. In earlier times, when such skills were even more scarce and NGO workers were particularly associated with higher salaries, this also provided them with

more opportunities to translate their linguistic capital into economic, including jobs at higher-paying local branches of international NGOs.

> I think language proficiency was the primary thing that got me prioritised. I'm sure many applied when the vacancy was announced. NGOs were even more popular by then [the 2000s] in Georgia and they are still popular. Pretty sure if you ask two people to make a choice between public and non-governmental, they will choose the latter. But it was extremely popular by then because the salary was nearly three times higher compared to the same position in the public sector. (Neli, Gori NGO).

Most participants I interviewed seem to be proficient in English. As already discussed in the previous sub-chapter, approximately half of them graduated from the English-language HEI programs abroad or at least spent a year somewhere in the scope of an exchange program. While typically these opportunities became accessible only through external funding, prior investments were made in learning the language which "really opens many doors" (Tekla, Tbilisi NGO) – the asset making them capable of studying abroad in the first place and competitive in the eyes of the scholarship-granting agencies. Georgian public schools, which most participants graduated from, have proved to be largely incapable of teaching English to the extent required by various educational or job openings. Consequently, many had to rely on additional private tutoring during the school or university stage.

Additional private lessons must have been accessible only to those who could afford them. Plus, learning the language has often been conditioned by the cultural capital of the family: the parents who tried to engage their kids in as many extra-curricular lessons as possible: "choir singing, piano, solfege, practically everything imaginable, English" and family members who set an example, some of them enjoying more opportunities due to English skills (Beka, Gori NGO). Below Beka tells how his family influenced his interest

in English and how he was also inspired by the post-revolutionary government's modernising emphasis on the English language.

> [I learned English] privately. You couldn't really learn English at school anywhere, although I had really good teachers at school. I first went to English [classes] on my own. My sister used to take English lessons. I kept remembering the words easily and liked this *speech* [Eng.] Also, the appeals by the president that English is our language and so on. I was in 3rd or 4th grade by then. I asked around and discovered the English teacher who lived nearby. Went there and agreed on time and money. She gave me the textbook list and only then I told to my family. I said, I'm taking English classes and we have to pay that much money per month and additionally I need books. At first, their reaction was "what have you done!" but then they supported me realising I really wanted the language (Beka, Gori NGO).

Eka also reminds the influence of her extended family:

> As a kid, I was very dedicated to learning good English. My cousin who was older than me went to the US via FLEX[5] exchange program, and obviously, he was fluent in English. He was quite a wunderkind kid, and I was always told "Oh, you have to grow up smart like him". And I always wanted to learn everything he knew. Consequently, English was one such thing. (Eka, Tbilisi NGO).

The opportunity of studying abroad, associated with returning social advantages and charged with high symbolic value, likewise played a role at later stages and pushed the people towards the language. For instance, already tangible exchange programs available at Tbilisi State University made English attractive and the resources spent on strengthening the language skills worthy for its students.

> By my fourth year at TSU when I already realised I wanted to participate in Erasmus… I took the English test once; the threshold was 76. I got 75 and I failed. […] I was really

[5] US-funded exchange program for school children

> obsessed with Erasmus. By my fourth year, I knew for sure, it was decided: I had to study [English] to do my MA abroad. (Keso, Tbilisi NGO).

Studying English-language programs abroad or even just being involved in various NGO-based cosmopolitan youth networks further socialised participants in English-speaking environments. Sometimes practising English was itself a motivation for joining the youth programs available. As discussed above, the practical application of English is also an indivisible part of the NGO work with its staff being engaged in international networks, constantly accessing English-language sources, and often producing reports in English. Such an atmosphere further contributed to the improvement of the language skills of those who already had some basis.

> It helped me with English. […] I spoke it before, but it doesn't mean I actually spoke well. So, it was very difficult for me when I first attended some international *event* [Eng.]. I could understand, and I could talk, but it was still too hard. But a year later I was already laughing at myself, realising how bad I was at English before. (Lado, Tbilisi NGO).

NGO representatives as well as donors stress the importance of the English language but simultaneously try to present the NGO sector as relatively open to everyone. As mentioned earlier, the donor organisations take pride in mentioning collaboration with non-English speaking organisations from Georgia's regions, while those from the leading NGOs point at their co-workers who are not that good at English to emphasise that such people in fact exist. As they say, "it will help you more if you have also English-speaking skills but it will not exclude you" (Paul, Donor organisation).

To some extent this is so, even among my interviewees from the NGO sector: the majority seem to be proficient but there are few with intermediate or almost no English skills. However, in contrast with the relative confidence of the fluent, these participants communicate uneasiness and lack of confidence. Irakli, for example, already had some

working knowledge of English when he got employed at one of the leading Tbilisi organisations, although he was not quite fluent. While he thinks NGOs are not necessarily reserved for the proficient only, he also admits this somewhat complicated his professional life. It is precisely Anglophonic information that gets one to the "high standards" in their job, as well as access to the information on international regulations - the good examples Georgia wants to follow, thus being especially beneficial for the development of the country.

> I don't speak English very well. Speaking of my example, I don't speak. Yeah… It still complicates your life. I mean I can read and listen but in terms of speaking, I don't really have a good practice. It was even worse when I started. Did it complicate my job? Did I need more? Because English is the medium you rely on in case you are after a high standard. At least, you must be able to read in English, read a lot of things. As I said, first of all, you have to be informed and this information is in English precisely. A big part of it. Even to compare local standards to international ones, you need English. (Irakli, Tbilisi NGO).

Some participants I talked to take additional lessons trying to "catch up" with their colleagues, others - thanks to the peripheral nature of their position (rural area, community organisation) - do not have sufficient time-related and financial means to turn to private teachers.

When Julia came to a smaller Tbilisi NGO as a volunteer from Western Europe, she found that some staff members felt quite unsure about their language skills and even though she was not a native speaker either, they looked upon her for the proofreading and speaking practice. To improve their English, her colleagues were pouring resources into private tutors: not being fluent hindered their opportunities to write proposals confidently

and to participate in events abroad, further associated with international networking and professional recognition.

> My colleagues were good [at English] … but for example, when I came, they were so happy because "Oh! now we can really practise our English!" And they always asked me, you know. My one colleague, who's younger, always wanted me to write emails for her. I know she could have written them but just not perfectly. And in this sense, she's like "no, I want there to be no mistakes". They had actually English classes, they went for private English classes. That's also the money you have to spend. But they were quite good. Because also they have a lot of conferences where they go outside Georgia, to Germany, to London. (Julia, Tbilisi NGO).

The case of Mari who is more of a freelancer at this point and has worked at several different-themed Tbilisi organisations is somewhat similar. To be able to work and participate fully, she also found a solution in private tutoring alongside work.

> I study English because it will be hard for me without it in this sphere. Maybe it's tough without English for anyone in any sphere nowadays, but in this sphere – especially. As usual, we had to work on literature, attend the seminars when foreign trainers arrive and mostly that's in English. It's hard without it. (Mari, Tbilisi NGO).

Natia, on the other hand, who is associated with the rural community NGO, feels even less confident about her English and has no opportunities for a private tutor, requiring additional money and time. Resembling the experiences of the other participants, English classes at the 1990s public school only gave her beginner-level language skills, sufficient neither for writing project proposals nor for international networking.

> I graduated from school in the 90s. This was the period when telenovelas were the only thing our English teacher would ask about. She wanted to know who had watched it, whether anybody had the TV or the electricity generator on, whether anyone had watched

> the telenovela, what had happened in "Mariana" [telenovela], and so on. Consequently, the story of our English learning was… In short, our childhood was very much like that… It didn't go further than *"It is a boy. It is a girl"* [Eng.]. Consequently, our generation found it too hard to catch up with English afterwards. (Natia, Gori NGO).

Later, Natia took donor-funded English lessons. Being an NGO-based project with finite resources and completely dependent on donor funding, the project lasted only for a few months – this could not make sufficient change, of course. While additional funding was not provided, studying a foreign language without any guidance turned out to be a largely unrealistic option.

> We couldn't get additional funding later. They said, "no, now learn by yourselves, continue by yourselves if you wish so". But it's very hard to learn English without a teacher, all by yourself. It's not easy. You have other problems simultaneously and you really cannot study. I have this textbook right here now in front of me, the textbook we studied from. To take it and to study the second part all by myself is unimaginable now, really unimaginable. (Natia, Gori NGO).

Non-proficiency in English further complicates the lives of the peripheral NGO representatives and places them in a disadvantaged position. The grant competitions they can apply for are not only restricted by the donor-prioritised themes this time, but also by the application language, which considerably narrows down the options. Another alternative is working with a translator, but this costs very expensive and does not happen often. For example, to translate the application papers for one specific call, Natia and her colleagues had to pay up to ₾200 (approximately £60 by then) to the translator from their own pockets, obviously, without any prior guarantee of success. At the same time, her monthly income from the community NGO is less than this amount, in contrast with those based at top NGOs in Tbilisi. Other organisations with relatively more resources can afford to employ English language specialist among their staff.

> Obviously, I cannot say that I'm fluent in English. The English language is not my profession but to an extent, I can speak it. However, we have our own English language specialist in the organisation who is responsible for our international relations. We communicate with international organisations and donors with the help of our specialist and we manage it pretty well. (Sopo, Gori NGO).

It is interesting that, unlike the perspectives of the comparatively younger or/and Tbilisi-based participants who regard language proficiency as a casual attribute of any layperson, Sopo associates such fluency with professional education – something that requires full dedication and remains relatively unattainable for the ordinary people. This also illustrates that like Natia, she does not completely fit into the ideal habitus of Tbilisi-based English-speaking NGO space. Next to them, Saba, in his early 30s, also differs from those at top organisations in Tbilisi. Previously employed at various working-class jobs, he got a place in the NGO sector quite unexpectedly. "Radically shifting" the lifestyle and entering the space without compatible habitus, he immediately felt the English language (he had only basic knowledge of), was one of the important aspects of the NGO environment he had to catch up with (Saba, Gori NGO). So, he turned to volunteer-led English classes that as NGO-based projects, tend to be somewhat unstable.

English certainly has practical significance in the everyday life of the NGO staff, especially when it comes to the leading Tbilisi NGOs. Still, its symbolic value goes beyond practicality and lies in its perceived universality – associated with the core Western states the English language signifies "high standards", progress and cosmopolitanism, which only a smaller and relatively privileged segment of society has access to, in fact.

5.5. Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter attempted to demonstrate how particular sorts of cultural capital that are directly or indirectly associated with the Western states, become especially valued in the Georgian NGO sector. Educational background - what discipline one has studied and where - as well as English language skills can be understood in connection with their benefit to Georgia's journey towards progress in terms of democratisation and Europeanisation. While the lawyers do the heavy lifting embracing the rule of law and human rights framework, and political scientists are considerate of foreign policy, researchers are typically involved in data production on donor-prioritised themes.

The English language becomes crucial in everyday work situations giving access to what is considered quality sources, allowing communication with the donors and nurturing international networks. Western education, which typically also implies good comprehension of English, indicates not only better education per se but most importantly socialisation in the Western culture, thus turning the alumni into more "authentic" carriers of the cherished "Western values" in the locals' eyes, whether it is democracy or tolerance. It is important to mention that such educational whereabouts also help accumulate social capital through this route, such as professional networks, alumni networks and above-mentioned international contacts. Yet we also saw that there are internal differences as well: The Tbilisi NGOs are more associated with the Western-educated and English-speaking professionals rather than more peripheral Gori, and even in Tbilisi people's confidence differs based on the capital they hold.

In the context of a strong national strive towards the West, association with the Western-marked capital allows the NGO community more cultural and symbolic power in the wider society, which in return further legitimises their ideas. Nevertheless, there are yet more subtle forms of symbolic domination than certain institutionalised (and embodied)

capitals, signalled by resumes and CVs. This is often merely the way of talking – something that could be regarded as linguistic habitus, distinguishing them from the rest. The speech interestingly represents an amalgam of various Anglicisms, not always making sense to outsiders and newcomers: these are informal English loanwords typical for the young and Westernised middle class mixed with NGO technocratic words and professional jargon that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

The NGO language and related symbolic struggles

6.1. Introduction

The significance of the language in the NGO sector goes well beyond the English language proficiency discussed in the previous chapter. The academics and the study participants alike emphasise that there are particular ways people residing in the NGOs speak which differ from lay speech. Bernal (2017: 44) for example, observes that the Tanzanian NGO community quite literally speaks the "international language of democracy, human rights, gender issues, and development" which due to hardships of translation is typically designed as a mixture of English and the native language. This is further added by technical terms tightly linked to the practicalities of the aid world. But the dependence on Anglophonic words does not end here. The NGO-based participants I interviewed not only rely on aid-related terms exclusively but at times also transfer completely unrelated random English words in their native speech. The first tendency is largely shaped by the process of communication with the donors and socialisation in the sector (Bernal 2017; Ishkanian 2008). The other bears a similarity with the speech of Georgia's urban cosmopolitan segment who typically depend on the English language in their work environments and share international networks (Goshkheteliani & Kikvadze 2017).

At the same time, both aspects of the NGO community's linguistic practice continue to be influenced by the same logic the previous chapter draws on: the source of its legitimacy in the local arena remains to be external and linked to the West (Zarycki 2014). From democratisation-related terminology (even if they become jargon-like and emptied out) to

the casual Anglophonic expressions, the language of the NGO community itself becomes an embodiment and a signifier of the evolution towards modernity. Becoming the asset of distinction from the rest, it marks its speakers as modern and developed compared to others (Bourdieu 1984). For example, despite the high symbolic value of the standard Georgian language, indiscriminate incorporation of English words is not particularly frowned upon in society (Kobaidze 2021). In fact, quite an opposite - it hints at better education and networks with foreigners. In Kobaidze's (2021) opinion, it can even be perceived as a sign of the much-appreciated pro-Western geopolitical orientation of the person.

The aid-related terms and catchphrases applied on daily basis become far deeper, entrenched disposition of the people residing in the NGOs – the part of their linguistic habitus (Bourdieu 1991). The same can be said about the English language they extensively rely on in the working process, which pours onto native speech and affects the way it is spoken. In this sense, we can even distinguish some sort of bilingual linguistic habitus that is being formed in the process, reflecting globally dominated and locally dominant positions at once. Simultaneously, this linguistic fusion which comes somewhat naturally for those rooted in the NGO environment alienates and confuses the rest, who are not part of the sector and whose habitus is shaped differently in many ways.

Beyond the "ways of speaking" emphasised above, the NGO language also incorporates the discursive facet - the "ways of seeing" (Sayer 2018: 116). The bundle of terms effortlessly uttered in the sentence by the NGO representatives not only distinguishes them on the basis of speech but also introduces and legitimises a specific vision of the world and the accompanying classificatory pattern, further benefiting them in a symbolic sense (Bourdieu 1991). Both, the speech (ways of speaking) and the discourse (ways of seeing) tend to be monopolised by the dominant professional orientations in the sector,

which I introduced in the previous chapter. Unsurprisingly, they also play important role in challenging the meanings the NGO language carries, so the language becomes the subject of struggle itself.

In this chapter, I focus on the language of the NGO community and look at how related symbolic struggles are played out in the sector and beyond – both, on grounds of its legitimacy and approachability as a language itself, and on grounds of the social reality it legitimises. First, I discuss the Anglicised Georgian language which is not particularly limited to the people in NGOs but remains to be important distinctive marker the participants share to various extents. I look at how Anglicised Georgian is linked to relatively advantaged groups in Georgia, as well as how it is simultaneously embraced and negated both by outsiders and even by its speakers. Later I move to what can be referred to as the aid language, focusing on frequently applied terms in the NGO world and how they classify the social reality. Besides the symbolic struggles around it, I also keep attention to the discursive facet of the language itself and its inherent ideological power (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999).

Such clear-cut differentiation I make between the Anglicised speech and the aid-related speech is mostly for analytical reasons, as they are pretty much intertwined in the everyday language of NGO representatives. I look at how this heavily Anglicised expert-like language alienates the laypeople yet gives more power to the NGO-based dominant professions who easily navigate in the relevant terms. Additionally, I observe the emergence of alternate left-leaning vocabulary among the above professionals, which challenges and simultaneously adds to the NGO linguistic amalgam. The interviews further reveal an interplay between habitus and reflexivity as the participants share their perspectives on the above issues.

6.2. The classed nature of Anglicised Georgian speech

The loanwords are continuously being adopted in any living language and the Georgian is no exception. Reflecting historical circumstances, plenty of words that are currently regarded as an organic part of the standard Georgian had previously entered from other languages, such as Greek, Arabic, Turkish, Russian, etc. (Goshkheteliani & Kikvadze 2017; Jikia 2016). The post-independence period brought the ascendence of Western influence and new ways of life in all aspects, including the influx of the corresponding new English descriptors. The wide variety of words had entered in everyday conversations of the lay Georgians, from *biznesmeni* [businessman] to *skeitbordi* [skateboard], from *leptopi* [laptop] to *supermarketi* [supermarket] and so on (ibid.).

Beyond the words like above, which enjoy rather shared recognition and wider usage, the practice of indiscriminate non-recognised transfers from English can be regarded as more classed in nature and rather characteristic of a relatively privileged segment of the Anglophonic young people. In this sense, it is possible to say that the excessive reliance on English words and sometimes whole phrases, highlighting the distinction, has successfully replaced the socially advantaged strata's previous tendency of applying Russian expressions in Soviet and pre-Soviet times (Kobaidze 2021; Reisner 2009; Suny 1994). The increased prestige of the English language and decreased prestige of Russian tend to correspond with Georgia's trajectory and the local reactions towards external influence, described in chapter 2. As Kobaidze (2021: 62-63) argues, "no educated person would dare to mix Russian words into their public speech to the same extent that, nowadays, journalists and politicians mix English loanwords into their speech and even into their written language". At the same time, while some Russian informal loans have

been crystallised in the lay speech they do not act as a distinction marker anymore. For example, while the younger cosmopolitan segment almost interchangeably transfers Russian "*prosto"* and English "*just"* in a Georgian sentence both denoting "simply" or "basically", only English loans are typically limited to them and hint at higher standing.

This hybrid type of linguistic habitus is likewise prevalent among the interviewed NGO representatives as well as some lay people of the same profile. As explained in the methodological chapter, to retain the linguistic style in Georgian-to-English translation, these English loanwords are italicised in the quotes throughout the thesis. Despite the participants differing when it comes to the frequency of relying on Anglicisms (some might say fewer words, others depend on them more heavily), my emphasis here is on capturing rather a general pattern that distinguishes them from other segments of the population. While at times the participants' speech also contains Russian loanwords, they are not given specific attention in the translation not to overburden the quotes, except when the interviewees consciously try to make a point about it. The data below reveals what these internalised Anglicisms communicate to those who do not share the same setting, further contributing to the gap.

English words and expressions are implicitly and effortlessly uttered in the organic environments of the young middle classes, but it is quickly spotted by the outsiders, such as by Diana for example - a young woman I interviewed as a layperson in the village near Gori. In fact, Diana also turned out to be quite familiar with one of the leading Tbilisi NGOs, as she had been hired by them for the short-term mission alongside her clerical job in Gori. While she was made feel welcome in the organisation and quite warmly remembers the NGO staff she met several times, there were certain lifestyle-related differences she noticed right away. What made her particularly uneasy was a distinct linguistic practice of speaking the Anglicised Georgian language.

> First, let me say what I don't like. They keep introducing too much English slang in their speech and I really dislike it, such as "my *team* [Eng.]" and similar things. I really dislike it. My ears find it grating every time I hear something like "let's have *breakfast* [Eng.]" If you already say the other words in Georgian, what's wrong with saying the rest of the words in Georgian as well? Probably they try to overemphasise that they obtained education there [in the West] and that they know something. I get it that you know stuff and that's why you are there [in NGO]. If I knew that much, I would have been there as well. (Diana, Gori, 27).

The quote above clearly reflects the tensions related to the habitus mismatch: Anglicisms of the staff that are most likely articulated without too much thinking and comprise a banal part of their everyday conversations, become more apparent for Diana. Additionally, as such speech signals superiority due to its association with Western education, it is irritating and labelled as a deliberate "show-off". In this sense, we see simultaneous acceptance of this superiority as well as resistance to it. On one hand, Diana shows no doubt about the symbolic value of the staff who are thought to be holders of cultural capital of a higher sort and thus deserving of their place in the organisation. These are the kind of people she believes NGOs are reserved for rather than someone like her. On the other hand, while Anglicised speech, signifying higher standing, is perceived as intentional boasting, it also feels as if she is being looked down upon. Consequently, Diana responds to this disparity with a mixture of mockery and self-deprecation, laughingly uttering: "I get it that you know stuff and that's why you are there. If I knew that much, I would have been there as well".

Similar confusion over the language is also part of Mari's novice experience, who has worked in various Tbilisi NGOs since she graduated from the university. English loanwords were the primary thing she noticed after first getting the job in such an organisation years ago because nobody around her talked like this before. Consequently, she found the practice of mixing words rather odd. Unlike Diana's case, who had a one-

time connection with the Tbilisi NGO, Mari saw her career opportunities in the sector and intended to stay; consequently, she had to adjust, over the time adopting Anglicised Georgian herself.

> The very first thing that I found strange and took time to get used to, was the so-called *wording* [Eng.], and I mean this very particular word I'm saying right now. I think people in other spheres, the engineers, for instance, don't talk like that. Maybe all spheres have their characteristic speech, but it was pretty difficult for me. I could not even make sense of why you should talk like this. Later I also internalised, so it's not that I don't talk this way myself now. I tend to apply English words directly. But this was the first thing I noticed. (Mari, Tbilisi NGO)

It should be noted that as Mari speaks about NGO language, there is a very thin line between ordinary loanwords and NGO terminology that I separated for analytic purposes. While at times she emphasises the usage of the common words, other times she focuses on Anglicised terminology that will be discussed next. To some extent even the words such as "team" and "breakfast" Diana specifically brings up, can be seen as entrenched in the NGO environment like *kofi breiki* [coffee break] or *lanchi* [lunch] often applied in the scope of NGO-organised events.

In the quote above it is evident that despite already being socialised into such language, Mari still tries to distance herself from Anglicisms: she clearly undermines the usage of loans by adding "so-called" to the English word *"wording",* consciously chosen to highlight both direct and indirect meanings behind. Referring to the combination of both casual and NGO-associated English loanwords, she hesitantly adds: "In a sense, I think we are maybe doing it on purpose. Maybe not entirely on purpose and deliberately, but as if we emphasise our weight."

While Mari struggled to get used to or even to see the point behind mixing Georgian with

English words, to those who, unlike her, received English-language education, rely on English to access daily information and entertainment, and are more incorporated into global networks, Anglicised Georgian comes naturally. As the quotes below show, at the intersection of their personal social trajectories and the national geopolitical trajectory, English loanwords become an integral part of their linguistic habitus as Russian loanwords have been before. Both NGO representatives, Keso in her 30s and Dato in his 20s draw this parallel to the automatic usage of Russian words, not particularly noticed by others because of their rootedness in the past and wider usage.

> I got an education in the English language and when I returned, I *vobshe [Rus. for "generally"]* found it hard to write up in the Georgian language. Exactly like I just said "vobshe" and "vobshe" is Russian. That's because I'm the 90s kid and we talked this way then. Then we moved into the 2000s, and I got used to English. Then I left and obtained English-language education. And when I came back, I could hardly write in Georgian and sometimes while speaking, I even kept thinking in English. (Keso, Tbilisi NGO).

> In the *bubble [Eng.]* we are privileged enough to read English texts, speak to plenty of foreigners in English, and watch movies in English. Obviously, this influences our language a lot. In a similar manner, my grandfather often uses Russian terms, and he might ask me to fetch him *achkebi*[6] *[Rus. for "glasses"]*. This is again because he used to read in Russian, watched [movies] in Russian and conversed in Russian with some people. This obviously gets reflected in the language. As for our *bubble* [Eng.], we use English every day, in our daily language. If you think about it, there is not a day when we don't use English, is it? […] Moreover, if I am abroad, even for a week and I don't speak Georgian for a week at all, it impacts me. (Dato, Tbilisi NGO).

Reliance on Anglicisms that signals more advantageous positioning in the local social space, to various extents can also be caught among a few lay people I interviewed –

[6] Russian word "очки" ("ochki") with added Georgian suffix; means "glasses"

young, middle class, Tbilisi-based, English-speaking, involved in modern professions such as creative advertising and computer science, sometimes with Western education. Together with the NGO community, they constitute what is referred to as a "bubble" (itself a loanword) in the quote above, sharing lifestyle including the speech particularity. Living in local and global realities simultaneously, they automatically utter English words such as "*skill" or "fluent"* and sometimes struggling to find the proper Georgian equivalent in the middle of the interview, they might ask: "how to say *opportunity* [Eng.] in Georgian?" (Levan, Tbilisi, 28).

As this segment is constantly exposed to English phrases and sentence structures, their linguistic habitus becomes bilingual. The meanings behind Anglicisms are intuitively recognised by others belonging to the same milieu and more easily grasped compared to when translated into Georgian. In this sense, apart from the foreign contacts, the impact of local social capital also comes forward, reassuring and naturalising such speech. But in parallel to the implicit usage, there is also some conscious awareness of the certain position it communicates.

This is how Lado explains this while recognising me as part of the "bubble" who should spontaneously be in tune with his ways of speaking:

> At the same time, it's *cool* [Eng.] and has become so *okay* [Eng.] that you can easily transfer any word and *it's assumed* [Eng.] that… I cannot say otherwise at the moment. *It's assumed* [Eng.] that whoever listens will get it like you are expected to understand what I said right now. (Lado, Tbilisi NGO).

Nevertheless, Anglicised Georgian, embraced by the cosmopolitan middle class can be simultaneously resisted by the very same people who speak it. Such tension is revealed in spontaneous ironic remarks or exclamations of frustration after the English word is

slipped; this is well before anything about the language was even mentioned in the interview.

> (…) *consequences* [Eng.], as Ioane Zosime[7] would say in old Georgian. (Dimitri, Tbilisi NGO).

> (…) *expectations* [Eng.], the expectations that you have… Alas, I must first [say] in English and then in Georgian. (Lado, Tbilisi NGO).

These comments, while quick, can be quite telling. The first one communicates irony as the borrowed English word is intentionally placed in opposition to the historical figure symbolising the Georgian language itself; the other one contains regret over Anglicisms being thought of first. While there is some situational factor at play (the interview is still a formal process, so there might be a certain pressure to speak in correct, standard Georgian), these remarks might also hint at overall frustration about globally peripheral positioning. While at local space this group is located relatively higher in the social hierarchy owning advantageous cultural and social capital, in a global sense they are themselves dominated, which in turn affects their speech pattern in their native language and fills it with imitations. This way, simultaneous positioning in both realms might paradoxically bring the traditionally dichotomous attributions of "distinguished" and "vulgar" together when it comes to such speech (Bourdieu l991). It is distinguished because it indicates locally valuable "more connection with the language, foreign friends and education" (Tamuna, Gori, 32); but at the same time, full of emulations, it is perceived as non-authentic and vulgar when juxtaposed against the standard Georgian, even by its respective speakers.

> I have noticed that it worsens the quality of communication. I mean it might worsen the part of your image more than the communication quality. At times I speak very proper

[7] Georgian monk, calligrapher, and writer from the 10-th century who dedicated various hymns to the Georgian language

> Georgian. Trust me, it says something about you, something good. It says a lot about you: that you are attentive, prepared, calm, and quiet. (Lado, Tbilisi NGO).

Such contradiction somewhat resonates with the study on language hierarchies in Georgia (Driscoll et al. 2016). The research shows that the English language as spoken by a Georgian is rated much lower on prestige by Tbilisi youth than the native-spoken Georgian and English languages on their own, native English being rated as the most prestigious. While it refers to the language itself rather than the hybrid, similar ambiguity is presented: on one hand knowledge of English is desirable as it enjoys the highest symbolic value, on the other hand, as applied by Georgian speakers, its prestige and likability drops. The authors explain it as a denunciation of perceived "showing off", but at the same time, it could also result from the denunciation of perceived imitation discussed above.

Simultaneously, conscious control of everyday English (loan)words could be aimed at expanding the audience beyond the constructed "bubble" of the cosmopolitan youth, especially accentuated by a participant from the more marginal activism-oriented segment. "When I look at photos of the previous protests, I almost get a heart attack," - he says - "there is too much English, annoyingly too much English. So nowadays we ask not to bring English posters at the protests." (Dato, Tbilisi NGO).

