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MÜHLFRIED, FLORIAN. *POSTSOWJETISCHE FEIERN: DAS GEORGISCHE BANKETT IM WANDEL*. SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET POLITICS AND SOCIETY, 34. STUTTGART: IBIDEM-VERLAG, 2006. 228 P. ISBN: 978-3-8982-1601-2.

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Florian Mühlfried's book *Post-Soviet Feasts—The Georgian Banquet in Transition* analyzes the contemporary practices and perceptions of the Georgian *supra* (banquet) from an ethnological perspective, drawing on ethnographic data, official pronouncements, mass media, and historical sources gathered during field research in Georgia in 2002–2003.

In the first part of the book, Mühlfried provides theoretical background. He paints a complex picture of ritualization and performance to show how the *supra* was incorporated in the historical process of nation-building. The second part focuses more specifically on the elements and rules of the *supra*, such as toasts, the toastmaster, wine, and dishes. Mühlfried analyzes the Georgian banquet as a secular ritual. The consumption of alcohol at a *supra* is related to toasting. These festive speeches usually follow a standard outline. Some topics are obligatory, as is the order in which they are addressed. Some toasts reinforce national values such as the motherland or invoke Georgian culture and history. The toasts are proposed and presented by the toastmaster (*tamada*), followed by the other banquet guests. Mühlfried discusses the order in which toasts are pronounced, the role of the toastmaster, and the kinds of drinks and dishes used. He analyzes the entire event as a marker of Georgian identity. The third part offers a brief history of the Georgian *supra*. This section is built around key themes: understandings of wine and the vineyard in Christianity, accounts by 19th-century foreign visitors and Georgian authors, and terminology. He considers the meaning of the ritual consumption of wine and food in connection with the Christian understanding of wine as the blood of Christ as well as the Georgian perception of wine as an identity marker, a metaphor for Georgian blood, and of those who share wine at a *supra* as virtual kinsmen. The fourth part examines gender roles and the image of masculinity in Georgian society. Mühlfried observes that the public performance of pride and honor