This way, it is visible that the incorporation of informal English words or phrases in Georgian speech serves as a common denominator of a relatively more privileged part of the society, generating their characteristic distinction. As this subchapter has demonstrated, English, often instinctively uttered amid Georgian speech, is quickly noticed by those not sharing the same position in social space and perceived as a manifestation of superiority. At the same time, some participants tend to be quite self-conscious about such slips that distance them from the rest, as well as point to their

peripheral positioning in a global sense. Yet, this is only a part of the story. The linguistic distinction has another dimension related to the aid sector per se. Allowing more elaborate ideological symbolic struggles over the language, it is discussed in the next section below.

6.3. The "NGOspeak"

The "informal borrowings" discussed above cannot be neatly separated from more "formal Anglicisms" of democratisation and project writing, entrenched in the aid world and internalised as part of the habitus through socialisation in the NGO. The latter is hardly unique to the Georgian NGO community, instead being widely shared with colleagues from other aid-recipient states from Eastern Europe to Africa (Bernal 2017; Sampson 2002). In this section, I turn my attention to this very vocabulary of the sector, reproduced by the donors and the NGO representatives alike.

The NGO language revolves around elastic "words or phrases that represent hot topics in development" disseminated by the Western aid agencies, that in turn often borrow the supposedly universal concepts from Euro-American social sciences (Powell 2006, Schnable et al. 2021: 26). The poststructuralist scholars with "the words make worlds" approach, have lent the most interest to deconstructing this nebulous terminology characteristic for the aid world (Cornwall 2007: 471). While I avoid such absolute focus on discursive reality, agreeing with Bourdieu that the power operates not entirely through the words but tends to be more internalised in its nature, the power of the discourse should not be completely dismissed either (Sayer 2018).

In this regard, it is not that Bourdieu negates the role of the discourse at all, but his primary focus lies beyond its meanings and content (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999; Sayer 2018). The discourse for him, if touched upon, is primarily about the struggles for symbolic profit in the field, which plays out as struggles for sustaining or changing the social world through imposing a particular "vision of the world" and related classificatory systems. Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999), whose take on discourse, unlike poststructuralist accounts, is compatible with the realist ontology, further enrich Bourdieu's approach by directing attention to the generative force of the discourse itself, while simultaneously seeing it as tied to the field context. In this sense, the authors indicate that the order of discourse, as a separate yet interlinked with the non-discursive layer of social reality, should also be considered in the analysis.

Thus, the NGO terminology can simultaneously be seen in terms of the linguistic competence NGO representatives have mastered through socialisation in the sector, and in terms of representations of the social world they convey, for which the actors struggle for. While I do not go into the in-depth semiotic direction here and neither method of critical discourse analysis is applied in the thesis, the power of the development buzzwords is nevertheless considered.

The development notions, usually driven by strong moral imperative and presented as an unquestionable good, attract a lot of criticism from scholars (Cornwall 2007; Powell 2006; Schnable et al. 2021). Firstly, being emerged in the specific Western context, these concepts are not that universal. The hardships of finding identical linguistic equivalents in local languages also indicate that the imported notions impose a particular understanding, a particular classification of the social reality that was not there before (Bourdieu 1984; Powell 2006). For instance, like elsewhere, many of these words enter Georgian vocabulary in their English form with added Georgian suffixes, such as *genderuli*

meinstrimingi [gender mainstreaming], *vochdogi* [watchdog], *tolerantoba* [tolerance], etc. Alternatively, such expressions can be adopted as literal translations like *kargi mmartveloba* [good governance], *kanonis uzenaesoba* [rule of law], *adamianis uplebebi* [human rights], and so on. As discussed previously, in this sense, the discourses of development (more precisely, of transition) and Europeanisation largely overlap in Georgia and the progress expressed by the above terms is hoped to be achieved via Europeanisation (Tsuladze et al. 2021).

To legitimise some of these trendy words internally, local political elites and NGO representatives have to go to some length and invent traditions that create a convincing ground for their usage (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). One such example is frequently repeated "tolerance" which arose in early modern Europe and as it turned into the "emblem of Western civilisation", carries significant didacticism directed at the local population (Brown 2006: 37). To prove its genuineness for Georgian context, the concept closely linked to individualism and liberalism, has now been increasingly applied to describe centuries-ago social relations in multiethnic and multireligious Tbilisi, as well as in relation to priorly existing patterns of non-normative sexualities (Tsuladze et al. 2021). As the narrative goes, such diverse coexistence has only been possible through the historical tolerance of Georgians – so *tolerantoba* is not new but has always been there. On the other hand, the discourse of historical tolerance also addresses external Western audiences, assuring them that Georgians are indeed deserving of their place among civilised and tolerant European nations.

Such morally charged words not only classify the social reality in universal terms but also symbolically distinguish those holding ownership over them as more ethical than the rest. Coming from the Western political contexts and popularised by the aid agencies, these concepts define and monopolise "goodness", distinguishing the countries that already

have it from the ones that are devoid of it and thus have to learn (Brown 2006; Mutua 2001). These notions become appreciated in the local context because they carry the symbolic power of the Western states and vice versa, much appreciated locally, they increase Western symbolic power in the country even more. Georgian elite groups further reinforce the simplistic imagination of Europe as normatively superior - all good and no bad, which Tskhadadze (2019) calls "the rule of Georgian difference", the concept previously introduced by Chattarjee (1993) and later borrowed by Böröcz (2006) for the CEE. On the other hand, Georgia is constructed as lagging back and in urgent need to follow European footsteps to get there.

The other important criticism towards development language is that it indiscriminately adopts concepts that might have ideologically conflicting or debated meanings (Powell 2006). "Civil society" for example, is one such concept itself, as outlined in chapter 3, that is reduced to one understanding, while the above-mentioned "tolerance" is almost interchangeably used with "equality" or "solidarity", as a number of my interviews also show. This way, the aid vocabulary controls and neutralises what could be otherwise applied to criticise its practice; the words such as "empowerment", "gender" or "participation" are stripped from their critical meanings and used to promote dominant neoliberal agendas (Powell 2006). The "restricted, banal and depersonalised" development language consisting of what has become buzzwords, "not quite the language of social science nor of 'living' English" thus conceals the power relations and leads to uniformity, while at the same time permitting some struggle for its interpretation (Wilson 1992 as cited in Powell 2006: 474). For example, the interviews with the donor representatives reveal that while certain smaller donors operating in Georgia might have somewhat diverse political visions, overall, everybody harmoniously coexists including sharing the common aid language. At the same time, politically marginal left-leaning

stances that have emerged in the sector locally, correspondingly manoeuvre in this ambiguous tongue, while asserting their difference. Emptied out but at the same time ideologically charged, technocratic and confusing nature of the development language is further criticised by other authors, referring to it as developmentspeak or NGOspeak in Orwellian tradition, some also drawing parallels to "wooden language of Stalinism" (Cornwall 2007; Cornwall & Eade 2010; Sampson 2002: 306; Schnable et al. 2021).

Beyond the absolute moral goodness ascribed to the concepts promoted by the Western states, local NGOs' actual financial dependence on foreign donors further adds to the high symbolic power of the language that NGO representatives have to submit to and mimic: they must be always up to date with the changing concepts foreign aid operates with if they want to get funded and retain symbolic significance in their eyes. Because of the constant exposure, this "dialect" - a variety of linguistic capital - is internalised as part of the linguistic habitus and at the same time strategically applied "so that the donor understood what is written there" (Nika, Tbilisi NGO). Speaking with the donors as they want to be spoken to is further emphasised by Julia, the overseas volunteer at a smaller NGO.

> We use, as I told you, more or less the same reports. Once you have one report and you do similar projects (and you often do similar projects), you can use the same words. Because some words they [donors] really want to hear, like has to be "sustainable", and others I don't really remember… And shaping these reports in English is really shaping them in what they want to hear. (Julia, Tbilisi NGO).

The catchy terms donors "want to hear" similarly tend to be reflected in NGO names and mission statements to signal their compatibility. Easily noticeable by the naked eye, it is additionally highlighted by Teona's experience. Teona was already employed at one of the organisations when she decided to set up another NGO with her friends (those also

associated with other NGOs), where they counted on choosing and working on topics more independently, without management interference. While the tiny NGO they founded did not turn out to be long-lived in the end, the starting point where the name and mission statement had to be outlined, was pretty much guided by the donors' interests and their preferred words. During the choice of thematic area, members tried to harmonise what they really believed was moral and worth fighting for with the strategic linguistic choices, such as "social equality" for instance – generally valuable for them and at the same time the haziest to fit ever-changing donor priorities. The process of pitching ideas for the name also floated around the buzzwords: "We wrote down some *keywords* [Eng.] that are very frequently applied in NGO space. We wrote them down and crossed out the ones we disliked." (Teona, Tbilisi NGO). As Teona laughingly adds, the name must also make a catchy acronym eventually and "not some bjhh" because the name matters for presentability.

Acronyms are in fact a big part of the NGO world. Different acronyms that emerge around the topics NGOs work on, also require familiarity. Sometimes, they are directly internalised in Anglicised form. For instance, Sandro, an intern from Tbilisi NGO, gets confused when I mention "EU Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum" in Georgian and laughs as he figures out what I mean: "Are you talking about *EAP* [Eng.]? I guess I heard it for the first time in Georgian". Even "NGO" is itself a popular Anglicised acronym applied in parallel with *arasamtavrobo organizatsia* [Geo.], a literal translation of "non-governmental organisation." Gia, one of the interviewed laypeople who is neither related to the NGO sector himself nor his social circle talks much about it, even doubts people will understand if asked about *arasamtavrobo organizatsia* at all; instead, he thinks, *enjeo* [NGO] will be relatively easily recognised. Nevertheless, as these terms become burdened by unwanted connotations, they further get changed. According to the Georgian

representative of one of the donor agencies, “these organisations don’t use ‘non-governmental organisation’ anymore; you should say ‘civil society organisation’. They try to somehow emphasise that they are not closed, professionalised… Even though they are.” (Avto, Donor organisation). Alternatively, those focusing on human rights might prefer the term “human rights organisation” to escape public distrust (Luciani 2020). But at the end of the day, such strategies further pile up confusing acronyms and terms.

This blended vocabulary, internalised and monopolised by the insiders, is not that accessible for the rest that easily. The experiences of the newcomers and the laypeople show that the greater the distance from typical NGO habitus, the more meaningless and pretentious the language might sound. Nevertheless, in many cases, the concepts are intended to be passed on to the population.

6.4. Making sense of the NGO language: insiders and outsiders

The NGO terminology that the participants are socialised into is not always meant to be contained in the sector. The contribution to the “development of the society and raising the level of knowledge and education” (Keso, Tbilisi NGO) is one of the important missions ascribed to NGOs. So, educating the public through diffusing the notions such as active citizenship, human rights, gender equality, tolerance, etc. is a big part of this.

A few concepts associated with the NGO sector have indeed trickled down and are also applied by the laypeople I interviewed, including older and poorer segments. Nevertheless, sometimes the latter do not seem as confident with the language they are implicitly pressured into when speaking about NGOs. For example, while referring to her gendered and classed experience as a breadwinner in a poor household, Elza in her 50s

from Tbilisi goes for the notion "gender inequality" but cannot fully remember it: "*genderuli* [gender]… how it's called, what they call it?". On the other hand, 36-year-old Shalva from Gori who works in sales distribution, warns me before the interview that he does not usually talk much and only clarifies the reason after opening up, at the end. As it turns out he feared he lacked the expertise to talk about these issues in a proper way:

> Well, when I said I'm usually brief I meant that I have never spoken about such things before and [I'm] just a person who thinks something in his head… Wherever non-governmental organisation discussions happen, your brain and tongue are polished about what to speak and how, and I have never talked about this topic. (Shalva, Gori, 36).

As Shalva shies away to share opinions about the NGO sector, he feels unsure not only about "what to speak" but also about "how" to speak. While NGO representatives appear to be more familiar and comfortable with the legitimised expressions that they further contribute to circulating, those in dominated positions are left with two options - "silence or a borrowed language" (Bourdieu 1984: 462). Such diffusion of the language is usually mediated through the media, training or conferences, the latter not much accessible or even attractive for the laypeople, especially for its marginal parts.

Zura, who has attended a few NGO presentations as part of his former job in the public sector, jokes that "there are such words, you have to be Shanidze[8] to understand" pushing him to "decipher" them later (Zura, Tbilisi, 42). Nevertheless, his irony and exaggeration indicate much more resistance towards NGO language than the actual misunderstanding. Resistance is similarly expressed by Rusudan, a 60-year-old housewife from the village near Gori. She has only seen NGO representatives on TV and despite agreeing on some issues such as women's rights, overall compares them to the sect almost: for her they all look and sound the same, distinguished by talking "in a modern way". As Rusudan

[8] Infamous Georgian linguist and philologist

separates the "modern" manner of speech from the "usual speech", her uncertainty and cautiousness are nevertheless noticeable, trying to emphasise that these are just her thoughts on the issue.

> Somehow it seems like they have the same image and the same manner of speech. I think so in a way. You can recognise on TV that it is a nongovernmental [organisation]. They tend to speak in a certain manner. As if they are very modern or make [the language] more modern. They have quite a particular image… you'll think they are all similar. That's just my opinion. (Rusudan, Gori, 60).

"Modern manner of speech" NGOs symbolically impose on the rest, is also an instrument of domination that marks them as educated and aware. At the same time, it further complicates their lives to find a common language with the laypeople. A number of NGO representatives stress the problem of Anglicised NGO-expert language - "very non-Georgian, very copied and non-authentic" (Dato, Tbilisi NGO) that alienates them from the population when they try to reach them. In Nika's words, as NGOs speak the donors' language, they pay less attention to what extent their writing is adapted to the laypeople, but the adaptation is not easy: "[We try] to make a video clip, briefly explain something using obvious examples but I'm not really sure it always works out" (Nika, Tbilisi NGO). Stuck between different audiences and concepts that do not always have the native equivalent, they either bring up the lack of relevant education among the public or blame themselves for not putting enough effort into proper translation, fearing that "not speaking the ordinary language is the reason people think as if we look down on them" (Nunuka, Tbilisi NGO). As the quote below shows, Anglicisms are resisted at the individual level but as the NGO staff is socialised into them, they are hard to dismiss.

> The report-language NGOs speak is very non-Georgian and sounds odd. [Sentence] constructions are English; there are plenty of such words… Just to bring an example, first I

> thought this "*sensitiuri"* [sensitive[9]] would not get adopted. I left [Georgia] for a while and when I got back, I heard "*sensitiuri"* everywhere. In the end, I realised that once or twice I also said "*sensitiuri"* myself and [thought] Oh, my God, what worse can happen to me? And the layperson does not understand this because they have never heard of *sensitiuri* or what it means. Say *mgrdznobiare* [Geo. 'sensitive']. There are plenty of topics like that where there is a language problem. On one hand, this is caused by our lack of knowledge, on the other hand, there are just no corresponding Georgian words for that thing. (Khatia, Tbilisi NGO).

Anglicised concepts are further popularised by NGO-based feminist and LGBTQ activists which are simultaneously in tune with the global new social movements (Kaldor 2003). Drawing on Western labels for mobilisation and struggling for sexual liberation, their activism has also been incorporated and largely defined by overarching donor-driven democratisation agenda (Rekhviashvili 2018b). As Lado, one of the activists indicates, the gap between the laypeople and NGO representatives is partly impacted by the linguistic difference following the logic that "who talk like that are not there for me" (Lado, Tbilisi NGO). Such alienation is further increased as NGOs routinely keep introducing brand new Anglicised concepts for public usage that the rest struggle to catch up with. Consequently, as Lado points out, the existence of non-normative sexualities locally is automatically linked to foreign aid:

> We throw million new terms at them annually that they must understand and adopt. 'What's *qviari* [queer] now'? What's male *jispoti* [g-spot] now? And they don't understand, don't know and get confused. Then they really think it is Soros who brought LGBT here. (Lado, Tbilisi NGO).

Regardless of the sphere, getting used to various concepts NGOs operate with can be hard to comprehend not by outsiders only, but also for the newcomers in the sector - especially

[9] As in "gender-sensitive" for instance.

when they neither graduated from social sciences nor come from the urban middle class, less familiar with NGOs and their terms. While for the well-rooted certain words become already banal or if newly introduced - easily adopted, for the complete beginners experiencing NGO language might be very alienating. Even if the words are literally understandable for those with beginner English skills, the implied meaning behind them is problematic to grasp without any prior experience.

> Who knows what *vochdogi* [watchdog] is? If you haven't come across it anywhere and no one specifically explained its meaning to you, it doesn't matter how many times you repeat it - it is just the dog that watches, isn't it? What does it do specifically? The streets are full of dogs. But if you spend a long time [in NGO] it becomes ordinary, like some people say "tobacco" instead of "cigarettes". This is a word for daily use, and when it is in your everyday life, it already becomes ordinary. It is not strange anymore. (Saba, Gori NGO).

Adjustment to the NGO sector has been quite hard for Saba himself who got there recently, is not familiar with its dominant professions, does not speak English and held working-class jobs before. Unlike Khatia and Lado, both well-positioned, and comfortable with the language and environment, Saba first-hand experienced alienation when he got a job at an NGO office and felt like "suddenly getting locked up after being free." (Saba, Gori NGO).

> So, you have to go to the meeting and talk about some stuff, something unfamiliar and unclear to you. Then you have to come back and analyse all of this. And my brain found it… It was too hard at first and later bit by bit, bit by bit, bit by bit… Now I already realise that in some sense I got quite developed in this direction, my mind [got developed] in this direction. (Saba, Gori NGO).

Mari, who has been linked to several NGOs and whose "values and everything got constructed in this sphere" (Mari, Tbilisi NGO), faced similar confusion in the beginning.

Before starting at one of the organisations, she was quite unfamiliar with this blend between Anglophonic loanwords and NGO-associated "la-di-da" [Geo. *dabrtkelebuli laparaki*], as she calls it. While she was not quite well-rooted in the Westernised Tbilisi middle class, additionally her educational background in journalism held more value on standard Georgian, so she could not figure out why would these people just copy the words from English: "What could it be so impossible to translate in Georgian?" (Mari, Tbilisi NGO). Changing different organisations and spheres, Mari considers the professional jargon shared for the whole sector. So, for her, there are two languages: one for work and another for the family circle. While she has internalised this work language over time, trapped in-between, she thinks there is no trouble switching it depending on the audience. Simultaneously, she suspects NGO representatives purposefully apply English or Latin borrowings to enhance their status vis-à-vis laypeople, without fully realising it.

> I think we [NGO representatives] speak different languages. When you are in the office you speak differently, when you are picking the grapes with your relatives you speak differently. But if you attend the grape-picking as an NGO representative, you will say "*subsidireba"* [subsidising] and words like that. […] In a sense, I think we are maybe doing it on purpose. Maybe not entirely on purpose and deliberately, but as if we emphasise our weight. Like, 'Perfect! the more confusingly I speak the more people will think, "Great! Great! This person sounds believable." (Mari, Tbilisi NGO).

For Keso, already socialised into the NGO sector and relatively better positioned than Mari (more confident in English, more globalised, representing a more dominant profession), "nothing was incomprehensible […] neither in the beginning nor later" (Keso, Tbilisi NGO). Yet, some inaccessibility is thought to be even natural: "every sphere has its specifics" and every report and the analytical piece has its rules of writing. "You should go see the public sector reports and the wooden language there."- she says, further naturalising NGO professionalism and their emergence as carriers of managerial

and expert knowledge in their respective areas. Drawing a comparison to the bureaucratic language of sphere-specific state departments, NGOs are understood as legitimately representing laypeople's interests, despite being linguistically distant from them.

> If I read some document in the [state] forest department I would not be able to make sense of it. Should I blame the forest department language for my not understanding it? It's not serious. I would never say that. […] Just because it is called the forest [department], isn't it still about the people? Everything is about people. Public sector, the state and the non-governmental organisations, all serve the people, don't they? (Keso, Tbilisi NGO).

Thus, making sense of NGO linguistic fusion is a skill, implicitly learned by those who already went through some socialisation in the sector. Facing trendy concepts practically everywhere from application calls to training programs, many NGO representatives naturally acquire corresponding linguistic habitus, especially if they come from related educational backgrounds. Beyond the "rule of law" or "human rights" lawyers feel the most comfortable with, there are also social science-inspired buzzwords such as "discourse" [Geo. *diskursi*], "identity" [Geo. *identoba*], etc. reminded by some NGO-associated participants themselves. So, those representing professions that tend to be favoured in the NGO sector, acquire more power to control and interpret the language according to their own perspectives. For example, it is largely due to such professionalised socialisation that as revealed below, even those who criticise NGO technocratic tongue from the left critical perspectives, at the same time successfully and confidently navigate in the aid market: they know how to fit into the hazy language of the major donor agencies and are able to provide the kind of "product" the donors want (Luciani 2020: 14).

6.5. The professionals as gatekeepers and challengers of the NGO language

If one zooms into the language NGO representatives typically speak, two interconnected linguistic undercurrents can be noticed: the domain of law and the domain of social/political sciences, both primarily guided by the geopolitical realm of transition and Europeanisation. Law and social science graduates – local advocates, scholars and activists - who are knowledgeable of the respective professional vocabularies, are better able to control the NGO language and acquire symbolic power over the amateurs. At the same time, access to professional linguistic capital can be used to promote diverse, at times conflicting local agendas that either endorse the major donor framework or attempt to challenge it in subtle ways.

Discussed peculiarities of NGO technocratic tongue bears quite a resemblance with its dominant juridical language of the "rule of law" - universalised and neutralised as Bourdieu (1987) himself notices. NGOs, if separated from the think tanks and research centres, tend to be primarily the lawyers' territory, who are "anyway accustomed to different sentence structures, the passive voice, 'has been implemented' and so on and so on" (Elene, Tbilisi NGO). In contrast, the juridical language remains "arcane and indecipherable" for the laypeople, detached from their daily life (Ewik & Silbey 1998: 106). Backed by the economic and symbolic power of Western foreign aid, exclusive access to it brings the lawyers closer to the field of power and places them in a better position to push for reforms. However, while the legal language takes pride in treating everyone in the same manner, it is never truly neutral - it classifies reality in a way which conceals power relationships (Bourdieu 1987a).

The morally powerful and central concept of *human rights*, that everybody mentions among the donors, NGO representatives and laypeople, can itself be an illustration of the abovementioned. While it remains to be an important mechanism to ensure at least formal

democracy, the human rights discourse carries Eurocentric moralising tendencies and blurs asymmetries and clashes among various rights (Evans 2005; Mutua 2001). For example, despite the rising emphasis on minimal social and labour rights partly due to the EU conditionality, NGOs have traditionally revolved around civic and political rights defined against the state, giving less thought to the former (Jgerenaia & Kardava 2016; Luciani 2020; Puig 2016). As Eka, one of the interviewed lawyers, explains, after the independence above-mentioned rights got enhanced attention "because civic and political rights were the worst pain for the country which went through the Soviet Union." (Eka, Tbilisi NGO). At the same time, reflecting on her working experience, she remembers that in order to exercise their rights, vulnerable beneficiaries she has provided legal services for, were lacking basic financial assets in the first place, not necessarily addressed by the funding bodies. In this sense, *human rights* mostly defined through civic liberties dismiss the question of economic disparities that determine who will manage to apply them in practice (Harvey 2005). Similarly, *property rights* are brought forward as a universally advantageous tool protecting ordinary peasants from land expropriation, for example, obscuring how it tends to benefit the rich disproportionally compared to the most marginalised (Sanghera 2020).

Monopolisation of the juridical language further allows NGO lawyers to involve international bodies in their advocacy. This can range from taking concrete cases to the Strasbourg Court to supplying respective international organisations with "neutral, objective and maximally fact-based" reports covering the issues they work on (Shorena, NGO representative). Pressuring the local state this way becomes an especially convenient strategy in the context of Georgia's European integration and expected harmonisation with the EU legal standards. Shorena, one of the lawyers, clarifies:

> As the state has a proclaimed aspiration towards European integration, it has many obligations to fulfil. How human rights are protected in the country is one of the key issues on this path. Therefore, NGOs have the watchdog function to monitor what the state does and how. Then they can deliver objective information to international organisations, and to eliminate the systemic problems also engage them in working with the state. (Shorena, Tbilisi NGO).

The lawyers, despite holding a more civic or more social orientation, all tend to manoeuvre into the dry expert language of rights, international standards and regulations. To draw on such obligations rather than on corresponding grassroots voices is thought to be the only possible approach to attract the state's attention, aspiring Euro-Atlantic integration. This in turn alienates the laypeople and simultaneously conceals internal symbolic struggles in the sector itself.

> Instead of saying in plain language that the people should not be dying in Chiatura [small mining town] because of the bad working conditions, you would bring up this or that article from the Council of Europe and talk about various types of standards. But I cannot put all the responsibility on NGOs either. They speak the language of standards and such references because the state only listens to this. Because it just cares about synchronising with Euro-structures and not the public discontent. Consequently, they speak for the state and not for the people. (Elene, Tbilisi NGO).

Subordinated to the overarching themes of European integration, democratisation and human rights, social and political science graduates also contribute to obscuring the language with their own terminology. Typically embracing the transition paradigm, they take part in preparing the reports for local and international usage and play the key role in helping the donors to assess the situation and monitor the progress. In this sense, NGO publications might vary from the "balance between academic and journalistic" (Irakli, Tbilisi NGO) to denser social science language simultaneously competing for academic

recognition. As in the lawyers' case, there is always tension between the different audiences these researchers have to speak to. Academia is one of them: their writing should be complex enough to be eligible for the academic community but at the same time accessible to anyone interested. This in turn creates conflicts between some researchers and their advocacy-oriented colleagues, reflected in Keso's quote below who thinks criticisms over the incomprehensibility of the language are too far-fetched:

> Obviously, you write for everybody to comprehend but [the NGO director] thought compound-complex sentences were already too complicated. […] I disagree. I don't think people are that stupid not to understand. First, some awareness should already precede to be interested in this report and to want to read it. If you have this awareness, you will then also know what's happening there. There is nothing incomprehensible about the language. […] In reality, you create new knowledge with this and not everyone will understand everything all the time. (Keso, Tbilisi NGO).

Similar tensions are described by Kapusta-Pafahl (2017) focusing on the clash between scholarship and advocacy orientations working on gender in the Czech NGO sector. The latter feared that "very sociological" reports would not be comprehensible for the targeted state actors, while the former feared simplified text would not be perceived seriously by the academic community (ibid: 105). Despite such arguments, the line between scholarship and advocacy is very thin and applied language is often a patchwork of different terminology, more academic as well as more technocratic (Kapusta-Pafahl 2017).

The mainstream linguistic fusion which embraces the transition to Western-like liberal democracy is further supplemented and simultaneously challenged by emerging left-leaning vocabulary borrowed from critical social science. Mainly diffused by the stronger segment of social democracy-oriented lawyers, the language is also associated with

various intersecting and conflicting NGO-ised groups of activists and scholars navigating into and at the verge of the NGO sector. Largely influenced by Western social movements and post-Marxist critical theories, these ones are similarly situated in-between academic and other relevant fields. They often come from social science and related interdisciplinary backgrounds and to a great extent overlap environmentalist, as well as feminist and queer activist circles along the boundaries of the NGO sector.

To address the neglected structural character of the inequalities in the context of the neoliberal transition, the internally diverse left-leaning segment strategically introduces an alternate classification system opposed to how mainstream NGO language classifies social reality. For instance, they purposefully replace "tolerance" with "solidarity", "discrimination" with "oppression", "knowledge" with "knowledges", etc. to question the individualist and Western-centred underpinnings of the prevailing words and emphasise systemic power relations as well as the importance of the bottom-up approach. Trying to butter the bread from both sides, they simultaneously manage to successfully manoeuvre into the donor-priority areas and its characteristic language which is understood in accordance with their visions. Prominent left-wing lawyers take a more reform-oriented approach and try to push for social and labour rights; some marginal activists, on the other hand, might be avoiding the rights-based language and even deflecting from the name "NGO" at all, while still keeping small donor-funded projects. Dato, for instance, representing the latter, strives "never to fall into the liberal NGO language" and uses expressions which already "imply that someone is rich because the other one is poor". "When I talk about exploitation",- he says – " my meaning is different from the meaning liberal NGO could have given to it" (Dato, Tbilisi NGO). In a similar manner, the queer activists have embraced the term "queer", which, while having roots in Western social movements and academia, is nebulous enough to be applied by different groups

differently according to their agendas, reproducing and challenging the mainstream approach of the donor-driven minority rights simultaneously (See Mizielińska & Kulpa 2011).

Nevertheless, questioned not necessarily on the basis of inaccessibility but on the basis of ideological structuring of the social reality, the mainstream terminology happens to be countered by even more incomprehensible language, similarly professionalised and anglicised, especially typical for the academically oriented. Sharing this struggle with their other colleagues in the sector, they tend to be associated with even more packed language by the interviewed NGO representatives. Articulation of the practical problems in terms of theoretical abstractions, controlled by those familiar with the relevant academic fields (scholars, activists or both simultaneously), risks isolating even the people affected, considering that the left particularly tries to address those lacking economic and cultural capital. In the words of Maka, not an NGO representative herself but familiar with its stronger left-leaning segment, the produced "text is so alienated from the problem which it describes that it is unimaginable that the ones this research refers to, managed to associate themselves with it" (Maka, Tbilisi, 33). Scepticism is also expressed by more activism-oriented Dato, contrasting "very closed, very academic leftism" to the more "authentic" language of the majority it should be translated into (Dato, Tbilisi NGO). In this context, passing the vocabulary to the laypeople so that they could communicate their worries in social, rather than nationalist language, is deemed to be of utmost importance.

As a result, various internal struggles seem to emerge over the negotiation between accessibility and maintaining political meaning – the reason this language was introduced in the first place. The same conflict is characteristic of those concentrating on social and economic inequalities as well as left-leaning activists gathered around specific thematic

issues. Lado, one of the activists, feels caught up between the intellectual "snobbery" of his associates who "like it better when something is said this way rather than saying the same thing with the plain words", and laypeople who do not want to hear about "some complicated philosophies" and "cannot comprehend academic knowledge" (Lado, Tbilisi NGO). He believes the language, additionally burdened by Anglicised terms and syntax, should be made more accessible.

> The snobbery and elitism are so high that as soon as someone tries to simplify, they go "Ugh, we can't say it like that, it's not the same meaning". I have tried to simplify the *statement* [Eng.] but they hate it. Do you know why? Because then it sounds as if the political meaning is already lost. And I think this is exactly where we are mistaken. (Lado, Tbilisi NGO).

At the same time, such negotiations cause considerable awkwardness as it automatically reintroduces the problematic classificatory discourse of "educated" vs. "uneducated" they try to distance themselves from. For example, Lado, already familiarised with the relevant theories and vocabulary, still falls into the trap of vocally distinguishing himself from the wider public who has an "education problem", while simultaneously feeling self-defensive: "As soon as you get some education and hear about something further" – he says, - "you are already regarded as a snob and a rotten guy who knows more" (Lado, Tbilisi NGO). Meanwhile, Megi from another organisation likewise tries to figure out how to translate critical academic language into popular one without losing the connotation. This brings out a similar discomfort. On one hand, she suspects the newly introduced language "does not mean anything to the laypeople" either, on the other hand, also believes elitism is rather to assume that "laypeople don't know things" (Megi, Tbilisi NGO).

> We tried to juxtapose the leftist language with the [NGO] templates but of course, at the end of the day, it does not mean anything to the laypeople and is incomprehensible. If you read our texts and the texts of any liberal NGO, there is a big difference. But eventually, neither of them is comprehensible. Maybe the latter is even easier to understand because society got used to it, didn't it? It's been almost 15-20 years since the elites have been speaking that language. Now we want to use very popular and plain language without losing the meaning, don't we? In a sense, I also don't think that the plain language… that as if the laypeople don't know things. I think this is also elitism, although more Georgian and more comprehensible language – for sure. (Megi, Tbilisi NGO).

This way, the left-leaning segment cannot escape the privileged social position they share with the mainstream either, directly reflected in their linguistic habitus: they are smoothly socialised not only in critical academic language but also in the dominant language they aim to criticise, already confusing for the outsiders. Consequently, not simplifying their tongue appears as snobbish as its deliberate simplification - both reveal the power asymmetry and uncomfortable distance from the outsiders, especially the most marginalised they try to connect with.

Speaking in terms of theoretical concepts, closely linked to one's specific educational capital, can, in turn, be rejected as bookish and unspontaneous as revealed in the interview with Saba – the young man in the midst of adaptation to the NGO office environment after the manual jobs he held before. Not paying particular attention to the ideological classifications in the sector, Saba generally speaks of his experiences from the donor-organised training he has attended, covering the predominant issues of liberal rights and liberties.

> […] I met people with philosophical and psychological education who have lost touch with themselves and I'm not fond of such things either. Because they have read so much stuff

> and keep the ideas of so many thinkers in themselves, so much philosophy, that there is no place left in their heads for their own opinions. They talk to you with their [thinkers'] terms directly. So, I was like, man, why? Well, I talked to them casually. I talked and we had arguments. (Saba, Gori NGO).

Saba, distancing himself from the "bookish" vocabulary, juxtaposes it with his own casual, down-to-earth language. For him, the NGO sector is a place of constant talking, devoid of any practicality. More accurately, it is a place of competitive talking, he struggles to adjust smoothly. Somewhat resonating with the "usually brief" talk of Shalva (see p.153), Saba likewise emphasises he is "not much of a talker", expressing irony, confusion and a lack of esteem. Where there are "invisible barriers" hindering the smooth involvement in abstract or technical discussions, he sees more sense in what seems far more useful – actually doing something by yourself. This in turn might be illustrative of the differing relations to the language reflected in the habitus, whether one is shaped in proximity or at a distance from practical necessity (Bourdieu 1984; Sayer 2018).

> There are also some invisible barriers, aren't there? There is a competition. This non-governmental [sector] is a great thing. You have to da-da-da-da talk and talk. The main thing is to talk. Nobody listens to what you talk about, the main thing is to talk. And so it goes. I had this barrier as well because I'm not much of a talker. I don't like to focus on themes everybody talks about and prefer to think about how concrete practical steps should be made and to make this step on my own, with my own hands and feet. (Saba, Gori NGO).

This way, the vocabulary introduced by the left falls into the same trap and as Megi suspects herself, might still remain meaningless for the outsiders. Even beyond the problems with abstract academic language, this is not merely because of being unable to understand the meaning of the words per se, but because of being unable to understand the meaning of the words in relation to those from the opposite positions, typically corresponding to the left-right political divisions in this case (Bourdieu 1984, 1991). This

is where they gain meaning after all. As in the case of NGO-linked terms such as "watchdog" or else, the words fail to make sense without proper familiarity with the particular fields they correspond to. According to Bourdieu (1991), it is the nuances of constructed opposites not followed by those distant from the political field - they are unable to get why such careful selection of the words is an issue at all. This reflection is particularly crucial for the Georgian context, considering that left-right fractions traditionally characteristic of the core Western states do not even describe the local political field (Nodia 2021). Instead, as Zarycki (2014) argues, similar contexts are mostly structured along overlapping pro/anti-Western and pro/anti-Russian lines and allow corresponding classificatory discourses. Devalued as part of the Soviet ideological imposition and mostly absent from the current political realm, leftist language in Georgia, as Dato (Tbilisi NGO) says, is "in making" (Barkaia 2015). This, added to the fact that the NGO tongue has already absorbed neutralised versions of some critical terminology, leaves the left-wing vocabulary particularly marginal and baffling for many, even among those NGO representatives who are not necessarily at the heart of these clashes (Powell 2006). Mari, for instance, watches such "fights" from the distance and dismisses them as the latest youth trend, extending beyond NGOs: "they compete showing off [political orientation] scales, whether you turn out more left, centre or right-wing in them", she says (Mari, Tbilisi NGO). Laypeople, who have a far vaguer picture of the NGO sector, moreover, do not typically follow such differences.

At the same time, as acknowledged above by the respective interviewees themselves, the academically oriented left-wing segment struggles to overcome the grander problem of English-dependent peripheral academia: the language, which already relies on theoretical abstractions and legitimised Latin borrowings alienating the lower classes, is additionally burdened by new Anglicised terms and imitated syntax (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990;

Trubina et al. 2020). Both are naturally reproduced due to continuous contact with Anglophonic academic literature and the lack of agreed official translations of the terminology. For the local scholars, who have adapted to the NGO world and depend on English to stay up to date with the current literature or to publish their papers, "Georgian becomes more of a language for everyday communication while everything else is read in English." (Elene, Tbilisi NGO). Consequently, the result might be hard to grasp even for those with corresponding educational backgrounds and knowledge. As Teona notes, struggling to make sense of the produced Georgian texts herself, the left shares this problem with the rest of the NGO sector: "In fact, they also have information from the Western sources. It is very hard to distance oneself from it. You mostly speak and read in this language and then it is hard to go beyond your analysis." (Teona, Tbilisi NGO).

Amid the worries over a better connection to the outsiders, linguistic differences can also be downplayed based on different logic the mainstream and left-leaning segments follow. From the mainstream position which envisions NGOs as the local vanguard of Western liberal democracy, an emphasis on linguistic differences might be rejected as part of anti-NGO propaganda, diffused by interested actors - local government and conservative groups - who try to discredit the sector and devalue its criticisms. From the left-leaning perspective which seeks to identify itself with the marginalised groups, it is not the differences in language that alienates the NGO sector from the lay people, but rather differences in interests; meaning that if only one speaks about "the real problem" (i.e. existent social issues dismissed by the sector) which "is common and shared", no misunderstanding will occur (Megi, Tbilisi NGO).

> When I travel to the region and meet people there […] I never have a problem. And why does this happen? Well, apart from obviously trying to speak differently, I also speak about what the real problem is and what is common and shared. I think behind the language-

> related alienation there is an alienation between the interests and needs and it's somewhat bogus [to imply] that the main problem the NGO has is to suddenly utter *impact* [Eng.] or *pluralism* [Eng.]. I don't think it's purely a technical language issue. I think it is due to diverging needs and interests that it becomes unfamiliar and incomprehensible. Although the language itself technically, just as a language, also needs improvement. (Megi, Tbilisi NGO).

> To be honest, I can't stand such an attitude [on language]. I think generally this is [diffused] by those who hold a negative opinion about non-governmental organisations or dislike [their] criticism, like the government or the Union of Orthodox Parents or someone like that. It is from the same fairy tale where they called [the NGO community] the grant eaters and the Soros people. These are all derogatory offensive epithets to discredit a non-governmental organisation. (Keso, Tbilisi NGO).

In this division, the dominant fraction of NGO representatives see the transformation into successful liberal democracy much in line with the long-term public interests, even if people, lacking the same expertise, are unable to currently understand it. "It's hard to explain to someone that I'm doing this not because I don't know or care about your problems, or about you being hungry, for example," – Nika says referring to the worse-off - "I'm doing this because it is the way of solving this problem" (Nika, Tbilisi NGO). On the contrary, the smaller left-leaning fraction, dominated by the lawyers, critical towards economic order and presenting itself closer to the economically or culturally marginalised, sees its role in supporting their "inclusion in institutionalised politics" (Dimitri, Tbilisi NGO) and "being the voices of various oppressed groups in this political field" (Megi, Tbilisi NGO). Nevertheless, in the case of both perspectives, there is still some assumption of an implicit delegation of power to speak for others in a "louder" voice - "a misrecognised dispossession of the less competent by the more competent" who can communicate in a legitimate manner: prepare the policy papers, advocate, speak

the legal language of the state institutions or draw on academic canonical texts (Bourdieu 1984: 413-414).

As demonstrated, the competence rooted in exclusive cultural and linguistic capital acquired as part of the educational backgrounds facilitates more comfortable adaptation to the NGO sector as well as allows its further questioning. This way, the mix of language the NGO representatives speak might reflect different views about existing problems and their solutions, and convey somewhat competing classifications of the social reality. As the left-leaning segment tries to counter the mainstream NGO language with what they regard as more emancipatory terminology, the distinction from the laypeople still emerges - both languages produced are meant to trickle down so that the locals made sense of their own worlds accordingly.

6.6. Conclusion

To summarise, while observing the speech pattern of the interviewees as well as trying to understand how they themselves relate to their own speech and writing, this chapter has looked into the language of NGO representatives in relation to their positioning in local and global arenas. Rooted in the linguistic habitus, their vocabulary is typically a mixture of various formal and informal Anglicisms: casual borrowings from the English language, they share with the local middle-class youth and the vocabulary of the foreign aid sector, they share with their colleagues from other aid-dependent countries. The latter is a particularly complex fusion further influenced by various conflicting and overlapping orientations of the involved actors, from juridical to social science frameworks, from activist and advocacy to academic positions, and related habitus, from the influence of transition paradigm to the influence of critical social science. Due to the cultural and

linguistic capital these NGO representatives possess, they manage to smoothly manoeuvre in it and negotiate their own interests, reproduce the language, and simultaneously contest it.

Nevertheless, the language itself bears the features pointing at being dominant and dominated at the same time. Full of imitations, it indicates the peripheral positioning of NGO representatives in a global sense, yet translates into symbolic power in the local arena, providing opportunities at the crossroads of various fields, whether development, juridical, academic, political, or else. Simultaneously, it generates distinction vis-à-vis laypeople, especially when it comes to its worse-off segment. Consequently, the amalgam also creates an "invisible barrier" for the newcomers, particularly for those not fitting typical NGO habitus (Saba, Gori NGO).

In this chapter, I also looked at the discursive facet of the language itself that the participants struggle for. The imperative of progress, also ingrained in the aid language, further affects the emergence of the corresponding internal labels in the country: the ones who are closer to the ideal and the ones who still have to catch up. In this marathon, NGO representatives see their role in educating those who lag back. This kind of "othering" constructions the interviewees come up with will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 7

The quest for Western liberal democracy and associated binary classifications

7.1. Introduction

"The problem is that we don't have time to wait until we educate these people. We should keep up the development pace with the West. And sadly, we are a backward, lagging-back country." – uttered the director of one of the watchdog NGOs in regret or despair, while he was attending the radio talk show as an invited guest (Radio Liberty 2021). He was primarily reacting to the comments by some radio listeners, who worried about the imposition of Western liberal values, applied homophobic slurs, and complained about being looked down on by the media and their guests as uneducated or pro-Russian. The theme of the interview resonated with the events that happened a week before in July. The month started out roughly. First, the organised far-right groups attacked the Tbilisi Pride march, while the journalists working in the area were also beaten. The next day the same groups took down and burnt the official European flag hanging in front of the parliament, linking the Pride march to the EU integration (Civil Georgia 2021). "It is us, who are unlucky" – the invited NGO representative continued, referring to the progressive minority, not the sexual minority - "the ones who went ahead of the pace of Georgia's development. But these people will probably think like this for long and hopefully they'll soon turn towards civilisation" (Radio Liberty 2021).

The above self-distinction and constructed binaries make a good example of the classificatory discourse characteristic for NGO representatives, also revealed in the

interviews I conducted. It demonstrates Europeanisation of the gay rights, culturalisation of the global hierarchies imagined as an East-West civilisational slope, NGO representatives' symbolic attachment to the West and classifying themselves as "progressive minority" vis-à-vis "illiterate" masses who are in process of learning (Melegh 2006). The gay rights issue is often brought at the centre of such discursive classifications, although its promotion by the West/EU as a matter of civilisational progress has been harshly criticised by Eastern European scholars from queer studies field (Kulpa 2014; Rekhviashvili 2018a; Rexhepi 2016). Yet, as I outlined elsewhere, the classifications go far beyond gay rights, which itself makes one part of the larger package revolving around tolerance, human rights, gender equality, individualism, and responsibility, strongly marked by the Western symbolic power and compatible with liberal democratic trajectory.

In this sense, this chapter focusing on the above subjective constructions is a direct continuation of the previous chapters where I attempted to pinpoint the NGO community's objective positioning in social space by highlighting the prioritised cultural capital in the sector and demonstrating how these positions are even embodied as linguistic habitus. Below I will show how the NGO community as a culturally dominant group reproduces powerful Western-centred classifications that paint them in a good light and further reinforce their symbolic power, already rooted in the West. In accordance with Georgia's geopolitically contested context, participants typically contextualise these progress-related constructed labels and ideas in the West-Russia binary. Consequently, the chapter makes further references to the geopolitical structuring of the local field and the dependence doxa, as distinguished by Zarycki (2014).

The first section below looks at what Zarycki calls dependence doxa, as he merges Bourdieusian theory with the assumptions of world systems and postcolonial theories.

These are the taken-for-granted ideas about "catching up" with the West which naturalises economic and cultural dependence by constructing local cultural backwardness as the main obstacle towards progress. We can further understand such ideas as a form of developmental idealism that international organisations and NGOs typically promote (Thornton et al. 2015). This includes globally widespread beliefs that understand the world in terms of a universal development ladder with the Western states on top and imply that to get there and to reach the "good life" all countries should internalise their standards and ways of life. These ideas voiced by the participants are contrasted by bringing up Russia as the polar opposite of everything good the West stands for. Given Russia's strong pressures, it is no surprise that even if Russia was not mentioned in my interview guide at all, it often came up spontaneously during the interviews. NGO community's strong self-identification with the West and accompanying anti-Russian stance is well reflected in Neli's quote: "Those who start working in the NGO, already well understand what it means to be pro-Western, and this is the reason they want to work there" – says Neli from one of the Gori NGOs. "And I don't think any organisation would hire a person who is pro-Russian." – she adds. It is noteworthy that the interviews have been collected before the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022. Nowadays Russian element would most likely be far stronger.

The second subchapter focuses on classifications like the one in the introductory paragraph, which emerges from doxic beliefs of catching up with the West discussed in the first section. These classifications define the NGO community as the bearer of progress, while the lay people are portrayed as lacking know-how of tolerance and active citizenship, often due to influences from the Soviet past and current Russia. The internalisation of Western values is in turn seen as a precondition of Georgia ever reaching the same level of progress the West embodies.

Yet, simultaneously, we should be cautious of completely reducing normative judgements the NGO representatives make to the workings of habitus and maximisation of the symbolic profit (Sayer 2010a). Their values, serving as distinction, are partially mediated by class-based and NGO-based habitus, while partially driven by personal experiences of mistreatment or of those around them. This ignites evaluative emotions and judgements shaped in terms of the available discourses of Europeanisation, democratisation, tolerance and so on.

The chapter mostly relies on interviews with the NGO representatives and is complemented by the data from the interviews with the donors.

7.2. The spirit of transition in the light of competing West-Russia domination

"If there are kids in Africa that need to be fed, in Georgia it is democracy that needs to be fed." – states Neli from one of the Gori organisations, as she speaks of the donor engagement with the local NGO sector. This slogan-sounding phrase, probably, best describes both – donors' approach towards the former socialist states defined against the former totalitarian experience, and NGO representatives' understanding of Georgia's position in constructed global hierarchies of linear development (Thornton et al. 2015). "Unfortunately, we are still in the stone age." – Beka adds in regret, - "in the 21st century, we still demand the right for democratic elections so that our vote is not lost" (Beka, Gori NGO). While the interviewed NGO representatives might be complaining about the irrelevance of some specific technical requirements of the grant calls or other trivial inflexibilities, overall, they are strongly in accordance with the major donor vision of

development. They make it clear that the core, visible part of the NGO sector is built upon liberal values, supports strengthening democratic institutions, cares for human rights and "views the future through such evolution" (Keti, Tbilisi NGO). Words like "evolution", "development", "transition", and "transformation" which are charged with strong teleological implications, are typically characteristic of their narratives, sometimes directly articulated through the prism of Western-centred rankings and classifications.

It is typically the Rose revolution of 2003 regarded as a turning point which ensured the break from the regressive past and Georgia, stuck in the 1990s' massive poverty, organised crime, corrupt state, and human rights violations, got closer to the "civilised countries", gaining the name of exemplary reformer through their very support (Shorena, Tbilisi NGO). As both foreign and native donor representatives indicate, Georgia soon became one of the donor darlings because it emerged as a "success story" (Paul, Donor representative) and "coincided with the interests of Europe and the US" (Giorgi, Donor representative). "It is about showing that this democratisation policy of the so-called West is successful." – Paul says, - "And Georgia is an example of successful reforms, transformation and partly, democratisation." From the local perspective, these geopolitical interests are seen in accordance with Georgian interests, so Western donors are perceived as important enablers of the desired political and cultural advancement. After all, "affairs with the normal country will be beneficial for them too", Keso says about the Western states (Tbilisi NGO).

In this sense, sustaining what has been achieved by far and developing further to reach Western "normalcy", defined by democracy and capitalism, becomes a crucial objective (Buchowski 2006). As Shorena (Tbilisi NGO) emphasises, "nobody will be able to care for you forever" and Georgia should not turn into a financial burden for the Western states. So, the country should keep pace and improve itself to "become a full democracy

instead of transitional democracy […], [reach] economic progress, and changes in public mentality" (Keso, Tbilisi NGO).

This idea of advancing further in a particular manner is quite intertwined with the ongoing Europeanisation process. Europeanisation being the major route of development, main donor agencies are typically synchronised around the EU association agreement as an orienteer and despite slight differences in approach, they work closely. On the other hand, NGO representatives dedicate themselves to approximate the country to the EU standards, popularise the EU and Europeanise the wider public (Tsuladze et al. 2021).

In this process, the "faulty" mentality of the local population is repeatedly seen as a significant cause of Georgia's backwardness, which historically skipped the necessary steps that "all countries go through" (Lela, Tbilisi NGO). Lela, a young intern from one of the organisations, for example, believes that the Rose revolution rather "happened to" Georgians than they consciously participated in this shift. Consequently, the necessary phases that could gradually bring them closer to the idea of democracy, human rights and tolerance were left out.

> Because of the Rose Revolution, we *skipped* [Eng.] certain things, in my opinion. Considering that in our country the democratic processes arrived through revolution, understandably, we kind of skipped [the stages] that we are going through nowadays, for example. […] it just happened to us and then we liked it. Maybe if we had approached it more gradually, we would have been more conscious of what really comes with democracy. (Lela, Tbilisi NGO).

The root of the problematic public mentality that hinders progress is typically ascribed to the Soviet legacy and the "homo Sovieticus" as its relict – the fusion of communist and conservative mindsets which disallows individual freedom, deemed as necessary for ideal liberal democracy. Participants consider the Soviet past as an "unnatural" trajectory

which pushed Georgia to skip the necessary stages. On the contrary, Euro-American states have developed "normally" and reached economic, political and cultural success as a result.

> They [EU states] are much ahead compared to us because of the historical and political processes. We spent centuries first in the Russian empire and then in the Soviet Union and its imposed [order]. It is argued that to some extent, in a cultural sense, Europe arrived here through the Russian empire and maybe it is so. But in the Soviet Union, what kind of natural development could we possibly have had? While we lived in a fictional state in the 1970s, in the US Andy Warhol was drawing things about freedom, about individual freedom and equality. And it was these values prevailing there. I'm not even talking about private property and such things. Consequently, these states are ahead of us in terms of development. (Keso, Tbilisi NGO).

The discourse of the wrong, interrupted trajectory basically repeats the findings from the study on elite and popular discourses on Georgia's Europeanisation (Tsuladze et al. 2021). Political and intellectual elites, as well as lay people, see Georgia as artificially torn apart from its European family by Russia and thus alienated from the "natural" course of development. In the quote above, Keso even seems to be more tolerating of 19th-century Russian imperialism as it still ensured the right direction through Europeanisation, later washed away by the Soviet Union completely. This is similar to the CEE discourses where socialist legacy is envisioned as non-European and thus erased as part of the legitimate history; the journey begins from ground zero with the guidance of more "mature" core Western states (Petrovic 2014).

In the NGO sector, this further implies the influx of trainers and experts from abroad to train the local NGO representatives. On the other hand, as the latter learn new approaches and techniques from Western experts, they are then assigned the role of the teacher for

other post-Soviet states imagined as more backward. This also includes neighbouring South Caucasian countries, which are typically orientalised in local elite and popular discourses and presented as less progressive and less Western than Georgia (Tsuladze et al. 2021).

> Often the experts take us to other countries, typically post-Soviet ones like Armenia, to conduct the study tours and share our experience with them too. […] To be honest, in other countries, they are more backward than us, but they are also developing now. Obviously, depends on the NGO too, international organisations help them as well. (Ana, Tbilisi NGO).

At the same time, from the Western donors' perspective, local NGO representatives might be viewed in the very same light of "transitional mentality" or "Soviet legacy" themselves. Paul, for instance, is critical of older hierarchical types of organisations whose "approach is very Soviet-style in terms of what you produce, what kind of publications you produce, what language you use and also the lecturer approach" (Paul, Donor representative). On the other hand, Anna, another donor representative comments on the monopolisation of NGOs by young and ambitious professionals who "don't want to share prestige, influence and money" and avoid volunteering, seeing it as a characteristic of the transitional states and consequent mentality: "there were expectations, that why should I work for free? [Whether] I graduated from the university or not yet, I should get a good position and well-paid job." (Anna, Donor representative). Yet, as Chapter 5 has demonstrated, governed by the logic of tough competition for the limited funding, the sector unsurprisingly creates the market primarily for young middle-class professionals, many of whom (for instance, social and political science graduates) lack the prospects elsewhere.

Development towards a Western kind of liberal democracy is what the sector typically revolves around but due to the geopolitical structuring of the local field of power, it does not exist without juxtaposition with Russia, also associated with the former Soviet Union. Perceived as an evil twin of the West, historically hindering Georgia's development, Russia is probably mentioned as often as the West itself, strengthening the goodness of the former. The current pressures from Russia and its strong military presence in breakaway regions significantly drive such attitudes. "If we remain alone [without Western support], we will be eaten up"- Khatia (Tbilisi NGO) fears, voicing the prevalent Russia-related anxieties that largely drive the quest for Euro-Atlantic integration (Gvalia et al. 2011; Kakachia & Minesashvili 2014; Tsuladze et al. 2021).

At the same time, as shown by the mentioned authors and demonstrated above, this is not merely a security issue for the interviewees (ibid.). While striving for an ideal liberal democracy is considered a crucial and unquestionable route towards "the good life", Russia's positioning as its conservative alternative lacks the same attractiveness. Instead, the latter is perceived as a backward imperial power, playing the role of the "other" for the Europeanising Georgia (Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015). This way, Russia's conservative stance and authoritarian leadership are contrasted with Western democracy and respect toward each and every individual, while Russian poverty is similarly juxtaposed with the Western prosperity Georgia likes to achieve through Europeanisation.

> You would be a fool to compare Europe with the poor neighbourhood or any other world that lacks the same things [material well-being, quality of life, human rights]. We choose where we feel better, and this is a very pragmatic choice. And I know the reasons why I don't want to be with Russia. If they change, I'd want to be with them too, because they have a rich history and meaningful culture. Yet, this is disappearing gradually and remains far from what currently comes forward. (Tina, Tbilisi NGO).

In the context of the West-Russia binary, Georgia and Russia also emerge as contrasting pair: Georgia might be imperfect, but still ahead of Russia when it comes to ensuring freedoms. As Keti emphasises, being a human rights defender can be a tough job but at least it is not life-threatening in Georgia. “In Russia, for example, they are killed.” – she adds right away. This way, the perception of the Russian threat moves from the country level down to NGO representatives personally, as they anxiously comment on Russia’s foreign agent and gay propaganda laws (Gorcharenko & Khadaroo 2019; Tolkachev & Tolordava 2020). As Rekhviashvili (2018a) points out, the latter issue acquires a key role in both Western and Russian geopolitical agendas: while the West measures progress based on gay rights, Russia reverses it and disseminates the discourse of gay propaganda instead, not due to backwardness but rather to reposition as West’s alternative. Consequently, for NGO representatives, Russia’s current policies are both morally wrong and personally frightening, whether it is linked to the human rights issue or flexing muscles in relation to Georgia.

So, one can see how different factors play out in Russia’s emergence as an oriental, immoral, threatening power vis-à-vis progressive and moral West in the discourses of the interviewees. It is everything altogether: the ability of the core Western states to mark their models with superior symbolic power perceived as a “natural” course contrasted with Russian backwardness; local grievances regarding Russia’s imperial ambitions in the region and moral judgements about its authoritarian policies; as well as NGO staff’s personal anxieties related to Russia’s suspicion of the kind of work they are typically involved in – monitoring the government, defending the gay rights and primarily, being foreign-funded. All this is interestingly laid out in the quote below, where Vladikavkaz (the city from Russia’s North Caucasian periphery) is purposefully mentioned instead of any Russian-populated city, supposedly as an example of what comes from the Caucasus

being dominated by Russia. This kind of Caucasus is contrasted with the modern Western cities, that Russians or pro-Russians alike prefer for themselves, yet still pushing Russia – the less attractive option - onto Georgians.

> Just to consider the moral dimension, I'd rather prefer to be part of the space, where if human values are not perfectly protected, at least they are recognised as important. Compare this to Russia, where a person can be arrested for a Facebook post, disappear and you might never figure out whether they are dead or alive. I don't want to be there. I don't want to live there. If you look at some pro-Russians and their children, also the Russians themselves, they don't want to be in Russia. They want [to live] in London, New York, and Paris. So why should I be there [in Russia] then? I don't want [to live] in Vladikavkaz. I want to be in a better place. (Khatia, Tbilisi NGO).

Both, avoidance of being colonised by the undesirable backward empire and self-colonising rhetoric vis-à-vis progressive West curiously emerge in Lado's narrative as well, even though it is said humorously rather than in a serious manner. "We used to condemn our luck of being Russia's colony, wishing we had been a British colony instead at least." - he tells me of the joke shared with his friends, and corrects immediately, - "Obviously, making such a distinction is ridiculous itself. Of course, colonialism always sucks but we mean the value-related aspect, these values [human rights] are much closer to us." (Lado, Tbilisi NGO).

Consequently, to make sure that these values withstand, NGO representatives are dedicated to both - popularising the EU among the population and neutralising Russia's information warfare against the West, which are seen as two sides of the same coin. "There are ordinary propaganda channels that try to demonise the Western world and those values, generally" – Nika (Tbilisi NGO) worries. While this issue appears to be an important concern for the donors, NGO representatives also display high anxiety over the

possibility of reversing pro-Western public attitudes. "If I were the donor, I would have been more interested and put more resources into the research about social media influence and generally, about the promotion of pro-Russian attitudes in Georgia " – Nia says. Amidst information warfare, popularising the EU and disseminating related liberal democratic values that should lead Georgians to happiness and stable, dignified life, becomes the matter of life and death for the participants: one must remain alert and keep the public opinion in check not to allow the country's sliding back.

> You might easily lose this discussion. One day when you go out in the street, you might find out that most people think Georgia's goal should be joining [Russia-led] Eurasian Union, and that visiting Moscow for 37 *maneti* [Soviet Ruble] was a happy era for Georgia. But we all believe that it was not this way, don't we? So, something should be done about it, and this is what our NGO and the other NGOs try to contribute to. They try to show [people] that joining Europe will make you happy, and these are not just empty words. You will be happier. Each person will be happier, richer, and have a more dignified life; and shouldn't the goal be to strive for happiness, for dignity? (Irakli, Tbilisi NGO).

As Georgia is situated in "a crumple zone between expanding empires" (Dunn 2018: 223), Europeanisation/transition discourse, NGO representatives diffuse, is driven by both desires together: to escape from more unattractive and aggressive Russia's ambitions and to reach the civilisational and economic progress, the West epitomises. As we see in the quote above, the latter destination is painted in particularly strong, romanticised, and optimistic terms – not merely progress, but rather a happiness shared by all citizens. This duality also cuts across the next subchapter, focused on how NGO representatives classify themselves and the laypeople, and the pedagogic function they ascribe to themselves in "helping the country to grow up" (Sopo, Gori NGO).

7.3. NGO liberal "bubble" and the quest for enlightening *bneli:* disseminating Western values as means to the progress

The Georgian word "*bneli*" implies being the bearer of the darkness in its literal translation. What *bneli* lacks is *ganatleba* – "enlightenment" in its direct meaning, the light *ganatlebuli*, i.e. enlightened, educated person effortlessly carries. *Bneli* has been a common way of describing unmodernised masses in Georgia, tainted by former socialist experience and traditionalist value system, seen as a hindrance to the successful transition (Manning 2009). The *bubble [Geo. babli],* on the other hand, is a contemporary English loan, most typically applied by liberally oriented youth to refer to their milieu of the like-minded - the space painted as inclusive, tolerant, stylish, secular, critical-thinking and above all, safe from the bigotry of the parochial *bneli*. At the same time, if the former emerges as strongly pro-Western in such discursive constructions, the latter tends to be easily tempted by Russia (typically, due to gullibility and the lack of access to trustworthy sources). Because of Russia's strong presence in the Caucasus, it is not merely explicit sympathies towards it that counts, but any anti-Western, anti-progressive or Soviet-nostalgic stance can be translated as "closeted" pro-Russianness. For example, *bneli* Georgian is simultaneously nicknamed *gruzini*, meaning "Georgian" in the Russian language.

Both descriptors (*bneli* and *bubble*), one about the masses and another about the contrasting smaller segment, often come up during the interviews, reflecting the widespread classifications in Georgian reality. As Keso, one of the Tbilisi NGO representatives, explains, "it is typically kind of pro-Russian, less educated, closed and

conservative people that are called *bneli. Nateli* [Eng. 'bright', 'enlightened'] are people with Western, European values" inhabiting the bubble. At the same time, she strictly emphasises that while such stereotypical hyperbolised dichotomies do exist in society and while NGO representatives would be typically ascribed to the first category, this is certainly not part of their vocabulary in the working process. And in fact, if the interviewees mention *bneli,* it is often to distance themselves from its explicit usage as well as from the associated condescending elitist stance, calling such an approach "vulgar, that cannot withstand any criticism" (Irakli, Tbilisi NGO). As *bneli* is becoming politically incorrect to use at least during the formal interviews, the implication it carries, including subsequent pedagogic mission, remains well and alive. Mostly softened behind the words such as "awareness rising" or "effective communication", it now requires patience and friendliness, not blatant arrogance. But this too sets the already knowledgeable NGO community apart from those whose awareness must be risen.

The donors particularly focus on "building the responsibility of a citizen" who would actively monitor and communicate with the government (Anna, Donor representative). The more people the NGOs reach, Anna notes, the more helpful for lessening the stereotypes such as "grant eaters" or "external agents" - "regular in the transition period when the society does not understand what civil society is about". Additionally, the donors encourage awareness about human rights, minority rights and gender equality, arranging workshops to educate women about their rights and equip them with entrepreneurial and leadership skills. This way, the values of tolerance, active citizenship, and responsibility, that define modernity get pitted against "traditional and closed" local society that lacks the same independence and open-mindedness (Lika, Tbilisi NGO).

For most NGO representatives, the internalisation of these principles is what distinguishes people in NGOs from the majority. First, the NGO community presents itself as "active

people who are not afraid to leave their comfort zone" (Tekla, Tbilisi NGO) and hold the government accountable. "In other countries, the necessity of the NGO sector might be less obvious, in Europe, in Sweden, for instance." - Khatia says –"because it is the citizen who takes this position, the citizen is a watchdog." According to the participants, while many Georgians live in a survival mode, they do not have much time or interest to get acquainted with important governance-related issues and how it affects them, such as judiciary reforms, state corruption, municipality budget, human rights protection, or the benefits of EU integration. As a result, they argue, it is hard to get them to attend NGO-organised meetings that in fact try to explain how all of this will eventually lead to prosperity. Primarily focused on democratisation, only a few interviewees from the peripheral organisations mention the provision of skills training for women or youth. Instead, respect towards individual freedoms and human rights appears to be the most significant discourse among the interviewees.

Misled by untrustworthy information and lacking appropriate education, the population does not take the issue of human rights or gender equality seriously either, the interviewees worry. Instead, they display conservative attitudes and intolerance towards various minorities - ethnic, religious, and sexual. The issues of gender equality and tolerance, being strongly marked by Western symbolic power, emerges as particularly crucial markers of both, individual and country-level progress. Simultaneously, Russia's conservative discourse targeting sexualities, which it is contested by, further intensifies the urgency of the issue for the interviewees, provoking the fear that the European future might be compromised (Rekhviashvili 2018a). Consequently, rather than being limited to designated feminist or LGBT organisations, these topics are addressed by the participants from the overall NGO sector. The majority of the NGO representatives I interviewed (whether in Tbilisi or in Gori, from influential watchdogs or tiny youth organisations,

employees or a few volunteers), might not work particularly on the above topics, but they still strongly identify with it collectively. They bring it up themselves and emphasise how actively they support the cause and informally educate the public about these issues. In this sense, the participants especially distinguish the older segment as a weak link, who went through socialisation in the Soviet Union and the inhabitants of the rural areas, where any "stereotypic information spreads like a broken telephone" (Nunuka, Tbilisi NGO).

Deficient in appropriate education, Georgians also lag back in terms of sexual emancipation and education, - some say, - reminding conservative backlash towards the Sex Ed initiatives, female sexuality, and sexual minorities: "there is so much alienation towards sexual matters that we don't even consider it as part of our whole body and our organism, except the reproduction" (Nana, Tbilisi NGO). But behind the collective "we" it is typically the unenlightened masses meant: if the pro-Western "bubble" is sexually educated and liberated, the latter is rigid, patriarchal, and lacking sexual know-how. "Education is not only about the maths formulas and being familiar with Ilia Chavchavadze[10] in Georgian literature or Dumas[11] in the French one." – adds Nana (Tbilisi NGO). "They lack information, they lack education, they don't know how things work" - Nika comments in a more general sense (Tbilisi NGO).

Classified in moral and cultural terms, "*we*" – Europeanised, rational, educated, and free from traditionalist cultural pressures, is thus separated from the local majority constructed as its opposite. Such a juxtaposition between *us* and *them* is especially eye-catching if we look at Nika's and Lela's words side to side - as Nika shares his concerns over the vices of the majority who carry "conservative, often fascist values", Lela demonstrates strong

[10] A famous 19th-century Georgian writer and public figure
[11] A famous 19th-century French writer

self-identification with the Western value system and subsequent virtues, presented in terms of individual freedom and choice.

> I consider myself a pro-Western person, someone who holds Western values. And the first thing that comes to my head is that I'm a very free person and respect others' freedom very much, enormously. I always try not to limit other people's choices, even if I stand against them. Not to be aggressive towards others' opinions, even if I deem them completely unacceptable. I associate this with the Western [values] primarily. (Lela, Tbilisi NGO).

> These liberal values are alien for the most part of society, unfortunately. Xenophobia, homophobia and so on, are something normal for them. Various phobias, you name it, are not considered to be shameful in society. For them, it's not even a huge problem to target anyone based on any ground. (Nika, Tbilisi NGO).

So as participants claim, liberal democracy does not quite work in Georgia partly because its norms are not internalised by most locals. Instead, they are perceived to be shaped by the blend of Soviet, traditional and religious ideologies which hinders the adaptation to democracy and individual emancipation. Beyond hurting the democratic system, which typically emerges in the interviews, few also connect mentioned xenophobia and nationalism to the rejection of foreign investments in local agricultural lands, thus also hurting the economy. In this domain, the prejudiced public mentality is viewed as unreconciling with global capitalism as well.

"People still have not got used to the freedom" – Natia from the Gori NGO regrets, pointing at internalised Soviet experience of totalitarianism, particularly ascribed to the older generation – "it does not disappear from the consciousness quickly". Previous ideological pressures, some participants argue, moulded the locals into bigoted and passive citizens: "they think freedom encourages immorality and ruins traditions" (Natia, Tbilisi NGO), while, on the other hand, lacking individual responsibility, they do not take

the matters into their hands to hold the government accountable, instead "keeping the attitude of blaming one leader for everything" (Lela, Tbilisi NGO). Additionally, former communism is juxtaposed with the current capitalist order: if the first one instilled a collectivist worldview where "one could not develop separately from the collective" and "was discouraged to have an idea or an independent opinion", capitalism - revolving around the private property - is seen closely intertwined with the values of individual liberty and equality (Keso, Tbilisi NGO). "So, we lag back at least for half a century in terms of economic, social and political development" – Keso concludes.

As such classification attaches a specific stigma to the older generation, Lili's position, who, unlike the prototypical NGO representative, is in her 60s, sounds especially interesting. When asked about whether she has reevaluated anything during her time in NGO, she directly goes to emphasise that despite being socialised in Soviet times, she never quite shared the Soviet mentality, and was familiar with the ideas of human rights, gender equality and tolerance towards sexual minorities. By bringing this up (her organisation does not particularly work on the latter two issues either), as if she attempts to counter the above-discussed "Soviet stigma", trying to convince the audience of her modernity, cosmopolitanism and non-Sovietness.

> Even when I was a student, and this was in communist times, I thought differently. Maybe many from my milieu as well. Even though I was a party member, I still used to think differently. Maybe you know what? Our university was an international one with a lot of foreign students. People from Asia, Africa and Latin America used to study there, almost everyone except the developed countries of Europe and the US. While communicating with other students, I got used to speaking about the themes such as gender, sexual minorities, and human rights that was quite actively ongoing by then. My worldview which resembles

> the views of the contemporary youth was formed as early as by that period. (Lili, Gori NGO).

Apart from emphasising the Soviet legacy, the interviewees believe Western values of freedom and tolerance are not easily embraced by the locals because Georgia "represents traditionally conservative culture" revolving around nationalist sentiments and orientation towards traditions (Eka, Tbilisi NGO). This orientation is thought to be strengthened further by the powerful Orthodox Christian church, encouraging conservative beliefs among the parishioners, particularly in the domains of gender equality and tolerance towards the gay community.

> They interfere too much in a person's private life, they have a lot of influence, and they know they have a lot of influence. Their sermons that come from the church pulpits, about a man being the head of the family and a woman being the neck, have a very big impact on the public consciousness. If there is one thing we must defeat today, it is religious fanaticism that should be separated from traditions even. (Natia, Gori NGO).

"Such phobias exist in every society, we are not that unique in that, but when it is instrumentalised and used against someone, here we have a problem" – Lana (Tbilisi NGO) avoids blaming the culture per se. In this sense, except for the church and its traditionalist agenda, participants believe the government also uses these sensitive issues to retain its power (for example, through applying minority labels to discredit the opponents, encouraging conservative groups, etc.), while simultaneously pretending to be a progressive actor. As for external instrumentalisation, it is typically Russia's troll factories considered to be behind fuelling anxieties through social media, which links Europeanisation to debauchery and losing Georgian traditions. In this context, besides setting themselves apart from the masses, NGO representatives strongly define themselves against the actors with competing conservative agendas that similarly go after

the hearts and the minds of the population: Russia in a geopolitical sense, the Church, and the governing elites internally. The latter, despite positioning otherwise, still includes those who "embody regress and darkness, and don't believe in these things themselves", they say (Nika, Tbilisi NGO). On the contrary, NGO representatives are presented as authentic carriers of Western liberal values, more virtuous and empathetic than the above-mentioned powers, as well as more attuned to the "civilised world" (Irakli, Tbilisi NGO).

As the interviewees distinguish themselves from the wider public, they often see their moral and cultural attainments in an individualised way, less reflexive of their positions in social space: the "bubble" exists only because of individual transformations in the worldviews - individual evolutions or revolutions - of the few in a society which conditioned them otherwise.

> Everybody grows up this way and all of them who think otherwise went through a small revolution or evolution in their own self as a result of personal development. Nobody taught [gender] equality to them, neither in the family nor at school. And if anyone achieved this, at the individual level really. (Keti, Tbilisi NGO).

Therefore, the narratives of personal transformation, growth and self-education tend to emerge in the interviews, sometimes it drives people towards NGOs, and other times NGOs drive them towards it. Additionally, as one's awareness increases, it becomes important to share these ideas and educate their own milieus in informal ways. Transcending even the age or the class dimension, this can include family members or close friends and is seen as everyday personal contributions to the development of the country.

> I began to think further, and this is what matters. Beyond myself, talking to peers and friends I have made other people think further too and reevaluate things. These discussions might not be official, just us four-five friends sitting together and talking. Because as time

> goes by, you realise that you keep growing together with others and the whole milieu grows up. It is what matters the most. I'm sure everybody in the NGO sector thinks this way. So, imagine if there are ten, twenty or thirty people behind me, and the same amount behind others, it means the society grows up to some extent, develops, gets educated and their social responsibility increases. (Sopo, Gori NGO).

As the idea of turning into an active, educated, responsible, and tolerant citizen becomes a celebrated moral value itself, energetic efforts to "make other people think" can further create conflicts even with the close ones, as several participants note. For example, after Saba "realised the importance of civic activism", he has been trying to familiarise his friends with it too, giving critical remarks whenever they throw rubbish away in nature. "As they are not used to it, they take this [remark] the wrong way" – he says.

> It's considered that you change [in NGOs], you know. Friends tell me they have changed me there. I tell them, won't it be better if you also changed into likes of us? […] You're still an agent for them, a traitor to the country. (Saba, Gori NGO).

As Saba notes, this is largely due to the perception of NGOs' positioning vis-a-vis Church and defending sexual minority, viewed as threatening through traditional and religious moral codes his friends share. As he also strongly identifies with these codes, instead, he negotiates the NGO-associated emphasis on tolerance with Christian ethics, engrained as part of his habitus and tries to convince his friends in the same: "Jesus Christ tells us to protect the weaker right away, and why do you have to bully them? Just because of their small number?" Similar confrontations are also shared by the others. Nana (Tbilisi NGO) for example, likewise, speaks about some of her friends' suspicions on the same grounds, who think her motives for working in NGO are purely financial. "I responded that I needed the money, and I wrote the project in order to do what I think is the right thing to do." - She says. Although, as Nana is positioned closer to the "bubble" than Saba, who

generally feels less confident in the sector due to a lack of compatible cultural capital and habitus mismatch, she also has friends she can write these projects with.

We should be cautious of the mask of disinterestedness, Bourdieu (1984) argues, as one always seeks to benefit oneself and get ahead of others, although not necessarily in a material sense, and not necessarily consciously. This is particularly well demonstrated in how most NGO representatives symbolically attach to the "progressive West", and differentiate themselves from the opposing forces, the wider Georgian public and sometimes from their own milieus - constructed as more infantile and in need of informal pedagogy. Yet, we should also acknowledge that these simplistic classifications, the interviewees diffuse, are not done in a cold-hearted manner: beyond being driven by the habitus, they also stem from being reflexive about the surroundings, accompanying normative judgements about the right and the wrong and evaluative emotions (Sayer 2010a, 2010c).

Doing "the right thing" and contributing to social change is what typically emerges as a very important matter, even if their discourse itself classifies in their own favour. While the participants lack reflexivity about their own othering practices, they tend to be more reflexive about gender inequality or the cultural exclusion of minorities for example, which apart from being conditioned by the habitus is also mediated by more personal emotions such as anger or pain of being mistreated themselves on the same grounds, care towards the affected loved ones and beneficiaries alike, etc. While these issues are being articulated in a power-laden framework of transition itself, simultaneously these are matters of justice, deeply felt by the participants.

Lika's quote below, who has been associated with a relatively peripheral youth-oriented NGO, is a good example of such entanglements. There is obviously a matter of self-distinction as the words she chooses very explicitly play around the familiar themes of the

light and the darkness. NGO "bubble" here is painted in a romanticised, almost spiritual manner – as a group of lit matchsticks against the darkness of the masses that try to extinguish them with their barbarism. While she is less reflexive of the classification games she participates in and the exclusivity of the "bubble" itself, we see how she is consciously guided by the feelings of justice this space embodies for her, and empathy and care for her friend.

> This place attaches you to itself, I don't know whether I explain it well, but I just felt it this way […] because there are people who perfectly understand you. There are people who hold the same values, that you should respect human freedom, that human right is a supreme value, and that human individuality is the highest value. You do all this quite well there because everyone easily gets it, you don't have to fight to defend it. But it is enough to leave this *bubble* and you turn into a sole matchstick in the darkness. At least you feel so because you cannot give the same *feedback* [Eng] anymore, they will extinguish you. You cannot talk about sexual minorities freely. You might be bisexual, just like a friend of mine, but we don't talk about it outside the *bubble*. […] Theoretically, everybody knows that human freedom and human rights are supreme values, and we shouldn't torture anyone, but in fact, it remains just a theory outside the *bubble* and often a forgotten one. (Lika, Tbilisi NGO).

On the other hand, while Keso, strongly identifying with feminist values, simplistically classifies some people as *bneli* and distinguishes herself from them, this is largely informed by the anger she feels when being mistreated or insulted as a woman.

> When some man comments on my [Facebook] posts that women should be in the kitchen, I call him *bneli*. Or just because I attended the [feminist] rally, some commented on my photo, saying that nobody would marry us anymore and that we were asking for it. This hyperbolised division is in fact for insulting purposes because he is the one insulting me first. And then I may also say that he is a

degenerate. (Keso, Tbilisi NGO).

A number of participants tell me that similar personal experiences and associated emotions have largely contributed to what they currently do, being involved in legal assistance, research, activism (especially) or training. Whether it is sexism, homophobia, or else, they remind of times when they either personally faced unequal treatment or noticed it happening to others around; were hurt or angry and wanted to help, sometimes long before they even got socialised in related information. “You can learn how to defend yourself whenever you are being mistreated, but you don’t need any learning to realise you are being mistreated. You always feel it” – Tina (Tbilisi NGO) notes.

Simultaneously, the participants reveal deep feelings of care towards their beneficiaries, typically from the vulnerable status groups. “You think you’ll move the mountains when you are helping this person” – Tina says, explaining that defending human rights requires strong emotional empathy. “Once I had a case that I’ll never forget when I couldn’t sleep for a week at all. I couldn’t sleep, and then I figured I might just fall unconscious.” – She adds. Or take Tatia as another example, who often conducts various training in the regional community-based NGO and feels particularly attached to the local youth she wants to educate: “you worry where they will go when they graduate; you care about them like a family member” (Tatia, Tbilisi NGO). As Tatia says, those who work with vulnerable groups such as domestic violence victims, for instance, might have even more anger accumulated on these issues than those who do the training.

Such experiences that give rise to evaluative feelings are obviously further mediated and regulated by the habitus in a way they are made sense of, understood, and articulated. It could be in terms of “individual freedom”, “gender equality”, etc. that most participants are effortlessly socialised into, or in Saba’s case for example in terms of more traditional normative judgements available in the society, the former is sometimes negotiated with.

Yet, they also leave the window for some reflexivity. Nana, for example, tells me how motivated she first was, intending to spread the knowledge and contribute to future changes, yet also acknowledges she felt superior over the others. She draws an analogy with the EU, assuming NGO representatives fulfil the same role locally: already at the top of the development ladder and involved in teaching others. While neither the nature of hierarchies nor the doxic development vision is entirely questioned (it is rather accepted as legitimate), Nana still largely emphasises both global and local asymmetries in the process, mostly driven by the feelings of disillusionment: she does not see the changes she was hoping for.

> Founding this organisation was a mission for me to contribute to the youth, the new generation. At the individual level, I had some feelings of *superiority* [Eng.] that I understood certain things. You get it, right? I guess the EU is doing the same, having these feelings quite organically, like 'I'm already past this, I read something, I learned something and now I'm there'. Obviously, that's already asymmetric. Like, I'll come to you and teach you that domestic violence is wrong, you shouldn't hit anyone, and men and women should share equal rights and roles at home and beyond. You think you have this prerogative and plus, I sincerely believed that you must share this with others as well, because it's everybody's problem, right? But through time you don't even want to bother, and you know why? Because you think maybe they prefer so in the end, maybe they really prefer. (Nana, Tbilisi NGO).

Tatia, on the other hand, takes a more optimistic look at it. She regards working in NGO as an "everyday fight" for normative changes, where the "not yet" condition is what motivates, rather than disappoints:

> I think working in a nongovernmental organisation is an everyday fight. When you go to sleep, things that you thought were already improved yesterday, could still be unchanged tomorrow. Especially, if you leave the *bubble*, you realise that oops! Not yet. But it is this

> moment of "not yet" and enthusiasm that helps us to last this far, I guess. (Tatia, Tbilisi NGO).

This condition of "not yet" Tatia mentions (not yet gender equal, not yet liberated, not yet tolerant, not yet liberal democratic, not yet European, etc.) and subsequent need for further "mental modernisation" (also demonstrated by other authors in Georgian context), draws some similarities with the "not yet" condition of CEE, discussed in the literature (Kuus 2004; Tskhadadze 2018; Tsuladze et al. 2021). And it especially refers to those who are left outside the "bubble".

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter is centred around what Zarycki (2014) calls dependence doxa and linked classifications that the majority of interviewed NGO representatives effortlessly reproduce.

The first sub-chapter shows how the NGO community understands the progress in terms of catching up with the West in a universal hierarchical ladder, where Georgia, due to Soviet experience, currently lags back. These ideas, also close to developmental idealism, are contextualised in the West-Russia dichotomous binary (Thornton et al. 2015). If the West represents all kinds of goodness, Russia emerges as its evil opposite. Given the local context, thoroughly described in chapter 2, such binary becomes less surprising and can be understood as a reaction to different kinds of external pressures.

The second sub-chapter focuses on the othering classifications produced by the participants, which marks them as progressive and enlightened, while the laypeople are

presented as infantile, backward and in need of education. Consequently, the participants think of their mission to engage in informal pedagogic practices, starting with their own milieus. Nevertheless, the chapter also refers to various reflexive practices, moral judgements and emotions of the interviewees that are articulated in language, determined by the class-based and NGO-based habitus.

Chapter 8

The lay response to NGO community: reproduction and rejection of the dominant classifications by the population

8.1. Introduction

"When I go home later, I should google the NGO definition thoroughly: what is meant by it, since when they have been here, how many of them are here, what topics they work on […] because I have chaos in my head, and my understanding is pretty vague." – worries 31-year-old Tamuna from Gori as we sit in the café for an interview. Her uncertainty is shared by several other participants, even though most are able to identify some topics and activities associated with NGOs, and also remind of prominent faces and organisations. It is true though that they tend to be confused about the technicalities, few might even consider the youth-led libertarian political party "Girchi" to be one of the NGOs - famous for creative performative protests. Others include the less organised middle-class youth movement "Shame" among NGOs as well, primarily concerned with antioccupation and corruption themes. Some speak of NGO representatives debating on TV but cannot remember whom they are talking about. Yet such confusions are rather informative itself. "NGO sector" is typically imagined as more of an abstract entity associated with the young, active and pro-Western (strongly distinguished from emerging pro-Russian organisations), most typically seen on TV. Less significant in their daily lives in form of particular organisations, for them NGO sector makes the most sense in relation to familiar social classifications that strongly characterise Georgian reality: pro-Western

and pro-Russian, educated and uneducated, progressive and backward, tolerant and xenophobic, etc.

As the Caucasus Barometer has shown throughout the years, the majority of the Georgian population does not display particularly strong feelings about NGOs (CRRC-Georgia 2008 - 2020). On a question asking about trust, a disproportionally high number find it hard to respond: either opt for the middle "neither/nor" response or do not reply at all. The differences based on age, residence place and income are not particularly telling either: the trend tends to be more or less similar. Resonating with the above quantitative data, in-depth interviews with the laypeople also reveal that their narratives are often full of uncertainties, self-contradictions and "yes, but…" -s. This, in turn, has much to do not only with the lack of information but also with the participants negotiating their positions amidst different asymmetries that define the relations between the NGO representatives and various segments of the population.

In this light, it is possible to roughly distinguish four groups among the participants: enthusiasts, ambivalent, rejecters and detached. While due to the nature of qualitative research, their distribution in the above groups should not be treated as generalisable to the overall population in any way, it is noteworthy that the ambivalent make up the largest group here as well, containing 24 different participants. Other groups include a smaller number of interviewees, such as there are 3 enthusiasts, 7 rejecters and 5 detached. The numbers brought here are just to highlight the trend in the study. Yet, we should not forget that the neat allocation of the participants in such constructed categories is also a matter of interpretation by the researcher, placing them in the group their perspectives tend to be closest to.

1) Enthusiasts are mostly represented by a few young Tbilisi-based interviewees - associated with business, media and creative industries, who are relatively closely situated to NGO representatives and display confident and enthusiastic attitudes, both Euro-enthusiastic and NGO-enthusiastic.

2) Ambivalent are the largest, most heterogeneous group incorporating people of different backgrounds, including the above-mentioned segment of urban youth with more critical views - either from a conservative standpoint or blaming NGOs for lacking empathy towards the disadvantaged. The group consists of the younger and older, better off and worse off, Tbilisi-based and Gori-based. What distinguishes these participants from the rest is displaying the diversity of non-straightforward, ambivalent opinions, yet without total rejection of the NGO sector. Like the previous group above, they largely tend to reproduce the dominant symbolic hierarchies which pushes them to assert themselves as progressive citizens, in parallel also identifying with the "masses". The more marginalised, the less confident their performance seems to be. At the same time, such diversity also corresponds to Sayer's (2005) argument that, unlike aesthetic tastes, ethical judgements, which are often part of how one thinks about the NGO community, might correspond to class positions less neatly.

3) Rejecters are represented by fewer participants, this time in their 60s and with relatively worse-off backgrounds. Having zero self-identification with NGOs, their opinions are also less ambivalent, rejecting both the collective West and the NGOs rather straightforwardly for spreading debauchery and threatening the Georgian nation. They do not bother much about "correct" performance along with the dominant classifications either.

4) Finally, the detached make the most alienated group, primarily represented by the poorer segment from the village near Gori and some older Tbilisi participants. Knowing and caring less about the NGO sector, they are also less prone to link them to either geopolitical orientation or cultural issues, being rather concerned with their everyday life problems. Each segment will be discussed separately below.

8.2. Enthusiasm of the young cosmopolitans

First, I will focus on the interviewees who most closely identify themselves with the NGOs and their visions - the ones often implied under the constructed "bubble" of the progressive youth. Being young, urban and involved in modern professions, typically these are the participants whose marginal position in the global field is compensated by more or less advantageous positions locally. Mostly dominated by the young (18-35) Tbilisi middle-class participants working in media and creative industries, this group shares with the NGO representatives both - the value orientation and the personal contacts. While one of them (20-year-old Liza from Tbilisi) rather works as a waitress in parallel with her university studies, describing herself as "perhaps a middle class or rather poor", she still shares the social "habitat" with the others - partly due to previous entry job experiences in the middle class-dominated industries the rest are associated with.

The participants tend to have friends or acquaintances in such organisations, have collaborated with them on a professional basis, or at least tend to actively participate in the demonstrations organised by them. "Everybody who holds the liberal values is anyway associated with the NGOs, it doesn't even matter whether they work in the NGO

or not." – Elene (Tbilisi, 29) confirms the self-identification. Liza similarly emphasises they are "on the same wavelength".

This group is typically the most Euro-enthusiastic and perceives Western-associated NGOs in an exceptionally positive light. Europeanisation of the country is primarily understood in terms of protected civil and political rights and strengthening individual autonomy, seen as a backbone of the former rights. NGOs are thought to be important actors when it comes to popularising Western values and they are particularly appreciated for their dedication to human rights. Specific emphasis is given to the rights of women and minorities, neglected by the state and the population alike, who fail to recognise the primacy of an individual being: "Our current problem is that we underestimate the individual's role in the society and do not appreciate a human being, their rights." – Bacho (Tbilisi, 25) says. Mistreatment of women and minorities according to him is closely linked to Georgians' lacking empathy - a direct result of Soviet totalitarianism which had infantilised and terrorised the population. "As a society we were like the oppressed children by then, scared of the boss" – he notes, explaining that everyone in such an environment had to be quick to point the finger at somebody else to avoid being blamed themselves. In contrast to the unempathetic majority, the NGO sector is seen as a rather empathetic minority (also linked to them being associated with professions in social sciences), caring about the issues that the others do not.

The need for transformation from undesirable Soviet/Eastern modes to attractive Western mode, which prioritises individualism and freedom instead of traditions and religion, is similarly highlighted by Liza. "We are in urgent need of tones of pro-European mentality" – She stresses, fearing that the prevalent mindset drags Georgians back and further complicates the life of the NGO representatives who try their best to re-educate the public.

> So, what is our background? The Soviet Union, mostly the East. If we wanted to go back there, it would have been super easy. If there were pro-Eastern NGOs around, their life would have been much easier because our roots are like this, we have this kind of mentality, a very bad one. Now we fight for change, for Western values, right? Those that I listed before, such as others' private life, freedom… brotherhood, freedom, and equality. This is the West, and this is the European mentality in fact. We want to import this one now. The Eastern features are what we already have. (Liza, Tbilisi, 25).

Corresponding to the East-West civilisational slope, thus from Liza's perspective, Westernised NGOs help Georgians to change and upscale in a civilisational sense (Melegh 2006). Quite similarly to the interviewed NGO representatives, NGOs' pedagogic role is at times brought up in a subtle, more socially acceptable way. "*Saganmanatleblo* (Geo. "educational/enlightening") might be an inappropriate word" - Elene fears, referring to NGOs' positioning in relation to the population, - "probably provision of the information, so that they share European and American experiences to fight some problems. We are a developing country anyways and fighting for the rights that I mentioned is something new for us." Bacho likewise brings up the word *ganmanatlebeli* (Geo. "educator, enlightener") only to dismiss it for sounding rather "pretentious". Instead, their function is to tackle the problems and help the people not being helped by the state, he believes, referring to both awareness raising and service provision.

The criticisms towards NGOs, if any, mainly have to do with an ineffective outreach and Tbilisi-centeredness: it is one and the same people who can find out about and devotedly attend the NGO-organised events over and over again, the participants say. Some worry that "NGO activities do not go beyond the civilised world, in the *civilised world* meaning the centre - the capital" (Bacho, Tbilisi, 25). Instead, they say, the problems tend to be

much more acute in the rural regions, where women do not even know they have equal rights. In this sense, young Tbilisi interviewees reproduce the familiar classificatory hierarchies between the West and the East (or "Post-Soviet"), between the urban and the rural, where in both cases the ideas and practices one-directionally flow from the former to the latter. Among these dichotomies they strongly identify with the "civilised centre" and distinguish themselves from the "masses" imagined as ignorant, lacking empathy and infantilised.

8.3. The ambivalent: varieties of "yes, but"

If the group of enthusiasts tend to be more straightforward in their perspectives, word to word echoing to the NGO representatives, as well as identifying with them, the second group incorporates various ambivalent stances and tends to identify with the NGOs less. These participants come from very different backgrounds and lead different lives. Yet, what unites them as a group is a plethora of ambivalent, "neither/nor", at times confused and self-contradictory narratives especially by those who are located at a distance from urban youth.

The participants do not particularly reject NGOs. In fact, they are considered to have an important role in the country, primarily as defenders of human rights, particularly the rights of women and minorities, those with disabilities, they are associated with service provision, etc. Through these activities, they are also thought to be driving Georgia towards progress and European normalcy. Yet simultaneously participants exhibit doubts and criticisms about their impartiality (being motivated by party political or economic interests), or the overconfidence they are thought to be displaying.

Due to the NGO sector having a strong pro-Western connotation, the familiar classificatory binaries play a strong role when it comes to ambivalent narratives in this group. These classifications are simultaneously adopted, challenged, as well as utilised in support and against NGO representatives, often by the very same people. On one hand the vices, NGO representatives are associated with, tend to be explained by their "Georgian ways" one cannot easily shred. At the same time, they are criticised for asserting moral and cultural superiority over the people, especially around the issues of gender and tolerance towards minorities. The grandstanding is mentioned by different segments and is experienced in different ways: some turn to the national pride arguing Georgians have been historically very cultured nation, others, sharing the habitat with the enthusiasts, display irony against NGO representatives and accuse them in self-congratulatory superficiality. Several participants also cautiously reject "pro-Western" and "pro-Russian" labels and call for "thinking for ourselves". Below I will first review the way participants see Georgia's development trajectory and link the NGO sector to it, followed by the above-mentioned strategies.

The previous Euro-enthusiastic segment is not alone in the way they see Georgia's development. Sharing the same doxa, participants, as different as a 60-year-old pensioner from Tbilisi or a 37-year-old delivery driver from Gori for example, tend to construct quite similar developmental hierarchy where Georgia currently lags back not only economically but also culturally (Thornton et al. 2015; Zarycki 2014). Beyond economic hardships, Georgia's backwardness is largely explained by a corrupted culture that bears the Asian influence and is marked by Russian domination for centuries, particularly during the Soviet Union, completely isolating Georgians. "Georgian people had such a culture before, such political life but the years are needed to restore all this as the Soviet

Union put us into the informational vacuum" – says 19-year-old Tornike, a student from Gori.

Considering Georgians' uncertain Europeanness, European and Asian/Soviet selves are also brought forward as two conflicting sides of a Georgia: the good, the cultured - that has to be recollected from the past, and the bad, the uncultured - that has to be unlearned. This discourse very much bears similarity with Balkanism, the concept introduced by Maria Todorova (1997) which is adapted from, but also contrasts Said's (1978) differentiated "Orient" and "Occident". It refers to the in-between zone with an ambiguous position between the East and West, presented as incomplete, backward internal other of the West. Lia, for instance, a successful middle-class doctor in her 60s, directly ascribes historical educatedness, culturedness and tolerance to Georgians' Western, occidental self, while Tamar in her 40s, an accountant from the poorer household, similarly fears it is the Asian influence that prevents Georgians from living the same peaceful and harmonious lives that people in Europe lead. "Europeans tend to have more empathy towards one another and perhaps this is why they came up with the NGOs in Europe." – She says.

> We are part of Europe. Maybe not in a geographic sense per se but the nature of the Georgian is. Not entirely European though, half European and half Asian. But our tolerance, our basic principles the state has been built on historically, is more European than Asian. Until Russia annexed and invaded us in 1921, we were very European people in the Russian empire. I visited my village some time ago and glanced through the photographs of my grandmothers' siblings from a different perspective - the way they were dressed, how educated, and cultured they were. (Lia, Tbilisi, 64).

Considering the above, NGOs are typically viewed as driving national and personal improvement. Apart from actually helping those whose rights have been violated by the

state or the citizens, they familiarise the population regarding their rights and how democracy works. Yet equipped with the Western experience, indirectly they also affect Georgians' everyday cultural shortcomings and change them for the better. The patriarchal values, lawlessness, violent tendencies, or non-punctuality this is ascribed to Georgians should change into the ways the Westerners are imagined to be living – calm, well-organised and according to the rule of law. This is well demonstrated in both Tsira's and Gia's quotes below, one being an 18-year-old student from the village near Gori and another 45-year-old man from Tbilisi, seasonally employed in the hospitality sector.

> These NGOs are a new thing in most cases, very much brought from Europe. […] Georgians have always been solving problems through fighting and quarrelling that tends to turn into violence sometimes and it has been a usual thing. NGOs and their certain segment are against this, they support peacefulness and calmness in the world. For our mentality, this is somewhat unacceptable, so this creates an obstacle. (Tsira, Gori, 18).

> [NGO representatives] try to introduce the perspectives that are typical for Europe, the way the Americans and Europeans live. They try to give you this information and [show] that it is possible to live like that. Entire Europe lives according to such order, and they are doing fine, so they offer: 'maybe you may as well join us and share our perspectives, that it's not ok to be late somewhere, you should follow the rules and obey the law, and so on.' (Gia, Tbilisi, 45).

In the last quote, the line is even blurred between the local NGOs and the Western donor organisations, which he refers to as their "superiors". Western organisations are the native carriers of the Western perspectives, while it is through the local NGOs that the information flows. "They weren't born with European values, were they? They went through some internships and seminars, either abroad or their superiors kept coming here to provide them with the information." – he adds.

As sexual emancipation and tolerance towards minorities become strong signifiers of both personal and national development, the issue is also brought up here. Some participants enthusiastically bring it up and praise the NGOs for working on these topics. 31-year-old Gvantsa, for instance, a small business owner from Gori, thinks people involved in NGOs are different from the typical *gruzini* (Russified signifier for the backward Georgian) primarily because they fight against intolerance and gender inequality. *"*You should have at least a small piece of Western mindset to be able to agree with the NGOs policies to some extent, and in my opinion *grunizi* will never agree to this." – She says. 64-year-old Lia, the middle-class doctor from Tbilisi likewise emphasises NGOs' role in battling homophobia and introducing sexual education, which is met by "terrible aggression of Orthodox parishioners" influenced by pro-Russian priests.

Others might produce more confusing narratives mostly pressured by the imperative of positioning as more progressive while not seeming to be entirely comfortable with it: they link acceptance of the LGBT community to further progress and say Georgians still need time because of "Caucasian mentality" or Soviet legacy. Yet instead of typically distinguishing themselves from the essentialised "masses", they rather indirectly associate themselves with them in a somewhat ambivalent, indirect way. Tamazi in his 60s from a better-off household and Gia in his 40s with a seasonal job both offer this kind of ambiguous narrative. Tamazi thinks the main obstacle to Georgia's approximation with Europe and NGOs (seen as closely related) are people of his age, socialised in the Soviet Union. At the same time, himself uncomfortable, he doubts even those in the NGOs are authentically engaged in the defence of gay rights. "Maybe in the NGO someone does not support this as well but remains there because of salary" – he notes. Gia also speaks confusingly where he avoids clear positioning but at the same time emphasises it is a matter of development.

> Once this generation leaves, only then it will be possible to get closer to Europe and NGOs. We say we have a European orientation, but do we? We don't have any kind of European orientation. Look, gay pride is being held freely in the Netherlands. Yet, when they organised it here, the priests started attacking people. So, we need some time, it won't happen fast, but overall, I think it's progressive, natural, and modern. (Tamazi, Tbilisi, 64).

> We should go through everything step by step, we cannot jump over. We cannot suddenly become Europeans and accept those values altogether. Whether it is good or bad, we cannot reach it in a day. We need at least 10 or 15 or 20 more years. (Gia, Tbilisi, 45).

Some younger interviewees also feel certain discomfort around the topic. They might simultaneously agree with NGOs for defending gay rights while accusing them of "aggressive approaches". Yet, they further distance themselves from the older generation, the uneducated or the religious extremists - those who associate the West and the NGOs with debauchery or turn to homophobic violence. Several participants in their 50s and 60s are more straightforward about disliking this issue, although to some extent still sympathise with West/NGOs selectively, for example around the issues of freedom of speech or fighting against gender-based violence.

Nevertheless, while participants, taking the symbolic global hierarchy as given, generally view NGOs in relation to political and cultural improvement, they also think NGO representatives tend to fall short of what they should be in theory, or at least they are vulnerable to diverge from it. Such vices constitute material self-interestedness instead of true motivations, careerism and nepotism, as well as non-impartiality, whether it is about criticising the government only and taking the side of political opposition or primarily supporting their own milieu. These faults are also often understood in frames of cultural backwardness, where despite the close association with the West, the NGO representatives still share the local cultural faults. For example, Gvantsa, a small business

owner from Gori thinks NGO representatives' concern for gender equality and minorities stems from their "Western mindset", while nepotism and corruption ascribed to these organisations are examples of their "Georgian approach". On contrary, Gia thinks NGO impartiality is guaranteed precisely because they are controlled by Western donors. "If the superiors find out that you wrote 2+2=5 there, I mean the NGOs" - Gia explains, - "they will say: no, maybe 2+2=5 in Tbilisi, in Georgia, but 2+2=4 in the rest of the world and in Europe". In this sense, the temptation of the NGO representatives to act in a self-interested way or become influenced by any political party can be neutralised by Western donors.

Others think NGOs' pro-Western image is itself somewhat illusive. Lia, a Tbilisi-based doctor in her 60s, who characterises NGO representatives as "young people who are enthusiastic, idealist" striving for a change, simultaneously thinks part of them can be hiding behind the "fog of Europeanness" and be primarily self-interested instead. Tornike, on the other hand, a young student from Gori, considers that NGOs are only perceived as pro-Western because they support the pro-Western oppositional political party. The pro-Western orientation of the latter in turn is thought to be rather audience-oriented, intended to attract the voters as most of the population tends to support Georgia's pro-Western orientation.

Such attribution of the perceived vices to the local culture can also be found around the matters of gender and tolerance towards minorities, especially in relation to the gay community. What is described as an "aggressive activism" aimed at lifestyle imposition, for example, tends to be explained by Georgian NGO representatives' difference from the more developed West.

Anxiety is characteristic of different segments, including the conservative middle class. Using the same language of rights and freedoms that is accessible, they argue that NGO

representatives disregard other people's freedom to disagree with them. If in Europe and US, people have already realised that everyone has the right to have their own idea, in Georgia it is still expected that all should share the same opinion whether it is about different minorities or about private sexual life. "We weren't able to leave this communist mentality behind and perhaps this is the result of these tough 70 years. I think we are not free enough to allow our family member […] to do what they want.", middle-class Nutsa (Tbilisi, 31) says, referring to NGOs as well as their opposing activists, both considered to be imposing the extreme views. "In Europe, for example, people live freely" – Rezo, a student from a poorer household (Tbilisi, 21) agrees, "nobody pesters them to recognise their situation to be the correct one". "Even among these people there is a problem of education" – he concludes, referring to the NGO representatives. Or Luka for example, in his late 30s and also relatively worse-off, criticises local NGO-associated gay activists on the same grounds of difference: if in the West the annual pride march is held at specifically assigned streets, Georgian activists "wave their underwear" everywhere: "There shouldn't be propaganda. Why don't they hold the pride as they do in the civilised countries?" - he asks. Such strategy is somewhat close to what Tskhadadze (2019) describes as the "rule of Georgian difference", as she analyses the label of "Georgian feminist", presented as aggressive and lacking a deep understanding of feminism in contrast with the "real" feminists in the West.

It is visible that the asymmetry in the global domain is perceived to be so natural that even criticisms towards NGO representatives are partly framed as them not being sufficiently Western-like. However, there is also a contrary response, sometimes even merged with the former strategy by the same participant: the rejection of NGO representatives for asserting moral and intellectual superiority over the rest and presenting themselves "as if they are developed, as if they are modern […], very European because

Europe cares much about the human rights" (Lela, Tbilisi, 40). If the internalisation of stereotypical mundane Western values such as learning punctuality or unlearning jaywalking is rather celebrated, anxiety tends to appear in more morally, culturally and geopolitically charged domains, such as tolerance towards minorities and women's rights. Although general irritation about the NGO representatives' enhanced self-confidence might persist also in relation to other topics, for instance, when disagreeing with authorities or strongly positioning along with rigid pro-Western/anti-Russian lines.

Nutsa, the young middle-class woman from Tbilisi, who also has acquaintances at NGOs, remembers both, TV debates and her own experiences of interaction. She thinks NGO representatives tend to come out as smarter and more educated during debates, easily winning the arguments. However, she does not always agree with them, primarily because of "aggressive approaches" when criticising the government or regarding women's or gay issues. "Their attitude is as if they know everything happening in your family better than you do and I somewhat dislike this" - Nutsa says, also reminding one of her acquaintances.

> I just remembered someone who works in the NGO and thinks all your opinions are wrong and all her opinions are right just because she works in the NGO. […] She says everything without batting an eye and thinks she's such a cool girl, so emancipated. She expresses everything openly and even gets involved in conflicts with others. […] Instead of sharing our human problems with each other, the opposite happens. They rely on mockery and presenting themselves as superior. There is no humanism in that in my opinion, humanism is just used as a cover. I mean this when it comes to [sexual] minorities and religious topics. As if they are very kind because they are defending the minorities and you are very evil for not praising them without a reason. (Nutsa, Tbilisi, 31).

A similar feeling of being looked down on and the irritation by moral or cultural self-confidence, which clashes with religious or lay moral codes, different people might share to a different extent, is also revealed by Diana, as she speaks of activism around LGBT issues. “Is it that they [NGO representatives] are better than me for rallying at that demonstration?” – she asks.

> As if they are more compassionate and defend them. […] They try to prove you something so stubbornly that even if you feel neutral, your attitude turns negative. And if you have at least a bit of Christian faith. (Diana, Gori, 27).

Such anxious narratives reflect various kinds of in-between positions in local development hierarchies that have been constructed. Due to not ultimately marginalised social locations (young, sharing urban spaces, sometimes also overlapping social circle with NGO representatives) participants, on one hand, strongly care to be associated with the dominant understanding of the progress, while on the other hand, they try to negotiate it with other beliefs and values in their lives. At times the strategy to assert oneself against both local and global cultural asymmetry is stronger identification with the nation and leaning on national pride (Kiossev 2002; Tsuladze 2013). “Concerning the gender, the respect for the women was particularly crucial in Georgia historically, so I don’t think they are as oppressed as they say” - thinks 31-year-old Tamuna from Gori, working in the higher education sector. She agrees the problems exist but thinks it is represented in a rather exaggerated manner.

The irritation about NGO representatives’ positioning as being more humane also expands to the West itself the sector is associated with. While Georgia might currently have some problems in terms of values (whether gender inequality or intolerance) stemming from the Russian empire, Soviet past and post-Soviet economic collapse, historically it has been far more tolerant than the US that teaches Georgians humanism

through NGO representatives, - 36-year-old Shalva, the delivery driver from Gori, thinks. Applying the very same criteria of tolerance to the West, he doubts the US legitimacy as a "teacher":

> I say, defending human rights by NGOs is a good thing. Of course, human rights should be protected. But in the 21st century, our society should not be needing the lecturing from some 20-year-old girl. In our country, Muslims were so respected in the 12th century that even pig slaughter was forbidden. On the other hand, we all know how America, which teaches us humanism today, treated black folks some 50 or 70 years ago. (Shalva, Gori, 36).

In the ambivalent group morally and culturally charged primary classifications of "pro-Western/anti-Russian" and "anti-Western/pro-Russian" also cause discomfort. For instance, despite considering US and Europe as Georgian allies, Shalva feels irritated by NGOs' "robotized" pro-Western orientation who "are paid to speak whatever they were taught there", in turn teaching the rest of the population. He finds it rather humiliating for Georgians not to be able to think for themselves.

> Do you know what seems to disappear? Georgia's citizens don't amount to anything any longer, you should either be pro-Russian by all means or pro-European. We don't have our own minds anymore and I find this pretty annoying. I'm neither pro-European nor… I support whatever I find good for the country. I'm not robotized and don't think I should learn something from the NGO. I have my own mind. (Shalva, Gori, 36).

Yet, to avoid any kind of scorn or suspicion from the interviewer associated with the dominant discourse and representing the Western university, Shalva still feels the need to once again emphasise that this does not imply, he supports Russia in any way: "Obviously I'm pro-European, how can I even be pro-Russian after the wars and all the misfortune with Russia for 200 years?".

NGO representatives' pro-Western stance and self-positioning vis-à-vis the public are also discussed by some younger middle-class participants from Tbilisi, largely sharing the social space and required value orientations with the first group, as well as with those at NGOs. Feeling more self-confident, they instead distinguish themselves from NGO representatives and accuse them of superficiality and lack of empathy towards the underprivileged majority, while simultaneously considering NGOs still quite important. Maka for instance appreciates them for being based on values of human rights and democracy associated with Europe, as well as for having more direct links with the population than, say, politicians. Levan, on the other hand, sees them as crucial alternative power counteracting the church which strengthens the gender hierarchies, and the political authorities relying on a "muscle". Nevertheless, NGO-organised protests are seen as "pointless demonstrations or flash mobs" that do not in fact change a thing. They are mockingly referred to as "pro-Western, free hipster youth" (Maka), collecting the "coolness points" (Levan) out of linking themselves to the prestigious West. "Pro-Western youth is a larger group and typically, progressive NGO representatives make its sub-group." – Levan explains. From Maka's perspective, such performative demonstrations are caused by NGOs lacking any real power and counting on attracting attention instead. Apart from that, according to her, their understanding of "freedom" is shallow, mostly defined vis-a-vis Russia. Levan, on the other hand, thinks superficiality starts from the way NGO representatives understand the problems they try to solve.

> They [NGO representatives] have some naïve views that everything is too simple, and things will get better if only some people stopped being evil and stopped beating their wives. And it's that simple. And they naively think that demonstrations will change this, but nothing changes. In my opinion, even these demonstrations turn into an arena of competition which of them stages a better performance or plays the electronic music better. This has nothing to do with social change. (Levan, Tbilisi, 27).

Like some other participants, Levan also remembers the TV debates and the assertion of superiority. If in the first group NGO representatives are associated with empathy towards the marginalised, here they are seen as rather lacking it, failing to consider disadvantaged social circumstances shaping those who oppose them.

> Whenever I watch TV… and I'm overgeneralising right now. It's not about everyone but rather tends to be characteristic of the debates. And I don't say this about the NGO representatives only, but generally about the pro-Western youth under which they tend to be incorporated. […] So, whenever they speak, they typically try to belittle their opponents and demonstrate how right they are and how wrong the other side tends to be. They don't show any sign of empathy to understand that you shouldn't just destroy and burn some bloke who curses the gays and thinks that the husband should beat the wife. On the contrary, [they should understand] that it has its reasons and one of the reasons is his being unsuccessful for his entire life, which led to the accumulation of these things in him. (Levan, Tbilisi, 27).

Social and economic problems, such as poverty and unemployment, are brought up by some other participants as well, particularly among those, whom themselves struggle with unemployment and economic issues, but not exclusively. While some mention small grant opportunities for the population, others consider the NGO sector either completely irrelevant to deal with such problems, or willfully blind. "Give us healthcare, insurance, transportation system, aren't these also in Europe?" – Zura (Tbilisi, 42) asks, thinking NGOs are less enthusiastic when it comes to pushing for social issues. "LGBT, unlawful prisoners, [Russia] is an occupier, [Russia] is an occupier! Don't you say? I know it, I fought the war twice, and the people who have never worn a military uniform, are teaching me now". – he says.

Social and economic problems shape the discussions more substantially in the following groups of rejecters and detached. Typically, more marginalised than previous participants,

they position themselves less in relation to the mainstream classificatory dichotomies. Rejecters rather twist these categories in a way that the West is now associated with moral degradation and so are the NGOs, while more detached participants do not care much about either classification.

8.4. The rejectors: underprivileged older generation's strategies against marginalisation

This group consists of relatively worse-off or poor participants in their 60s, mostly from Tbilisi. Completely distanced from the world of NGO representatives both in terms of age and class, their marginality is expressed in two recurring themes: nationalism, now defined mostly against the West, and Soviet nostalgia. If the previous groups tend to revolve around the mainstream classifications based on essentialised and stereotypic views of backward Georgia and civilised collective West, this group introduces alternate, yet similarly stereotypical dichotomies of (sexually) immoral or colder Westerners and decent or friendlier Georgians. Consequently, the duo of the West and the NGOs (here too they are seen as linked) are viewed as an existential threat, few also bring up conspiracies regarding masonry. If some participants quite straightforwardly position themselves against the West and NGOs, others could be placed closer to the ambivalent group: despite existential fears of moral degradation over drug liberalisation policy or LGBT issues, they still find likeable matters for example in regard to protecting domestic violence victims and rather call for the selective adoption of the Western norms. Selectivity further characterises Soviet nostalgia: the financial stability and previous

cultural forms, that are brought up in contrast to current reality, tend to be distinguished from less favourable memories of closed borders or the censorship by the state.

As the participants apply two main strategies to make sense of the world from which they feel side-lined, I will first focus on existential fears and perception of the NGO sector as part of the grander external plan for the Georgian nation's moral and physical annihilation, while later Soviet nostalgia will be addressed.

"With all due respect, this is just some petty issue in my opinion" – Givi (Tbilisi, 69) remarks about the topic of our interview. He thinks speaking about the NGO sector is pointless because it is nothing but a small tool for the power which stands behind it – the one that is interesting for discussion and matters. This power aims at dismantling the Georgian nation by artificially keeping it in poverty so that the decent talented people left for immigration, whilst also corrupting Georgia morally by the introduction of LGBT or drag liberalisation issues. "They aim at the country's ill-being, so that the people left and died, to empty [Georgia] from the people who would be able to resist. They [NGOs] are invented as the tools to reach this goal" – he explains. For some such power can be the collective West, while others turn to further conspiracies. Givi is not sure about it, although thinks this is a far higher and more secretive force, the West itself fell victim to. Russia in this scenario is similarly controlled by them which further explains its military approach towards neighbours such as Georgia and Ukraine.

The collective West and Russia often emerge as two powers that are after Georgia: if utilising NGOs, one comes with moral degradation and pushes youth to emigrate (for instance via funded educational programs abroad), another one applies the military means and seizes the land. "They are after Georgians. I don't know why. They cannot stand our talent." – Naira (Tbilisi, 62) thinks of those who orchestrate NGOs, primarily the West. As for her, beneath the seemingly noble activities of the NGOs such as helping the lay

people, there are more sinister motivations. Eteri (Tbilisi, 68) shares her suspicions, also expanding it to former Soviet leadership:

> No idea what they want. Once Gorbachev or his wife said they wanted Georgia without Georgians. Now it is the same. I think they just want Georgia without Georgians. They fund [NGOs] for this. They push the youth so that they lost love, and respect towards the elderly; now they speak about this marriage between men and between women. And they have been insulting everyone who opposes. They destruct everything Georgian, our traditions.

Beyond more acute issues around the LGBT topic or drug policy, the participants feel anxious about other changes, the emergence of children's rights as well as the general trend towards individualisation ascribed to the Western lifestyle, those who emigrate to the West, supposedly bring back: whether it is keeping distance from the neighbours or not visiting parents without prior notice.

Along with the depressing feeling of the entire collapse that the participants tend to experience in both economic and cultural dimensions, they turn to Soviet nostalgia. Observed in the post-socialist world elsewhere, such nostalgia is what emerges as a response to losing security, stability and previous cultural forms of sociability, driven by the desire to escape from the current stigma of a "loser" and "slave" (Todorova 2010). Pine (as cited in Todorova 2010) further notes that instead of thinking about such nostalgia in total terms, we should understand it as a selectively and contextually remembered past which is brought up to criticise the present.

> They all say 'Soviet, Soviet, Soviet'. I don't miss it. It was bad, the borders were shut but we had a different mentality, there was more sense of shame and more education. (Tsiala, Gori, 66).

> I lived better during the communists and to be honest, perhaps I miss that time. I felt more secure and calm. Now I'm poor and rely on 200 GEL. I like the current life less, and I

> always argue about it with the youngsters. […] That time had its negatives, but the positives were more. The youth say, now it's freedom, they ask me if I could have been that free by then. But tell me why would I want hungry freedom? There is no middle class in Georgia anymore. For instance, I consider myself poor, very poor. (Eteri, Tbilisi, 68).

> They want me dead, so where is the public defender, who never actually defends people? The [TV station] director once said on TV that it is impossible to build a normal country until people who lived under communist times die. Is it because I say people were happier then? There were parties and songs in every family. There is neither that kind of Tbilisi nor that kind of relationships anymore. Everything died. They don't want me to say this. I saw that with my own eyes and now some kid tries to convince me that it was a bad time and now it's better. (Givi, Tbilisi, 69).

Naira on the other hand, the pensioner from Tbilisi, tries to negotiate Soviet nostalgia with exclusive pro-Russia and pro-West dichotomy, while she also tries to present herself in line with a dominant pro-Western orientation. Such a nostalgic stance is of course riskier in the Georgian context than in CEE as it is directly associated with Russia, the 2008 war and general tense relations. "They [NGO] are oriented towards Europe in every way, they get an education there, and don't want anything Russian, or communist. Of course, there is more prosperity in Europe, they [NGOs] are pro-Western and so are we" – she adds. Yet, she thinks it should not be that divisive line between pro-European and pro-Russian and reminds the example of Estonia, which according to her keeps good relations with Russians too. "Who is more European than Estonians? But they don't have such division." - she says. Displaying ambivalent nostalgia towards the past, Naira, on one hand, notes that "we didn't really feel bad" and on the other hand, speaks about how the Soviet past "left mark on everything, we were more closed, could not go anywhere and nobody knew about Georgia". Maia further escapes from the dominant dichotomies with a more nationalism-oriented stance, which picks selectively from the West: "I want

neither a Russian nor an American. I much prefer Georgians. I want Europe, I do. But I don't want that kind of debauchery these NGOs preach." (Maia, Tbilisi, 60).

Thus, among the urban older participants the socio-economic issues and social and cultural isolation tend to translate into a rejection of the dominant beliefs and classifications, driving suspicion towards the West, the NGOs and other actors, epitomising modernity. On the contrary, these issues leave the poorer in a detached condition and less interested in NGOs that do not particularly affect their everyday lives and concerns.

8.5. The detached

The final group mostly incorporates poorer participants in the 35 -55 age category from a rural area in Gori municipality, as well as a few participants from Tbilisi above 60. The main difference from the other groups is that the interviewees do not follow the classificatory dichotomies that much. They also know much less about the NGOs and are neither particularly interested in them nor link them to the collective West like the rest of the participants. If most interviewees anyway have rather an abstract image of the NGO sector, it becomes far more ambiguous here. There is nothing much to say about it except some direct experiences with humanitarian organisations or the women's rights issues they hear about on TV. Living in the village near Gori, Ela (Gori, 40) remembers the humanitarian organisation that helped them after the war in 2008. "They were pretty attentive and good people" – she notes, - "Why should I think anything bad? The more people they help the better."

These participants from rural Gori are rather involved in their everyday lives whether it is the housework, agriculture or any other job, they have neither much interest nor the time

to find out more about NGOs. “I leave home at 6:45 and return by 20:00, pretty tired.” – says Dato (Gori, 39), the minibus driver, - “If I have some time to see the mates in my village, I’m more interested in the everyday topics, how they are doing, what they have achieved. I’m more interested in that than in NGOs.” “Somehow, I cannot distinguish anything anymore. Neither good nor bad.” – Sopo, in her 60s from Tbilisi shares her confusion and instead speaks about various social and economic problems she daily faces.

Besides, if the categories of gender or freedom, Europe or Russia is touched upon, it is less attached to the othering classifications and acquires meanings in relation to the participants’ everyday lives without much connection to NGOs. These life experiences in turn further lead to the lay reflexivity on the issues of social inequality that often slips beyond the attention of more dominant groups (Sayer 2005, 2010a).

For example, Europe for Ela is primarily associated with labour migration which particularly affects the women from her village. She worries many have left for abroad to be engaged in care work. Without European-like living standards, the rhetoric about Georgians’ Europeanness remains meaningless for her.

> Nowadays everyone says that we are Europeans. Is women’s migration being Europe? This is not Europe. I think this is from a different perspective. Being a maid does not mean you are European because we are going there as slaves. [...] Maybe one or two families leave for different reasons but most of us are maids. Few families going there does not make us European. We are mostly the maids for all the other countries. Look at what’s happening in Turkey, half of Georgia went there. So, how are we called Europeans? (Ela, Gori, 40).

On the other hand, instead of the West’s civilisational “other”, Russia also emerges as a source of very concrete physical security-related anxiety for Ela, given that Gori municipality is close to the breakaway region where Russian troops are based. “It seems the war is over, and everything got hushed up, but they keep attacking people there [near

the border] up till now."- She worries, - "Even now, people cannot just walk in their back garden, is it freedom? It is not freedom."

To summarise, instead of sharing an abstract opinion about the NGOs, whether it is positive, negative, or ambivalent, the conversations in this group primarily revolve around the issues that particularly affect the participants' daily lives: things they care about and are concerned about, and where the NGO discourses often do not even fit.

8.6. Conclusion

This chapter looked at how different groups of laypeople respond to the classifications reinforced by the NGO community, which paints them as more advanced and presents the population in process of learning. Due to a variety of ambivalent opinions that at times go beyond the class dimension (for example, people from both poorer and middle-class backgrounds can hold conservative values and remain critical of socially liberal stances associated with NGOs, or mention economic inequalities), the chapter has been arranged based on what participants say instead of Bourdieausian class-based logic of positions and related positions-takings.

Nevertheless, excluding the ambivalent segment, each group mostly coincides with the concrete positions the participants hold in the social space: younger urban participants engaged in modern creative and technology-related fields tend to be very well-tuned with the NGO community, organically reproducing their discourses; older urban participants, who lived under the Soviet Union and are now disadvantaged both economically and culturally, tend to be more hostile towards NGOs and their representatives, instead turning to the strategies of nationalism and Soviet nostalgia to defend themselves from the stigma of "backwardness" and express discontent towards unappealing present; the far

detached group with no particular opinions on NGOs is mostly made of rural participants who fall into the "transitional" age category – people caught in-between two eras of Soviet Union and rapidly transforming Europeanising Georgia.

The ambivalent group is the broadest in terms of positions in the social space it includes, which somewhat repeats the trend the qualitative survey shows, where most people do not have concretely defined opinions on NGOs (CRRC-Georgia 2008 - 2020). The participants differ in terms of age, residence place, and class and consequently, their ambivalence is presented in distinct ways too: one thing uniting them is that based on either one or the other demographic criteria, they are not completely alienated from the current cultural requirements, thus they do not substantially deviate from the catching-up doxa and related classifications. Instead, they care to fit in (some even naturally fit in as in the case of some young middle-class participants), while also remaining critical or uneasy about it. This chapter further shows that while driven by habitus (match or mismatch), people also tend to be evaluative beings who reflect on things around them and react to what matters in their lives.

Chapter 9

Classificatory struggles inside the NGO sector: challenging the orthodoxy

9.1. Introduction

In chapter 7 I addressed the catching-up doxa and consequent dominant classifications diffused by the mainstream segment of NGO representatives - reproduced by those from successful Tbilisi NGOs and those from peripheral or regional organisations alike. Also taking the main ideas of development as a natural trajectory, if the weaker segment voices discontent, it is typically about the lack of access to legitimate capital in the sector. They worry that asymmetries in funding, the professionalised staff and opportunities that undoubtedly prioritise stronger Tbilisi NGOs, risks reducing the regional NGO community to the participant recruiters for the training events organised from Tbilisi. Chapter 8 on the other hand, revealed how different groups of laypeople adapt to the classificatory discourses that are organically embraced by the NGO community. Various segments of the population reproduce these ideas but also reject them based on their living environments and incompatibility with what matters for them in their lives.

This chapter, continuing the theme of liberal-left classificatory struggles in the linguistic domain (see chapter 6), looks at the NGO sector as less than a homogenous entity, where the mainstream discourses are themselves getting questioned and criticised. These struggles are less recognised by the peripheral actors, instead, it is typically done by those

who are rich with relevant social and cultural (including academic) capitals in the sector, many of whom emerge as new left-leaning intellectuals against those from the early transitional period.

In this sense, this part of the thesis focuses on symbolic struggles between two camps in the sector in more detail. On one hand, there is a well-established liberal majority who is in tune with the donor agenda and embraces the ideals inherited from the post-communist NGO leaders turned into political elites. These ideals, largely embraced as a path to catch up with the West, can be situated at the crossroads of classical liberalism and neoliberalism, combining notions of individual liberty, human independence, rule of law and government accountability with competitive markets and individualisation (Freeden 2015). The left-leaning stances on the other hand that arose in the sector by the 2010s, assert their difference by openly expressing criticisms towards the economic logic of transition and share the suspicion towards unregulated market forces. In the core sector, it includes social democratic stances of successful lawyers, who, as chapter 6 showed, navigate in the human rights language but are also critical of its shortcomings. The rise of the left-leaning segment is particularly marked by the emergence of the strong left-wing lawyer-driven organisation, although these stances are not exclusively limited to it and might exist in a less organised form among the participants. On the other hand, the women's and minority rights issues, which are an ideologically significant part of the aid, have been questioned by left-leaning feminist and queer standpoints at the verge of the sector, giving more attention to recognition-redistribution debates (Fraser 1998).

Each camp I mentioned is treated as relatively homogenous for analytical purposes. In fact, neither left-leaning nor liberal stances shared by the participants should be considered as internally uniform, further linked to their different positions in the NGO field. For instance, the marginal participant who shares more radical leftist position

doubts if NGO's reformist left should be called the left at all, seeing them as co-opting with the power; on the contrary, the centre-left activist navigating minority rights sub-field is critical of both cultural identity politics, and exclusive emphasis on class, accusing the reformist left in being overtly class-oriented instead. Yet, as all positions challenge the mainstream liberal ideas of the sector as inconsiderate of economic inequality resulting from neoliberalism, they are treated as a "left-leaning" camp here. There are also some differences in the mainstream fraction. For example, the liberal feminist I spoke to further feels threatened by more individualist libertarian stances that might not take the collective disadvantage that seriously, while both perspectives are placed under the liberal camp in the thesis. Moreover, given that my approach towards the study was not particularly based on organisations, I included a number of isolated left-leaning stances in the analysis that may or may not coincide with the organisational identity they are associated with. Even then these stances are far more marginal compared to the mainstream liberal views.

The left-liberal split is not perceived identically by each camp, the labels being the subject of further classificatory struggles between the "old guard" interested in maintaining the doxa and "newcomers" who challenge the orthodoxy (Bourdieu 1975; Swartz 1998). Turning back to the theoretical chapter, on one hand, the division stems from the logic of the field itself, where the orthodoxies are anyway prone to be questioned by the avant-garde. Moreover, the centre-left views only partially challenge the taken-for-granted ideas and do not radically go against the dependence doxa. In fact, they further fit well in donors' shifting perspectives towards more sustainable development and related EU requirements, not to mention the dependence on Western critical academia (Lomidze 2019). On the other hand, we should not dismiss the importance of the normative judgments made by the actors that are resulted from reflexive and self-interrogative

practices, and access to the academic literature available for those with relevant professions (Crossley 2003; Sayer 2010a).

Accordingly, in the first sub-chapter, I will focus on the liberal-left cleavage itself, how it is understood by both camps, how the left differentiates itself from the mainstream liberal segment and how they are responded back. In the second sub-chapter, I show that these clashes remain subordinate to the major geopolitical structuring of the local field of power, which I discussed in chapter 7, and is anyway interpreted in the scope of the West-Russia dichotomy.

9.2. The liberal-left cleavage

Considering that the new division threatens what is brought forward as a sole and universal line of development, the definition of the cleavage becomes a matter of classificatory struggle for itself: while the mainstream tries to minimise the difference between the two camps, the newly emergent instead try to maximise it, attempting to turn the part of doxa into the subject of discussions (Crossley 2003). For the liberals, the commonality they share with the left, such as positioning vis-à-vis conservatives, being in favour of social freedoms and taking an anti-Russian stance, is the most crucial. At times they see the division in the scope of mere topic distribution, such as labour and social rights topics being reserved mostly for the left-leaning lawyers in the core NGO sector. The diverse left-leaning camp, on the other hand, strongly differentiates itself on an ideological basis instead and classifies the mainstream as “neoliberals” or the “right-wing” (in economic, rather than in cultural dimension).

The liberal fraction typically asserts itself as free from any ideological inclinations, at least at the organisational level, instead being oriented towards the issues regarded as neutral and good for all: good governance, protection of human rights or debunking the fake news. Where opinions might sometimes differ inside the organisation, it is seen as a matter of personal tastes and a subject of friendly discussions rather than connected to what NGOs do anyhow. “Every person has their own particular perspective in our organisation, every person is an individual” – Ana, from one of Tbilisi’s leading organisations, says - “some prefer left, some prefer right.” Even though the political field is less differentiated ideologically, Ana remains careful with the issue of political preferences and directly continues emphasising that the organisation does not support any political party in any way. She underscores that their critical focus on government is not there because they favour oppositional parties per se, but because “one of the key directions of any NGO is to criticise the government” (Ana, Tbilisi NGO).

With the few exclusions who are strongly in favour of the smaller state, the liberal segment typically tries to distance themselves from the left-right labels completely, even when it comes to the individual rather than organisational level. Taking a political position is seen as holding biased rather than objective perspectives and at times is associated with moral or intellectual grandstanding. Tina from another leading organisation, for instance, says that she purposely avoids reading literature from one side or another. She fears she might get trapped in one of the positions (left or libertarian) and lose what she genuinely feels, tempted to become like one of those “cool people ".

> I’m not much interested in this sphere, I don’t try to figure out who I am, or where I am. I’m kind of both. The main rule I follow is that you should help someone who is objectively in need. I don’t know where I stand with this logic of mine, I have no idea. But at least I’m neither left-wing nor right-wing and I’m pretty happy about that. One of my friends was

> helping me with self-determination and said I was a leftist with solidarity. I told her to feel free to remember it herself because I will definitely forget this. Honestly, these things just make me laugh. (Tina, Tbilisi NGO).

Irakli is not much supportive of the left-right classifications dividing the sector either, underlining it is the centrism that proved to be globally successful in the end, not the extremes. "During the split, we were somehow baptised as a right-wing organisation which can be logical but also not." – he returns to the split, - "We always try to approach each issue separately, whether it is the left-wing position or the right-wing." Like most participants in a liberal fraction, Irakli thinks there is no easy formula which can work for every situation. "I say let's count" – Khatia shares Irakli's position, pointing at the advantage of task-focused tactics which for the left-wing segment is rather an example of depoliticisation. Khatia considers herself economically right-wing but does not think her personal perspectives matter a lot in the working process:

> The people I have talked to were rarely ideologically consistent and maybe it is not that bad. Sometimes I'm more scared when the person responds with an ideological position when facing a challenge, rather than focusing on the solution. I believe right or left is not an issue but rather what we can do to solve the particular problem, what will be the costs and the benefits? I have loved mathematics since childhood, and I say, let's count. (Khatia, Tbilisi NGO).

Not seeing the differences as absolutely crucial, the mainstream segment tries to highlight the common values they share with the left-wing portion in the NGO sector: supporting equal rights, fighting against homophobia or xenophobia, standing against authoritarianism and corruption, sharing anti-Russian stances, and so on. It is regarded that the "ideological differences are the next stage, but our base is the same when it comes to the fundamental issues" (Lana, Tbilisi NGO). From Nika's perspective, for instance, a

more moderate centre-left position appearing in the sector is itself part of liberalism, so not in huge contrast with the rest. In the left-wing segment, on the other hand, such unity is described as enforced "cohabitation" which comes with a lot of compromises. As Dimitri explains:

> "Cohabitation" is a term deriving from Roman law. It meant the time granted by the judge to the spouses willing to divorce so that they could think about it twice. […] It is approximately the same situation: we want the divorce, but we keep thinking for the sake of kids. (Dimitri, Tbilisi NGO).

The "kid" is a "strength in unity" in this context - the louder voice the NGO sector can make together around essential issues or, as Dimitri calls it, the "truisms" the ruling party keeps disagreeing with. According to the participants, there is often a crisis when the "elementary democratic process, the basic framework needs to be saved" in Georgia and sometimes it is urgent to come together (Megi, Tbilisi NGO). Nevertheless, becoming ideologically more conscious is crucial, they say. "I think in some sense the ideological lines should become clear, and of course, we would like that more NGOs had some idea about who they are and what kind of society they want, revise their strategies for instance." – Megi emphasises.

If the liberal segment tries to diminish the differences, the left-wing camp rather focuses on them. They label the mainstream as partly consciously right-wing - prioritising the business interests, and partly "automatically right-wing" through being emptied out of politics completely (Inga, Tbilisi NGO). In this sense, their positioning as "liberal-democratic-universalist" is regarded as quite symptomatic (Megi, Tbilisi NGO).

> The people who do not take any position, say: I don't follow the ideology, I just follow common sense. But in fact, there is no common sense, is there? In fact, it is fed by a certain ideology. […] What is considered common sense is a perspective of the dominant ideology

> that has become so dominant that nobody thinks of it as an ideology, and all the rest becomes a deviation. And the dominant ideology is neoliberal ideology in this country today (Dimitri, Tbilisi NGO).

As these participants indicate, supposedly neutral ideas of tolerance and equality that are distinguished as a shared value in the sector are also framed according to the dominant order. "For instance, they think of tolerance as common sense, but tolerance is a liberal idea that can be juxtaposed with solidarity, and this will lead us towards different results" – Dimitri notes. Teona thinks of the same:

> I think it is very common to put an emphasis on equality - social equality. Socially left-wing stance and economically right-wing stance is what make the neoliberal paradigm today. NGOs are its flagmen. They say, 'we put immense emphasis on equality' but in reality, they do it in the scope of the right-wing agenda. (Teona, Tbilisi NGO).

Such liberal-left classifications, homologous with the more dominant democracy-oriented part of the sector, are further voiced around women's and minority rights issues that have emerged in the donor-driven liberal human rights framework in the first place. For instance, in Inga's opinion, NGO-based feminists follow liberal agenda which is "not really a feminist agenda" as they fail to contextualise women's oppression in the wider socio-economic setting. As Keso explains on the other hand, representing the liberal camp herself, left-wing feminists prioritise social issues over political representation and further label the liberals as "bourgeois-capitalists and right-wing" who reproduce the imposed donor agenda. "Sometimes, when disagreeing over the final goal, they would resist you with such stamina, as if they were resisting some fascist group" – Keti adds, annoyed about the left-leaning feminist activists. In a similar way, there are cleavages in the domain of LGBTQ rights, where those on the left see the liberal segment as guilty in

denoting the queer community as an innately "liberal group" matching them to liberal democracy (Dato, Tbilisi NGO).

The left-wing segment that emerged later as a response to the mainstream liberal-democratic understanding of progress distinguishes itself from the dominant sector in two main domains: as more grassroots and participatory vs. elitist; and being driven by critical academic knowledge vs. mere technocratic orientation. They generally see the NGO sector as more isolated from the laypeople, especially from its marginalised groups, and tightly tied to the donor agenda instead. Lacking the legitimation from below in turn makes NGOs not so democratic actors, they argue. Dimitri thinks the gap in NGO agenda and actual public needs should be primarily blamed on NGOs because it is these organisations that keep reproducing the donor agenda over and over again.

> It is not that the NGO sector is misaligned with the public needs just because they cannot get the projects for the public needs. First, they can. And where they cannot, it is not because someone already decided for them. It is because they told [the donors] that the main problem in the country is this thing about elections. Imagine, we live in a country where kids are hungry, die of hunger, a third of the population is below the poverty line, and we live in a country where the government and its leaders live in luxury, where there are a lot of ecological problems […] but we work on amendments to the election code because there is this one case out of the ninety-nine cases which cannot be legally appealed. (Dimitri, Tbilisi NGO).

In this sense, this fraction differentiates between the NGO discourse (coinciding with the discourse of political elites and media) which focuses on issues such as corruption, elections, court, etc. presenting them as urgent problems and the "actual problems" of socio-economic nature, reflected both in the country representative surveys and the popular strikes from below. If the NGOs turn to the laypeople, they argue, it is either as

beneficiaries of the free service, diminishing their role as citizens or through "aggressive rhetoric of introducing progress" (Megi, Tbilisi NGO). In contrast, the left-wing segment sees itself as correcting these faults of the sector and advocating for the problems that come from below, while giving a voice to the affected groups in the process: "We should not be talking, they should be talking but we should strengthen them with the legal arguments for instance."- Dimitri says. In this sense, the segment associates itself with two domains at once – being actively involved in mobilisations and strikes from below, while simultaneously advocating for the subsequent reforms. The dual nature, as Megi puts it, makes the core NGO-based left appear as "radical in the institutional field, while not that radical in the streets", also giving the opportunity to think from a long-term perspective. The more marginal radical side on the other hand, which is less dependent on major donors, sees itself in the first domain primarily and distances itself from the "technocratic leftism".

"Building the bridges of solidarity between the different groups" and "collective mobilisation for social changes" is thus juxtaposed with the prevalent perception that NGOs should "enlighten" and "save" the population, especially apparent in the context of ongoing Europeanisation. "Do you feel better now after denoting the 90% of the Georgian population as *bneli* [illiterate, unenlightened]?" – Inga asks disapprovingly, distinguishing her approach from what she considers as the pretentious and antagonistic stance of the NGO community. Megi thinks of the same:

> When we speak of Europeanisation, we speak of minority rights, women's issues and that there is this Georgian society – patriarchal, savage, less civilised. […] Very often these activists, pro-European parties and NGOs cultivate this view that there is this higher civilisation, and you should catch up. And this Europeanisation process has created cultural conflicts that there is this 1% European-educated elite, and the rest is *bneli* post-Soviet, post-

> Socialist society, and you have to save them, enlighten and conduct the training to them. Some people seriously say that they should be taken to Europe to see how things are there. (Megi, Tbilisi NGO).

Instead, the participants argue, one should focus on urgent problems from below, while also igniting thoughts about specific issues different social groups face through a "respectful and just environment of discussions" - thus developing solidarity among people, which leads to integration rather than fragmentation of the society. So, the form of communication emphasised is a dialogue and mutual learning rather than hierarchical teaching, followed by the trust from the groups they work with or stand by (although the horizontal approach is at times also underlined by participants from the liberal camp).

Nevertheless, such encounters cannot completely escape from the differences in habitus as reflected in chapter 6. In this sense, the left shares more with the mainstream segment it is critical of, than with the underprivileged social groups it tries to engage. As Bourdieu would say, instead of "endless and precarious pursuit of the necessary means of existence", their habitus tends to be "formed by skholé" that one should go through to end up in the leading NGO sector (Burawoy 2019: 73). Sharing different life conditions and implicit hierarchies are further brought up by one of the donor representatives, who reminds feeling quite awkward during one of such visits in Georgia's small poor regional town: "I felt that we were like aliens from Tbilisi, landing on a strange planet, looking at the locals and then going into our cars and driving. I didn't feel well doing that." – he says, despite appreciating the grassroots approaches generally.

Instead, the left-wing segment tends to be inspired by varieties of critical social theory, which happen to be at odds with transition-oriented perspectives prevalent in the sector. If the mainstream is engaged in needs assessments, situation monitoring and service delivery, seeing "good practices" as a primary point of reference, the left-wing fraction

distinguishes itself by familiarity and reliance on critical academic knowledge. Correspondingly, they see themselves inciting discussions about "deep structural causes" of social and economic inequalities lacking from the sector as well as from local academia (Megi, Tbilisi NGO).

> The NGO sector is completely emptied out of political ideas. It is very important to have academic debates on different topics, about rights, social justice, and democracy. And even though NGOs were the most progressive [actors] in the 2000s, they have not been able to catch up with these academic discussions any longer. (Megi, Tbilisi NGO).

Feeling that "one can have much larger political projects and ideas than the rule of law and the provided scope of human rights", they have followed the route of further self-education in that direction including collective reading and discussion practices. This is common for both – a more dominant group of lawyers uniting forces with social scientists as well as relatively marginal activists of the NGO-ised new social movements they sometimes collaborate with, who to some extent also overlap the domain of social science: either come from social science and related interdisciplinary backgrounds or the activism has led them to it.

Differentiating itself from the mainstream, the left-wing segment has also opened the door for a more critical approach towards the donor-dependent NGO sector itself, which has been long perceived as a "sterile and idealised space" (Elene, Tbilisi NGO). As Elene notes, these criticisms are anyway moderate because, in the case of a more radical approach, one would have avoided setting up an NGO oneself. Yet, she thinks the liberal camp misunderstands these as directed to specific organisations per se, rather than to the systemic problems which the NGO left cannot escape either, lacking enough autonomy.

In fact, while various accusations coming from the conservative/nationalist standpoints, in relation to which the sector sees itself as morally and intellectually superior, are taken less

seriously, the criticisms coming from the NGO-based left, who hold necessary capital and are regarded as legitimate actors, are more recognised. Asserting itself as closer to the grassroots problems and at the vanguard of academic discussions compared to the others, the left segment symbolically threatens the accumulated moral and cultural capital in the sector, thus also questioning the value of existing symbolic capital. Now the liberal segment, which defines oneself as a tolerant and educated minority against a "backward" majority, itself gets criticised for strengthening inequalities and for "not catching up" with the current debates. Accordingly, somewhat similar to the lay people reactions towards the NGO community reflected in the previous chapter, "do you think you are better than me?" is what comes forward as a response among some from the liberal camp. For instance, also associated with the leading NGO sector, Tina thinks the left looks down on others morally and intellectually: "Then they get surprised that some people fear them and do not talk much." – she says, – "How to say… this is called intellectual oppression when you make someone feel that you are better than them." Apart from that, Tina emphasises that the self-identification itself as "left-wing", where "according to your ideology people should have food and you feel self-congratulatory", implies only the left-leaning are the "kind" ones and others are "evil", not wanting the good living conditions for people.

> Those having social ideology are in fact very smart, very educated, and resourceful people and on a conscious level they are very good people. There are things happening on an unconscious level there, but they are very good people. But they shouldn't imagine that life is a clash between good and evil because we are all partly good and partly evil. I often tell them, and they won't listen, but when you keep such an attitude towards others, then the distance further increases between you and your beneficiaries, who can be really poor. When you position yourself in a way that you know something and the others don't, or that the others make mistakes and you don't, you fail to consider how this might be viewed by them [beneficiaries]. They might question, if you distinguish yourself from someone else, then how

> would you perceive someone with no education at all and having nothing, urging for help? (Tina, Tbilisi NGO).

"Do you get what you're saying? You're saying: I am an NGO representative myself, but those ones there, they are different." – Keso similarly feels irritated over the criticisms directed at the NGO sector, - "If you're saying that NGO is a bad thing, which you are also part of, then you are trying to ruin the sector's reputation from the inside, aren't you?" Keso thinks it is to boost their ego that the opposing camp engages in criticisms publicly rather than in the private domain, which the liberals and the left, positioned closely in the social space, typically share to some extent:

> I understand the criticism and all, but they do not communicate, they insult. And do you think they say it privately? No, privately they are all friends, drinking together. Instead, they show off in front of the people, their 2000 Facebook friends or the TV audience that "you know I'm a better NGO and I'm interested in workers and the others are villains and just eating money." (Keso, Tbilisi NGO).

Teona, who represents the tiny diversity-oriented organisation herself but is familiar with those engaged in the above debates, describes the way she sees this situation:

> Somewhere there is a break in communication, nobody can talk to anyone and there are different camps: the population camp separately, leftist NGOs separately, neoliberal NGOs separately and nobody can interact with any other, everybody has a snobbish attitude and thinks they are better than others, so the fight goes like "you don't get this - no, you don't get this. (Teona, Tbilisi NGO).

To summarise the above, while previously it was given that people in NGOs ideally shared the common understanding of how they saw themselves and what kind of future they wanted - the ideas they successfully managed to naturalise, now these visions have diversified, and alternative classifications of the reality have emerged. Although these

classifications are prevalent in more central parts of the sector, they remain invisible for many. The split in turn brought new tensions, particularly given that the new camp challenges the mainstream in moral and cultural domains where the sector sees itself as a frontrunner in the country.

9.3. Emergence of the NGO-based left and its accommodation in major West-Russia dichotomy

Beyond the distinction logic that was addressed in the previous sub-chapter, the heterodox stances have further resulted from the normative judgements and evaluative emotions ignited by the social environment the participants navigated into (Sayer 2010a, 2010c). For example, the initial discontent of some left-leaning interviewees who were already part of the sector was primarily related to the frustration with the harsh modernising practices of post-revolutionary political elites and the NGO sector's complete neglect of the advocacy for social issues. Additionally, involved in NGO practice, they felt that project-based service provision for the targeted beneficiaries was not enough, leaving their key economic concerns intact.

Not framed in political language directly, such frustrations were first expressed in "emotional, intuitive" ways and only later gradually transformed into the left-wing stance due to better access to specific academic literature: "My discontent was not politicised." – Megi says, - "I felt that something was unethical, immoral there [in the political field], but I didn't have the political naming for it." Meanwhile, others were getting ideas directly from their degree programs in social and political sciences, or in the scope of activism around women's, queer or environmental issues, and consequent familiarity with new

social movements in the West. In addition, like the previous NGO generation, some came back with foreign, typically Western degrees. “I discovered… and it did not need much discovering” – Eka says, holding the Western diploma, - “that academic knowledge I got in the economic, social and cultural sphere was very much tied with the problems that are currently in Georgia.”

Unsurprisingly, some deviation from the mainstream has developed among the sector’s most powerful and recognised professions, already holding legitimacy to be taken seriously: the lawyers inhabiting a core NGO sector, holding appropriate habitus and high capital accumulation. They have been sided by those coming from social and political science backgrounds, at times associated with gender and minority issues, also already favoured by the donors and the mainstream discourse. The transformation at the heart of the NGO sector, these participants hope, has the further potential of trickle-down and transforming the rest of the sector in a similar direction.

At the same time, the legitimacy is further granted by the changing nature of the field itself, against which the left-leaning participants are not necessarily at odds and rather fit in. Most particularly, Georgia’s association agreement with the EU, signed in 2016, came with strong requirements of some basic regulations around labour rights and social policy that was non-existent in Georgia before, the business interests being entirely prioritised (Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center 2016). The association agreement is in turn the key document the foreign donors in Georgia are generally synchronised around and considerate of. Additionally, by the 2010s there has been a general shift towards more sustainable development, manifested in the agenda of the major donors: despite leaving the primary priorities intact, now they additionally began to pay more attention to human vulnerability and ecology (Lomidze 2019).

Nevertheless, this kind of shift, also influencing the format of EU trade agreements, has

been received less enthusiastically by some scholars (Orbie et al. 2016; Reid 2013). They argue that the problems these protective mechanisms attempt to amend via a focus on basic labour rights or the environment, are themselves created by the global neoliberal order which is prioritised and pushed by the very same actors. According to them, the emphasis on sustainability also risks co-opting and neutralising more critically oriented players in civil society, shifting the criticisms backstage (Luciani 2021; Orbie et al. 2016).

By describing the external circumstances, I do not imply to diminish the local agency. As already mentioned, often different groups rather manoeuvre and make use of external constraints to push for their own agendas. What I mean is that even if politically marginal, the left-leaning camp in the NGO sector does not deviate from the central logic that is characteristic of the Georgian field of power that generates respect and acceptance: dependence on the West as the source of legitimation, despite being explicitly critical to such dependence themselves. Further legitimised by the Western donor community, their stances and reliance on critical theory also put them closer to Western political and academic circles, treated with aggravated respect internally. Most importantly, they remain critical of Russia and more supportive of Georgia's pro-Western foreign policy. These issues will be discussed below in detail.

The change in the context addressed above is well expressed in the quote by the Georgian representative from one of the donor entities. According to her, the sector has done its job well, but as Georgia develops further, focusing on the same traditional issues NGOs advocate for is not enough anymore. Thus, both civil society and the political field should catch up with current requirements and give more attention to economic inequality.

> Civil society is not regarded as a fundamental principle for democracy anymore. Civil society tends to be born out of democracy as one of the liberated groups, having freedom of expression and being united under certain values. In our case, the groups holding these values

> were artificially created. Now after going through several rounds of elections already, "Long live independent Georgia!" is not fashionable anymore. Now the discussion is about how the rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer. (Nino, Donor representative).

The local NGO sector's neglect of social issues and sticking to human rights and good governance is similarly brought up by some other donor representatives. Nevertheless, while NGOs do in fact reproduce the dominant topics by themselves, social and labour rights anyway hold a relatively marginal place in the major donor agenda, most of them mentioning it only after I specifically asked. As the left-wing segment also notes, it is much easier to get funded in the scope of conventional topics such as good governance or minorities, than on above. While there are also donors with a centre-left identity, they are typically smaller and have fewer resources.

As discussions over the welfare state gained more legitimacy, partially resulting from the above transformations in the field and the association of these ideas with the high-status players in the sector, the emergence of left-wing stances is often seen as an indicator of Georgia's further development. As the participants from the liberal fraction note, these debates becoming possible means that Georgia went beyond the basic problems and the failed state phase and reached a more advanced stage: "Only after you are fed a little bit, it is possible to think about music" (Keso, Tbilisi NGO). So, starting the discussions over the left-right distinction, considered "a healthy process happening everywhere", is seen as a good sign in terms of diversifying the viewpoints and engaging in the next-level discussions (Nutsa, Tbilisi NGO). On the other hand, while the existence of differing perspectives is linked to progress, the object of criticism can become "how being left is understood [in Georgia]" (Tina, Tbilisi NGO). In this sense, quite characteristically for the peripheral context which tends to devalue the local, some think it is the Georgian left lagging back compared to those in the West: American left for example can be seen as

more engaging in meaningful conversations and holding more moderate views. So, this is perceived as yet another stage Georgia goes through:

> This has probably become more of a matter of condemnation and disputes in this context. In a civilised country, in many countries, these terms [left-right] are not applied anymore and nobody speaks about it. Maybe this is also a certain stage of our development we are going through. (Shorena, Tbilisi NGO).

Few European donors further contribute to associating the centre-left stances to the EU. As one of them indicates, referring to the European left as "corn-off crazy maniacs is still sometimes done but it's increasingly difficult when the declared national goal of the country is to integrate with Europe" (Victor, Donor representative). On the other hand, the local NGO-based left is also seen in connection with Europe, as a more European-influenced segment compared to the first NGO generation, more oriented towards the US and linked to previous political elites. In this narrative, the EU is brought forward as more social democracy influenced against the American version of capitalism.

> I think these people are more like intellectuals and academics, but they have a more grass-roots approach from the bottom. I would say it is more the generation which grew up in independent Georgia and which knows Europe, European Union very well, which studied there at the universities and brought their values and ideas from there. And this is a trend in terms of emancipation from the past and emancipation also from the old elites. (Paul, Donor representative).

Thus, the emergent left, consisting of young lawyers and academics, is distinguished from both – a Soviet-oriented "old-school pro-Russian communist", as well as a US-oriented neoliberal. They are instead thought to be more EU-focused or locally and regionally-focused. "[It] is also a trend you can say, but for me, it also looks more authentic" – says Paul.

Legitimised by the European left, the liberal-left divisions prevalent in the core sector, cannot escape the major geopolitical axis structuring the local field of power and rather surrenders to it. As demonstrated before, the mainstream segment accepts them due to decisive commonalities – being pro-Western and sharing Western liberal values such as disapproving homophobia or xenophobia. Even if the left camp tries to distance itself from the West-Russia classificatory dichotomy and proposes some alternative classifications (ex. Global North – Global South division), in practice it seems to be an impossible mission, nevertheless being perceived through the geopolitical lens, and judged in the context of Georgia's pro-Western aspirations. For instance, as one of the participants notes, differentiation between the Global North and South has been met with substantial confusion and scepticism by the liberal actors. While clear-cut contextualisation of the post-Socialist bloc in the above categories can in fact be problematised and become the source of debates, the dissatisfaction was instead caused by placing Georgia closer to the South, while the North combines both Europe/US and Russia together. So, to overcome this inconsistency, some from the mainstream came up with the concept of the "global West" in response. Even if the above division already implied Russia's domination over Georgia, the made-up term was to ensure that no classification disconnects Georgia from the West, while keeping the country in a separate category from Russia.

As voiced by the left-wing camp, similar confusions are common because according to the major classification, "you are either pro-Western, progressive, pro-LGBT, pro-feminist, pro-free market and all that stuff or you are pro-Russian, Christian, radical, orthodox, traditionalist" (Dato, Tbilisi NGO). Consequently, whoever deviates from this dichotomy leaves everyone baffled. It gets difficult to make sense of what one says when "you seem progressive, but you think differently about certain things" as Dato says. This

in turn takes us back to Bourdieu's (1991) observation that the classificatory opposites are only understood as congruent in relation to the concrete fields and characteristic divisions it produces. Left-right distinctions remain puzzling in the wider sense, as the context is largely structured according to the West-Russia (progressive - regressive, peaceful - threatening, etc) dichotomy.

The participants are concerned that while there are only two boxes to categorise the social reality, any criticism directed towards the West or local cultural and economic dependencies risks being interpreted as a pro-Russian stance delegitimising those who voice it. "If you criticise the West, you don't do it because you reject pro-Western political orientation; you do it to expand the knowledge and to insure against racism" – Elene emphasises, saying it is problematic to think of the West as something sacred - entirely ideal and acceptable. The existing dichotomy that goes beyond merely discursive binaries and also involves real geopolitical pressures, pushes the participants to always prove they are not lenient when it comes to Russia either. While the West gets to be criticised from political economy and postcolonial perspectives, Russia is not seen as any better alternative to it when it comes to civilisational, political or economic domains. Thus, if for the liberal segment, the foreign policy orientation is framed as a choice between good and bad as demonstrated in the previous chapter, here it is formulated as the choice between bad and worse, limited by Russian military threat even further.

> Of course, while the Russian money enters [in Georgia] and Russian propaganda also works, we are more skewed towards the Western actors because at least some basic value framework is shared here, maybe not the economic framework but the framework of basic democratic rights. But obviously, we are not blind or naïve that there are interest groups and certain things are being planned out according to these interests in our country. (Megi, Tbilisi NGO).

Consequently, the criticisms of cultural and economic domination voiced by them tend to

be clearly differentiated from the pro-Western foreign policy as such. For example, while the EU might be considered as "not sufficiently left-wing platform", it is emphasised that it is better to integrate there and seek alliances for its transformation into a more democratic and equal institution than to be hostile towards it (Dimitri, Tbilisi NGO). Elene, for instance, further distinguishes foreign policy orientation from Westocentrism prevalent in the country where the West "is not just a political course anymore but becomes the sole source of legitimacy". "[It is] when you see the West as superior to other civilisations, when the West becomes superior and higher, including Western science, culture, political ideologies, everyday matters, lifestyle," – she says, - "when the West becomes the normative standard for you in all areas and everything else turns subordinate and less valuable, accordingly."

On the other hand, the local elite groups are also found responsible for cherry-picking and interpreting European values as individual rights only, while implementing a number of neoliberal reforms in the name of Europeanisation. This understanding is juxtaposed with the idea of a welfare state and social justice, that as they argue, is likewise characteristic of Europe. "We say, to what extent is this modernisation, Europeanisation project that is prevalent in our country, socially oriented?" - Megi asks, emphasising that the dominant economic approach got translated into much-increased inequality in Georgia.

> For example, when speaking of Europeanisation and European values, nobody says that there are welfare states, there is social justice, there are massive strikes in France for social issues, pensions, bills and so on, or Scandinavia and Nordic welfare. Europe is not understood as welfare and social justice here. Here it is understood as rights, women's rights, individualism, that I'll do whatever I want and that my body is my business, and the discourse of identity politics instead of social justice, redistribution, welfare, sustainability, and protection of the environment. (Megi, Tbilisi NGO).

Thus, while the left camp is critical towards the West in many ways, they still very much exist in the scope of the main classificatory dichotomy, their views are also authorised by the models, theories, or actors prevalent in the West. Supporting European integration and remaining critical of Russia, they also remain in the scope of the sector's major norms. Consequently, while those from the liberal segment might disagree on some issues, their pro-Western and anti-Russian stance is not doubted. Yet, at times they are still thought to be strengthening the pro-Russian/pro-Soviet discourse unwittingly. In this sense, the left-wing fraction's concern about associating them with pro-Russian rhetoric is justified.

First, their criticisms directed towards the NGO sector itself might be compared to Russia's anti-NGO discourse. As Keso says, meant as hyperbole, these criticisms go hand in hand with the "NGOs should be closed down" rhetoric circulated by Russian TV channels. On the other hand, some communicate discomfort that the emphasis on social issues is simultaneously applied by pro-Russian forces who instead of the European welfare state, considered as acceptable, link the better living conditions to the Soviet Union, advocating for a closer alliance with Russia. The direct criticism of the West causes more resistance: it is seen not only as irrelevant and inadequate for the local context but also directly dangerous which risks triggering public scepticism, and converges with pro-Russian discourse. According to the participants, such criticisms should be directed more towards Russia than towards the West, because Georgia has been the colony of the former, not the latter, facing the imperial attitude up till now.

> I think these groups have the problem of taking the context into consideration because when you prepare seventeen thousand papers about American imperialism and you don't speak about Russian imperialism and Russia's postcolonial attitude towards Georgia, this is just a double standard. They speak from a different context, they speak from the perspective of scepticism that exists in Europe which is healthy in that region, in that space and time. But

> here I find it unacceptable because we are dealing with an issue of physical security, and we are facing Russian imperialism much more than the American one that they speak about in the Middle East. (Nutsa, Tbilisi NGO).

Thus, while the criticisms towards the West are acceptable elsewhere, whether it is the West itself or the region affected by US military power, in Georgia it is less permissible, seen rather as harmful. Even if the left-wing groups' approach to the matter is perceived as more sophisticated rather than hostile or anti-Western, there is a fear it might unintentionally compromise Georgia's security until integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures is guaranteed. More critical discussions, as Irakli notes, are better to be kept among a private friend circle or in the academic domain exclusively, rather than in media for example.

> [Criticisms towards the EU] strengthens the opposite [pro-Russian] camp (I don't even want to call this a camp, but the ideas that are artificially generated in Georgia), when this is not even what you are aiming at. On the contrary, your discussion is more sophisticated and in-depth because you don't say 'I want Europe, I don't want Russia' which is quite primitive. And the thing is, it is already worn out. Unfortunately, we are in a condition of this urgency, it's not that I'm happy saying these things either. I would rather prefer to speak about what happens in Europe, Northern Europe has a different ideology, the Western part happens to be different and the Eastern part is a completely different space, or whether it is worth joining the Eurozone for the developing economy, and a million other things. But these problems can be the problems of the next stage or the stage after that. (Irakli, Tbilisi NGO).

A less favourable atmosphere for more critical stances directed towards the West further takes us to Zarycki's (2014) differentiation of intellectual fields in the typical Western context and CEE. His observation is quite applicable to Georgia where the intellectual field largely overlaps the NGO sector. As he argues, more autonomy from the political field and less power create better grounds for freely generating more critical stances in the

West. On the other hand, the intellectual field in CEE is less autonomous and very close to politics. Thus, anything one says, gains importance in the political field. So, given the nature of its structuring, if anything makes the mentioned critical stances accepted at all, even boosts their prestige, it is the above symbolic power of the West itself. An impact of this power in turn ranges from the kind of capital accumulation that ensures who will be taken seriously enough and listened to when deviating from the doxa to some extent - to the legitimacy of the actual discourse, authorised by Western political and intellectual fields.

9.4. Conclusion

The previous chapters mostly saw the NGO sector as a relatively uniform space, even though some differences were already addressed in the chapter about language. This chapter instead focused on the split that by far remains an issue among more centrally positioned organisations and participants. The division took place between the mainstream NGO sector whose identity has been based on Western liberalism and the left-wing segment born out of the former.

While the liberal segment focuses on freedoms and equality before the law, the left camp remains critical of the prevalent social order as generating social and economic inequalities. Characteristically for the old guard vs avant-garde symbolic conflicts in the field, these camps propose different versions of understanding the heresy itself. If for the mainstream it is the commonality that matters, the left tries to separate oneself from it ideologically and speaks of ideological differences. Apart from that, even if the left-leaning segment tries to go beyond the West-Russia dichotomy that characterises the local

field of power, instead, they are incorporated into it themselves. Moreover, it is typically pro-Western positioning that in fact generates their legitimacy in the NGO sector.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

10.1. Introduction

This final chapter concludes the thesis. It consists of three main sections. First, I overview the thesis and summarise the main findings in relation to the research questions. Later I move to the discussion of the findings and as inspired by the critical realist underpinnings of the research, adopt the explanatory approach in relation to the research subject (Sayer 2010b). For this, I distinguish three types of causal factors that play a role in the relationship between the NGO community and the lay people: constraints of structural nature, habitus that determines how agents act, and personal reflexive practises. After that, I discuss the contributions and limitations of the study and conclude the thesis by identifying the areas for future research.

10.2. The thesis overview and the main findings

The NGOs that mushroomed in Georgia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, were an integral part of the democratisation assistance directed at post-socialist countries (Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani 2009; Nodia 2005). The donors' thinking that now it was finally the time for these countries to develop in the right direction, converged with the similar teleological thinking of the local NGO community, made of intellectuals and the middle classes (Wedel 1998). For them, NGOs were not only a means of material benefits in an unstable post-independence period but most importantly - the tools for the desired social change that would bring Georgia closer to the attractive West. The change would

have come if only Georgians became better at democracy, capitalism, tolerance, and individual freedom.

Yet, asserting themselves at the vanguard of progress, the NGO community found it troubling to win the hearts and the minds of the ordinary public (CRRC-Georgia 2018). The NGOs have largely failed to penetrate the lives of the people they claim to represent. Scholars have often blamed this on the Georgian population's cultural drawbacks and lack of appropriate know-how about performing civil society and active citizenship, at times falling under the influence of the anti-NGO propaganda orchestrated by the government or Russia (Gilbreth & Sichinava 2015; Kachkachishvili & Mezvrishvili 2002; Pokleba 2016; Sumbadze 2013). This thesis comes in here and takes this indicated gap between the NGO community and the laypeople as its major subject of interest. My goal in this study was to problematise and explain the divergence, without necessarily reducing the situation to orientalist cultural explanations.

Instead of a Tocquevillian standpoint from which the issue is often approached, the thesis positions closer to a Gramscian conflict-laden conceptualisation of civil society. From such a perspective civil society is less about the harmony of associational life and more about the hegemony exercised by the dominant classes. Taking this as a starting point, I shift to Bourdieusian multifaceted conceptualisation of power, which cannot be reduced to economic capital alone, and lean on his relational sociology to address the goal of the study. While Bourdieu's (1984) concept of "symbolic power" bears quite a similarity with Gramscian "hegemony", he gives more attention to how the culture can become an object of the struggle for itself, securing the legitimacy of the dominant groups and silencing the dominated (Burawoy 2019).

Bourdieu's conceptual language further shaped the following research questions, which were designed to capture both objective and subjective aspects potentially contributing to NGO-population disjuncture, as well as heterogeneity inside the sector itself:

- What kinds of capital tend to be prioritised in the aid-dependent NGO sector and how does it contribute to the gap?
- How does the NGO community distinguish itself from the population and how are they perceived by different segments of the laypeople in return?
- What internal classificatory struggle takes place among the NGO community and how does it address the NGO-population gap?

To respond to the above questions, I conducted 81 in-depth interviews with three target groups who could provide the relevant information: 34 NGO representatives associated with the organisations under a broad democratisation umbrella in Tbilisi and Gori; 39 laypeople differentiated by age, residence place (Tbilisi, Gori), class and gender; and 8 donor representatives from active donor entities.

What does the gained data tell us about the kind of capital prioritised in the NGO sector and its contribution to NGO-population mismatch? Giving distinguished attention to cultural capital due to its significance in the sector, the study revealed that its appreciated varieties are directly or at least symbolically embedded in the Western setting, enjoying heightened prestige in the local arena. First, one such capital is English language proficiency, which is not particularly equally distributed in society (CRRC-Georgia 2019). English has both practical and symbolic benefits: beyond being useful in the immediate working context in the sector, it is further associated with modernity, and access to innovative and accurate information, including good practices and standards that

Georgia needs to adopt to improve. Higher education gained in the West is another highly valued cultural capital. The credentials aside, the participants directly associate it with living in Western contexts and thus the "true" internalisation of the desired Western values that are needed for Georgia to develop further. The last cultural capital identified that goes in the same direction and seems to be largely welcomed in the sector are educational backgrounds in law (primarily), social and political sciences, and to some extent humanities. While a profession as such can hardly be called Western-marked, consideration of the context is important in this case, which makes them less than neutral and in fact, embedded in dominant Western political ideas. Embracing the spirit of transition, these professionals are rich with specific credentials (ex. advocates) or transferable skills (awareness of local and global political contexts, research skills) that are helpful in contributing to democratisation and Euro-Atlantic integration, as well as to data collection and reporting activities as required by the donors.

Possession of the Western-marked capital, especially when it comes to the proficiency in English language and Western education, is essentially classed and also links to the age category (CRRC-Georgia 2019; Omanadze et al. 2017). So, it tends to favour and reproduce the young middle class in the sector which differs from the other segments of the population both culturally and in terms of what it cares about. The difference is further amplified by and expressed in embodied ways the NGO representatives typically speak: their native Georgian language tends to be filled with a combination of urban middle-class Anglicisms and the aid buzzwords. The first situates the NGO community closer to the younger cosmopolitan Anglophonic urbanites, and the second emerges as part of the socialisation in the sector, while both linguistic particularities signify some sort of modernity set against the rest. This language further alienates those who do not fit in the typical NGO profile, on the other hand, partially dependent on the concepts coming

from Euro-American social sciences and law, those with preferred background knowledge have it easier, even managing to twist it according to their own agendas.

What kind of classificatory constructions tend to dominate such a context which as Zarycki (2014) argues is largely sensitive towards external pressures from more powerful global and regional actors, further shaping the relations between the NGO community and different segments of the population? The interviewed NGO representatives strongly emphasise the importance of Georgia's advancement towards Western-like liberal democracy, while juxtaposing it with the backwardness of the Soviet Union/current Russia. The way they relate to the population is also coloured by this very "catching up" doxa, as the participants further tend to construct Western-centered dichotomous cultural classifications that distinguish the NGO community as already developed in the correct direction, while the population is presented as lagging back and in need of further education.

On the other hand, the public perceptions of the NGO community, uncovered in the interviews with the laypeople, are likewise embedded in the above dominant classifications. Among the laypeople, I distinguished four groups based on their opinions on the NGO sector: enthusiasts, ambivalent, rejecters and detached, typically coinciding with the social positions of the participants. The enthusiasts are primarily made of urban cosmopolitan participants engaged in modern professions, who feel close to the NGO community and faithfully subscribe to their discourses. On the contrary, the rejectors are typically older, relatively worse-off participants from Tbilisi, who feel marginalised both in economic and cultural domains. Instead, they adopt the defensive strategies of anti-Western nationalism and Soviet nostalgia – everything the NGO community stands against. The detached segment typically consists of the poor rural participants who are involved in their daily matters, as well as older respondents from Tbilisi. They know less

and care less about NGOs as these organisations lack relevance in their lives. The mentioned classifications seem to be less important for them too.

The ambivalent is the largest group and consists of a variety of participants differently positioned in social space. What they have in common is a non-straightforward attitude towards the sector and the people associated with it, while simultaneously rejecting and reproducing the Western-centred classifications. To counter the stigma of backwardness that many participants in this group are somewhat anxious about, two major strategies can be applied: one is national pride, according to which Georgians have been historically humane and progressive, and do not need any teaching either from the West or from Western-associated NGO community (Kiossev 2002; Tsuladze 2013); the other strategy turns the table on NGO community and now blames them for not being Western enough, instead still acting in uncivilised Georgian ways, expressed in "aggressive activism". Although the latter strategy can be also applied to criticise NGO representatives' material interest, careerism or nepotism as they are sometimes perceived, understanding these as Georgian traits.

In line with the final research question, the study found that NGO-diffused classifications are not only confronted by the population but they are further questioned internally. Rather than being uniform, we can observe the internal struggles between the mainstream liberal and relatively recently emerged more marginal left-leaning perspectives that I treated as two camps. The new camp challenges the orthodoxy to some extent and voices criticisms towards the economic logic of transition, Eurocentrism and NGOs' detachment from the public, while also navigating in the sector comfortably. Equipped with the highly valued cultural capital (located in the core NGO sector, dominant professions in law and social sciences, Anglophonic, sometimes Western-educated, confident in NGO buzzwords), they symbolically distinguish themselves from the mainstream by asserting a

closer association with the marginal groups, and proximity to critical academic knowledge. In such symbolic struggles, the language itself is at stake and competing vocabularies emerge inside the sector. At the same time, the study shows that the left-leaning segment cannot fully escape the West-Russia dichotomy either, structuring the local fields.

In terms of structure, the thesis consists of ten chapters overall. Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter where I identified the research gap and presented the research questions. In chapter 2 I thoroughly described the local context, while in chapters 3 and 4, I outlined the theoretical and methodological choices in the study. The research findings have unfolded in the following five empirical chapters: chapter 5, chapter 6, chapter 7, chapter 8, and chapter 9.

10.3. Explaining the NGO community - laypeople mismatch

The critical realist methodological framework, which guided the research, gives particular importance to the causal explanation of the phenomenon we study (Sayer 2010b)**.** Drawing on the above key findings, I will now address several possible causal factors that affect the relations between the core NGO community and the laypeople: the structural causes, the habitus and the agency of the actors.

10.3.1. The structural conditions: External pressures and the logic of the peripheral field

It is no surprise that the NGO sector directly falls under the cultural and economic influence of the Western donor community. People in the aid-dependent NGOs are

typically presented with ready-made, broad and value-laden frameworks, that often reflect the changing concerns of the donor countries and international entities, in quite a top-down manner. Most importantly, lacking alternative sources of funding, the NGO community's existence is itself dependent on the financial incentives stemming from the donors, whose priority list and interests they cannot substantially deviate from.

This thesis, however, also draws attention to the more extensive and penetrative influence of the external pressures on Georgian society that go beyond NGO offices and affect the structure of the local field of power overall. As the locals respond to competing cultural, economic and political influences from the US/EU on one hand, and Russia on the other (here military pressures should also be considered), most domestic fields conform to geopolitical logic of divisions that reflect the "pro/anti" attitude towards the mentioned influences (Zarycki 2014). In such a context, the Western aid-dependent NGO community can be understood as a strongly pro-Western and anti-Russian fraction – much in line with the traditionally predominant stance in Georgia's political field (Kobakhidze 2021; Tsuladze et al. 2016, 2021). Even though the watchdogs may not be favourites of the ruling party clashing with oligarchical interests, NGO representatives cannot be called ideologically marginal in the country which has set itself towards integrating into the Western structures and has gone through rapid Europeanisation.

The study shows that such position-taking of NGO representatives is not random. They typically also tend to own the capitals that are embedded in the West, rather than locally. As the core Western states have the power to mark their capitals as symbolically and practically valuable, their ownership becomes the key asset in Georgia, affecting people's objective positioning in social space and determining their life chances. To some extent, this is even reflected in the NGO sector itself. As Outhwaite (2008) and Wedel (1998) argue, right after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the cultural and social resources

associated with the West, say English language or social networks with foreigners, turned crucial for finding the better-paying jobs, including in NGO sector; simultaneously its ownership boosted one's social status. But even beyond immediate market pressures, in peripheral countries such as Georgia, dependence on external capitals and the rise of the socially privileged strata who own them was not entirely a new thing: in fact, now directly accessible Western resources came to replace devalued Russian-linked cultural assets that were previously charged with the imperial prestige (Manning 2012; Reisner 2009; Suny 1994).

Here I have particularly focused on cultural capital that alongside economic resources, plays a key role in structuring the local social space. While in such as context it is a bit more autonomous compared to Western Europe, some amount of economic capital and family-owned cultural capital is essential to catch up with its acquisition, particularly when it comes to English language skills and obtaining higher education in the West. Unlike the 1990s no longer extremely rare, these assets are still very unequally distributed among the population and only a minority manages to own them, further dependent on age, class and residence place (CRRC-Georgia 2019). Possession of Western-marked cultural capital thus places the core NGO representatives closer to the young urban middle class but further from other social groups among the population. The interviews show that there is a discrepancy even among the people in the sector itself: some spent their childhoods showered by a variety of private lessons and held English-speaking family members who implicitly paved the way for them; others had to rely on impoverished public school teachers exclusively. Nevertheless, instead of taking the disparities seriously, the widespread discourses often present these skills and opportunities as something naturally acquired - a matter of motivation, being active and trying one's best.

The West-Russia binary is further reflected in the othering discourses of progress that distinguish young progressive cosmopolitans from the "inept" majority, perceived as tainted by the Soviet past or brainwashed by Russian propaganda. Here as well the differences are typically portrayed in moral and cultural terms. The population responses are further shaped around these classifications. Moreover, dependence is similarly reflected in the symbolic struggles played out in the sector, where each side, the old guard and the avantgarde, attempts to legitimise its own type of Western-marked cultural (linguistic, academic, etc.) capital, whether it is linked to the reports about good practices, helpful to reach the Western liberal democracy or canonical academic texts that might question the former. At the same time, while neither local discourses nor objective conditions allow serious deviation from the geopolitical dichotomy nobody betrays the pro-Western and anti-Russian position in this struggle.

10.3.2. Habitus

The habitus, which mediates between the structure and agency is the most enigmatic and simultaneously most crucial concept introduced by Bourdieu (1977, 1984). It refers to one's cognitive schemas and values that are a product of socialisation in a particular environment, allowing us to implicitly navigate in the familiar context without too much thinking. When applied in the study in practice, it gets hard to concretely operationalise and grasp what habitus looks like, even if its workings can be very noticeable among different social groups. The linguistic particularities I focused on in Chapter 6 can be considered as embodied manifestations of the habitus that is directly observable and much instinctive, unlike the normative dimension for example, more affected by the pressures of social desirability.

The study shows that the way of speaking is deeply classed, age-dependent, and further affected by one's professional competencies. The Western-influenced (Anglophonic, NGO buzzwords) language of the NGO community communicates distinction, higher standing, and looking down on others, even if it is not meant to do so at all. Instead, most NGO representatives are organically entrenched in their environments without typically being conscious of the words they utter and their impact on others. Both class positions and internalisation of the sector's environment guarantee such smooth functioning. Yet the outsiders, whose habitus differs, quickly notice it - they feel uneasy and find it pointless or artificial. The same goes for the abstract political and academic debates, that to some extent happen in the sector, remaining arcane for those who are not organically engaged in them.

The habitus has its fair share in the wider cultural divisions that emerge. Being part of the cosmopolitan environments and networks, younger urban middle classes stay more in tune with socially liberal values as it marks them as modern, tolerant and open. Such branding increases their legitimacy in their own habitat and further serves as a distinction marker from the "unenlightened majority". In the NGO sector, acting on these values, which are introduced as part of the democratisation/Europeanisation agenda, is moreover part of the job or the volunteering practice for some. On the other hand, for others adjusted to distinct environments determined by age, class, gender, or other factors, organic tuning in with the NGO-promoted tolerance (especially as promoted by those who are already different from them) might be harder. This is reflected in some anxious ambivalent narratives among the lay participants that combine pressures of appearing progressive/pro-Western with a certain discomfort, as well as in utter disapproval of NGOs by culturally and socially most marginalised older participants, who are typically the easiest targets of the label of "Soviet remnant". The same can be said about the values

of active citizenship and holding the government accountable which the othering classification contrasts with the passivity and gullibility of the Homo-Sovieticus.

The habitus is a key concept when it comes to the reproduction of inequalities. Distribution of capital in social space does not function without habitual mediation. The young urban cosmopolitan context not only allows organic access to the discourses of tolerance, gender equality, human rights or active citizenship but also decides who will even entertain the idea of proceeding with Western education or putting the time and resources into learning English. If it is a natural part of the young middle-class habitat and intuitively feels right for the people like them, for the less privileged, whose surroundings differ, such thinking might not even be on the table. Various scholars (such as Makovicky 2014; Skeggs 2004; Tyler 2015) argue the young middle classes manage to develop entrepreneurial, flexible and competitive neoliberal subjectivities, helping them to adjust the market pressures. This also includes an adjustment to the pressures of competition for donor funding in the sector (Vetta 2019). While not everybody is able to smoothly adjust, the blame is ascribed to the individual person, labelled as passive, lazy or even pro-Russian in the Georgian context (Tsuladze et al. 2021)

Thus, as in terms of capital accumulation, the habitual particularities place the NGO community closer to the urban cosmopolitan middle class being intuitively familiar to them. Simultaneously it creates disjuncture with other social groups.

10.3.3. Agency and reflexivity

Critical realists can be particularly harsh on Bourdieu for his relative neglect of the reflexivity and agency of the individuals (Archer 2019). They argue that people are more than habitus-driven automatons and tend to critically engage with their surroundings. While their reflexivity is in fact constrained by structural matters, whether it is class, their job or global asymmetry internalised as part of habitus, they do not always act sub-consciously and are partly reflexive (Decoteau 2016; Elder-Vass 2010; Sayer 2010c). Sayer (2010c) further urges not to dismiss the normative judgements and evaluative emotions that emerge as part of people's daily lives in relation to what they care about and what matters to them. For him, these are examples of lay reflexivity about their environment and their place in it.

My interviews show that along with intuitive habitual dispositions, the participants are capable of reflecting on their environments. The chapter about language is particularly interesting in terms of participants observing their own positions. One of the activists, for example, well reflects on his own usage of Anglicised Georgian as deriving from the privileged positioning. Along with the implicit transfer of random Anglicisms, at times participants are also very conscious about how they speak, manifested in ironic or regretful reactions, even if speaking this way is organic in their environments in which the interviewer herself fitted. I think we can also perceive this as some sort of response towards a globally dependent position and the resulting imitated speech. Those in disadvantaged positions further reflect on their place in the social world, for example, noting that one has to have its tongue already polished in the environment of NGOs to be able to speak about the topic smoothly.

Normative judgements are an important part of the NGO work - very value-based and oriented towards social change. As the logic of the previous section goes, values are

typically part of the habitus that the participants have intuitively internalised. Nevertheless, it can also be more complex and partially driven by the evaluative emotions that arise from their immediate surroundings. Shaped by the class- and NGO-based habitus, most NGO representatives I spoke to are in fact more reflexive of cultural inequalities related to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc. (some also expressed empathy towards the poorer groups, while less linking it to the structural reasons). Yet beyond the NGO sector's values, at times their concerns also stem from private experiences and consequent emotions such as being mistreated on the above grounds, empathy for the friend or the other people mistreated, and so on. As Gagyi (2015) argues, due to structural constraints, the Eastern European middle classes often articulate their concerns in the language of democratisation and Europeanisation that is available to them. Consequently, these marginalising experiences are typically addressed in ready-made terms of minority rights, individual freedom, tolerance and gender equality. Although, as shown in the relevant chapter, those on the more activist side further get access to different language and theoretical ideas shaping Western social movements, which in a way also points at their dependent position.

Although the dependent position does not imply the lack of agency. The skilful manoeuvring in the NGO language and projects, and usage of the donor-provided tools with their own (at times even divergent) agenda in mind, indicate that the NGO representatives are not passive objects conditioned by geopolitical or donor-set structural constraints. Changes in the core sector and the emergence of new ideas further point to insiders' reflexivity. While access to specific sources and the relevant cultural capital obviously matters, a number of participants began by questioning the environment that seemed unjust in a lay manner first, only later turning to the designated academic literature. Similar reflections have been made by some middle-class lay participants who

blame the NGO community for lacking self-critical attitudes and negligence of inequalities.

Obviously, middle-class groups have better access to the ideas that turn into a more reflexive understanding of the social world (Crossley 2003). But it does not mean such inequalities are only reflected on by them. For instance, while gender-equal values become a marker of civilisational progress epitomised by the NGO community, these issues are further touched upon by the women most marginalised among the participants: poor, rural and relatively older age group. They do not articulate it in terms of *genderuli tanastsoroba* [gender equality], or if they do, they rather seem to be artificially pressured into such language, but they still do notice that some experiences around them are gendered and classed. As she talks about herself, Tbilisi-based Elza in her 50s, having a manual job, observes that nowadays women are faced with a double burden of the housework and the job. Ela from the rural setting near Gori further notices that it is primarily poor women in her village who have emigrated for care work abroad. This is not necessarily brought up in connection with the NGOs but rather emerges naturally, as these women talk about their lives and problems.

The lay reflexivity of the relatively worse-off groups typically revolves around socio-economic issues that affect them, or consequent social and cultural marginalisation, which at times skips from the reflexive practices of the better-off groups. More marginal rural participants I spoke to care less about NGOs. Instead, they bring up the issues they think matter and where NGOs and their discourses seem irrelevant. As for the geopolitical dichotomy, in such observations, neither Europe nor Russia might be viewed romantically, one associated with care work and another with the physical threat. Others ask why NGOs are less interested in the welfare that exists in Europe. In the older groups fears for national annihilation and Soviet nostalgia can be further interpreted as not only

an example of habitus mismatch but also as a critical commentary on the social reality they are excluded from and instead ascribed the stigma (Todorova 2010). Finally, the lay anger about the enlightening discourses coming from the West and NGO community, at times manifested in heightened national pride, may similarly be seen as a reaction against being looked down on (Kiossev 2002; Tsuladze 2013). This can be partially seen as an example of evaluative emotions ignited by cultural asymmetries both in local and global domains, where the dominant side is represented by the West and the Westernised.

Simultaneously, reflexive opinions have also been voiced among the donor community. For example, one of the overseas donor representatives openly speaks of the donors' implicit prioritisation of the young and Anglophonic as they feel proximity with them due to shared practices. He further reflects on the asymmetry between the donor/NGO community armed with privileged cultural capital on one hand and the marginalised laypeople in Georgia's regions – on the other.

To summarise, reflexive practices are also at play affecting the NGO - laypeople relations in different ways. Yet, of course, it is only partial, as people remain largely constrained by semi-conscious habitual reasoning and various structural forces that shape the field and cause the given situation to unfold.

10.4. The study contributions, limitations, and future research

This section concludes the thesis by bringing attention to the contributions and limitations of the study, as well as pointing to the areas for future research.

I will first address the empirical and theoretical contributions the study makes. From an empirical perspective, it adds to the scarce sources on Georgia's case which tend to be rather skewed towards descriptive reports and typically lean on teleological democratisation/transition framework. The present research instead takes an alternative approach and places the Georgian NGO sector at the intersection of global and local asymmetries: it shows how Georgia's peripherality and in-betweenness affect the domestic configurations, perceptions and discourses, translating into Western-centered self-distinction of the local NGO community. In this sense, the Georgian context also draws similarities to the other post-socialist states, so the thesis can further contribute to the area studies, in general. While a lot of work has been already done in the early years of the sector's formation in this region (see Hemment 2004; Ishkanian 2008; Mandel 2001; Sampson 1997, 2002, 2003; Wedel 1998), this research pays close attention to more recent developments, including the emergence of left-wing voices in the sector since the 2010s. Besides, given that donor-NGO relations are typically the focus of studies about the sector, this one contributes to the literature by giving more attention to NGO-population dynamics.

In terms of theoretical contributions, the present research goes beyond the neo-Tocquevillian framework - the perspective typically taken towards NGOs in a post-socialist context - and instead applies Bourdieusian theory to grasp the overlooked asymmetries affecting the NGO-laypeople gap. In this sense, instead of Putnam's (2000)

concept of social capital applied in studies of civil society, this research approaches the NGO community with a different, more conflict-laden Bourdieusian understanding of capital, revealing the significance of cultural capital in the sector. The study also adds to Bourdieusian sociology by adapting the theory to particular complexities of the post-socialist region, while also combining it with a critical realist focus on individual agency. More specifically, drawing on Zarycki's (2014) ideas about Western-associated capitals gaining inflated symbolic value in peripheral countries, the study brings in the notion of Western-marked cultural capital to demystify certain competencies, backgrounds and dispositions deemed as important in the sector. At the same time, the critical realist methodological framework helps combine individual reflexivity and agency with the Bourdieusian "unconscious strategist", while also bringing a novel approach to the area studies, dominated by positivist and constructivist methodological frameworks.

Nevertheless, the study has several limitations that should also be considered:

First, stemming from the intensive research design I adopted, the findings must be treated with caution when it comes to generalisability. My take on identifying crucial capitals does not rely on the quantitatively oriented sector-representative mapping of the academic backgrounds, language skills or educational qualifications. Instead, I opted for gaining rich in-depth qualitative data about participants' personal experiences, observations, and opinions, which allowed me the interpretive and explanatory analysis. Yet, the study findings can also provide the material for quantitatively oriented future studies to draw on and test them further.

Second, interested in the common themes that tend to emerge among a variety of NGO representatives, the study does not engage in one specific sub-field substantially. Consequently, a lot of internal struggles, say in the field of gender, ethnic minorities, anti-

corruption, labour rights, etc. are only touched upon superficially or missed out. The left and liberal camps are further treated in an essentialist manner for analytical reasons.

Third, while I made the conscious choice to focus on cultural capital entirely, this does not imply that it is the only capital that matters. For example, the importance of social capital, which has been extensively addressed by other authors, did emerge in the interviews and was incorporated in the thesis only partially (See Aliyev 2015; Vetta 2019; Wedel 1998). Pinpointing political capital possessed by more elite NGO representatives is also interesting, although can be the subject of future research.

Fourth, having a key focus on the core NGO community associated with more or less leading organisations, my participants typically were of a similar profile, even if different in terms of positions in the organisation, ranging from program directors to freelancers and interns. All are involved in the office-based job. While I was lucky to also interview those with outlier experiences, they were relatively few. For future research, it would be interesting to purposefully select so-called "field officers", field coordinators and recruiters who often might be positioned more peripherally in the social space. Giving full priority to people associated with smaller community-based organisations where professions might matter less, could have also changed the picture; on the other hand, the inclusion of think-tank and policy institutions would have further increased the visibility of political scientists, economists, and sociologists in the sample.

Fifth, despite the inclusion of the donor participants in the study, due to limited resources, less emphasis was placed on NGO-donor relations per se. Future studies can conduct a more comprehensive analysis of the donor programs and approaches, linking it to the present research.

Finally, as already mentioned in the methodological chapter, the research tends to have a top-down approach. So, it does not particularly engage with the varieties of grassroots activism on issues different local groups care about.

These limitations also contain opportunities for future research, some of which have already been addressed above. To continue the list, one might want to further investigate how left-wing activists negotiate their position in-between NGOs and grassroots; how internal struggles are played out in specific fields touched upon in the study (ex. human rights, feminist or queer activism, etc.) and what are their peculiarities not captured here; whether perceptions and practices would be the same in different sectors, such as humanitarian aid, service delivery or think-tank fields not addressed in current research; how more marginal Russian-associated organisations that were not the focus here, tend to be structured and perceived either internally or externally, and so on.

Regrettably, the study findings do not cover the very recent significant geopolitical and domestic shifts that have taken place since 2019-2020 when the fieldwork was conducted: the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 and its influence on Georgia; deterioration of the EU-Georgia relations best expressed in not being granted the EU candidate status in June 2022; the rise of right-wing populism and the introduction of "Foreign Agents" draft law against NGOs in March 2023 (Kirby 2023; Lomsadze 2022). Although not passed after the massive protests, the government's support for the draft law can be seen as an indicator of the changing climate. While these issues are not included in this research, the findings could nevertheless be useful in inspiring new studies to understand the circumstances and effects of such shifts in relation to civil society: For example, how do geopolitical changes affect the local field of power and the conditions for the NGO sector in the country? Is the binary understanding of the West and Russia further strengthened in such circumstances and what are its effects on liberal-left symbolic

struggles going on in the sector? Could the NGO community's self-distinction and othering practices also be contributing to the potential attractiveness of right-wing populism? Drawing on this research, these questions could be taken further by future studies.

To sum up, this section addressed the empirical and theoretical contributions of the thesis, identified its limitations, and outlined the directions for future research.

10.5. Conclusion

This is the last concluding chapter in the thesis.

In this final part, I briefly reviewed the direction of the research and summarised the main findings in relation to the research questions.

I also discussed the study results in accordance with the theoretical framework and identified the key factors that have the power to influence the mismatch between the NGO community and the laypeople.

Zarycki's (2014) treatment of Bourdieu's ideas for the (semi-)peripheral CEE areas was particularly helpful in setting out the interconnected global and local structural constraints that shape the social space in Georgia, as well as existing local fields. These constraints typically result in structuring the local context along geopolitical lines, where the Western markers are ascribed immense symbolic value. Following Bourdieu's idea that power is enacted and accepted intuitively, I further distinguished habitus-related particularities that cause the NGO community, associated with the above markers, to implicitly think, feel and act in certain ways that are often ascribed to individual traits or choices instead. It is

due to compatible habitus, they organically adopt, produce and reproduce the othering classifications, positively distinguishing themselves from the rest. Yet, as people are not automatons completely subjected to the structural pressures even when mediated by habitus, we should also pay attention to the instances of reflexivity among the NGO representatives, different groups of laypeople and the donor community. It shows that even if partially, people can still consciously reflect on things that bother them, at times even leading to attempts to swim against the current.

Finally, I listed the contributions and limitations of the study, followed by the areas for future research in changing geopolitical and domestic climates.

Appendix 1

The sample for NGO representatives

To further limit the indirect identifiability of the participants based on quotes, they are assigned the numbers below, instead of the pseudonyms applied in the thesis. The thematic focus of the organisations is also indicated in rather general terms.

N	NGO focus	City	Organisational Strength	Internal Position
Participant 1	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Managing
Participant 2	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Managing
Participant 3	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Managing
Participant 4	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Managing
Participant 5	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Managing
Participant 6	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Managing
Participant 7	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Managing
Participant 8	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Managing
Participant 9	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Managing
Participant 10	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Staff
Participant 11	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Staff

Participant 12	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Staff
Participant 13	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Staff
Participant 14	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Staff
Participant 15	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Staff
Participant ~~16~~	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Project-based
Participant 17	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Project-based
Participant 18	Human rights and Democratic governance	Tbilisi	First-tier	Volunteer/ Intern
Participant 19	Education, Activism	Tbilisi	Second-tier	Managing
Participant 20	Participation, Education	Tbilisi	Second-tier	Managing
Participant 21	Participation, Education	Tbilisi	Second-tier	Managing
Participant 22	Advocacy, services	Tbilisi	Second-tier	Staff
Participant 23	Participation, Education	Tbilisi	Second-tier	Staff
Participant 24	Participation, Education	Tbilisi	Second-tier	Volunteer
Participant 25	Participation, Education	Tbilisi	Second-tier	Volunteer
Participant 26	Participation, Education	Tbilisi	Second-tier	Volunteer
Participant 27	Participation, Education	Tbilisi	Nominally existing	Managing
Participant 28	Participation, Education	Gori	Second-tier	Managing
Participant 29	Participation, Education	Gori	Second-tier	Managing
Participant 30	Participation, Education	Gori	Second-tier	Managing
Participant 31	Advocacy, services	Gori	Second-tier	Managing
Participant 32	Advocacy, services	Gori	Second-tier	Staff
Participant 33	Democracy, participation	Gori	Second-tier	Staff
Participant 34	Advocacy, services, education	Gori	Second-tier	Staff

Appendix 2

The sample for the Lay people

N	Pseudonym	Residence Place	Age	Gender	Occupation (Loosely Based on ISCO-08 classification)
1	Elene	Tbilisi	18-35	Female	Professional
2	Maka	Tbilisi	18-35	Female	Professional
3	Nutsa	Tbilisi	18-35	Female	Professional
4	Bacho	Tbilisi	18-35	Male	Professional
5	Levani	Tbilisi	18-35	Male	Professional
6	Gurami	Tbilisi	18-35	Male	Technicians and associate professional
7	Liza	Tbilisi	18-35	Female	Student/ Service and sales worker
8	Rezo	Tbilisi	18-35	Male	Student
9	Oto	Tbilisi	18-35	Male	Unemployed
10	Tamuna	Gori (urban)	18-35	Female	Professional
11	Tornike	Gori (urban)	18-35	Male	Student
12	Gvantsa	Gori (urban)	18-35	Female	Manager/business owner
13	Dachi	Gori (urban)	18-35	Male	Manager
14	Diana	Gori (rural)	18-35	Female	Clerical support worker
15	Tsira	Gori (rural)	18-35	Female	Student
16	Tamta	Tbilisi	36-45	Female	Professional
17	Lasha	Tbilisi	36-45	Male	Professional
18	Zura	Tbilisi	36-45	Male	Technicians and associate professionals
19	Lela	Tbilisi	36-45		Technicians and associate professionals
20	Daviti	Tbilisi	36-45	Male	Service and sales workers
21	Luka	Tbilisi	36-45	Male	Service and sales worker

22	Gia	Tbilisi	36-45	Male	Unemployed/seasonal worker
23	Shalva	Gori (urban)	36-45	Male	Plant and machine operators, and assemblers
24	Dato	Gori (rural)	36-45	Male	Plant and machine operators, and assemblers
25	Nona	Gori (rural)	36-45	Female	Unemployed/ Domestic work
26	Ela	Gori (rural)	36-45	Female	Unemployed/ Domestic work
27	Irina	Tbilisi	46-65	Female	Professional
28	Lia	Tbilisi	46-65	Female	Professional
29	Tamazi	Tbilisi	46-65	Male	Manager/business owner
30	Givi	Tbilisi	46-65	Male	Craft and related trades workers
31	Gocha	Tbilisi	46-65	Male	Service and sales workers
32	Elza	Tbilisi	46-65	Female	Elementary Occupations
33	Maia	Tbilisi	46-65	Female	Pensioner
34	Eteri	Tbilisi	46-65	Female	Pensioner
35	Naira	Tbilisi	46-65	Female	Pensioner
36	Manoni	Tbilisi	46-65	Female	Pensioner
37	Rusudani	Gori (rural)	46-65	Female	Unemployed/ Domestic work
38	Tamari	Gori (urban)	46-65	Female	Pensioner
39	Tsiala	Gori (rural)	46-65	Female	Pensioner

Appendix 3

The sample for the donor representatives

To reduce the risk of indirect identifiability I do not specify the kind of agency each participant represents, whether it is a foreign government, international organisation or a private entity. However, I do specify if the people I spoke to were locals or foreigners. The reason behind such clarification is that the perspectives of Georgian representatives could still be considered insider perspectives. Apart from that they bear a lot of similarities with the NGO community itself.

N	Pseudonym	Background
1	Anna	Overseas
2	Avto	Local
3	Nino	Local
4	Paul	Overseas
5	Victor	Overseas
6	Alfred	Overseas
7	Tina	Overseas
8	Giorgi	Local

Appendix 4



INFORMATION LEAFLET

The study of perspectives on Georgia's NGO sector

Who am I and what I am doing?

I am a PhD student in Sociology at the University of Kent, the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research.

Currently, I'm working on my dissertation about experiences and perspectives related to the Western-funded non-governmental sector in Georgia. I am interested in the views of people who are involved in the sector as well as those who are not involved.

What is the study about?

My study aims at understanding how people get involved in the NGO sector, what are their experiences of being part of it and how they see their place the society. I also want to find out how they are perceived by various people outside the sector, how these people make sense of NGOs and what are their viewpoints. I will also meet the donor organisation representatives and hear their opinions.

Where do you come in?

- I would like to interview you and hear your experiences in case you are part of a non-governmental organisation
- I would like to interview you and hear your experiences in case you are not involved in a non-governmental organisation but have opinions to share about it
- I would like to interview you and hear your perspectives if you represent the donor organisation

I will interview you when and where it is most convenient for you. I will ask questions about yourself, your perspectives and experiences around the NGO sector. If there are any questions that you don't want to answer or feel uncomfortable answering just say so. You are free to stop the interview at any time.

How long it will last?

The whole interview should last for approximately an hour.

Other things you should know

I will use the tape recorder to record the interview so that I do not miss anything important you might say. The tapes will be transcribed, and then destroyed. If you would rather the interview is not recorded all you have to do is say so.

Confidentiality

During the interviews, only first names will be used and anything you do say will be kept in the strictest confidence. Your name will be anonymised in the final thesis and identifiable names or information you mention, removed or changed. Some of the direct quotes will be used in the thesis and possibly, in articles or conference papers.

Appendix 5

SSPSSR

University of Kent
Canterbury
Kent CT2 7NF

The study of perspectives on Georgia's NGO sector

Consent Form

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the chance to ask questions.

   Please initial box ☐

2. I understand that taking part in the project is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without my rights being affected.

   Please initial box ☐

3. I understand that I do not have to answer any questions that I am not happy with.

   Please initial box ☐

4. I agree to take part in the above project.

   Please initial box ☐

Name:_____

Signature:_____Date:_____

Appendix 6

Interview Guide for the NGO representatives

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. Can you walk me through how you ended up in the NGO sector and in this organisation particularly?
3. How do you think working in the NGO sector differs from any other job in the public or private sector?
4. How would you say this job influenced your life and worldview?
5. What aspects of working in NGO do you find fulfilling and what aspects are more discouraging for you?
6. In your opinion, what kind of people get involved in NGOs mostly? How are they distinguished from the rest?
7. In your opinion, what role do NGOs play in relation to the population? What changes do you want to achieve and what do you do about it?
8. Some say there is a gap between the wider public and the NGO sector. Which segment of the population would you say generally aligns with values NGOs embrace and who is relatively hostile towards them? Why?
9. In your opinion what mainly drives the Western donor organisations to fund the local NGO sector?
10. In your opinion to what extent are the donor-proposed programs relevant to the local context? Can you bring any examples?
11. Most NGOs are part of the EaP civil society platform. What do you think about NGOs' involvement in the popularisation of the EU?
12. In your opinion, do human rights-oriented NGOs in Georgia share the same approaches or do they differ from one another? How?

Appendix 7

Interview Guide for the lay people

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. Where do you usually get the information about NGOs?
3. What are your immediate associations about the NGO sector?
4. Is there anything in particular that you like or dislike about NGOs?
5. In your opinion, what kind of people are involved in NGOs mostly?
6. According to your impression what role do NGOs mostly play in relation to the population?
7. Are there any NGOs in Georgia that voice your concerns particularly? Have you ever visited these organisations?
8. What are your main concerns and where do you discuss them usually?
9. What do you think needs to be changed in Georgia to become a better society? What role do you think NGOs play in that?
10. In your opinion, what are the issues currently dividing Georgians? What side do you think NGOs take and why?
11. Some people think that NGO representatives are the most pro-European part of society. What do you think about that?

Appendix 8

Interview Guide for the Donor representatives

1. What are your main priority spheres when it comes to funding the NGO sector? How are your priorities set?
2. Have you changed or modified your priority areas/spheres in Georgia through time? How?
3. How do you decide which country to focus on especially or else shift your focus away? What factors influence it? In what situation is Georgia in this sense?
4. Through collaborating with Georgian NGOs what positive changes that you hoped for, have been achieved and what has turned out to be more difficult?
5. How do you think NGOs contribute to the wider population?
6. To what extent do the values you represent align with the values of other foreign donors active in Georgia? Can we speak of a certain donor community?
7. To what extent do the values of NGOs you fund align with the values your foundation stands for?
8. Are there any changes in Georgia's NGO sector that can be seen through time?
9. Some people say that NGOs play important role in Georgia's Europeanisation. What is your thought on that? To what extent do you focus on this issue in your programs?
10. One can see a certain asymmetry in terms of the financial well-being of more prominent Tbilisi NGOs and smaller ones, especially in regions. Why do you think that happens?
11. What would be your further recommendations for people in NGOs to improve their work?

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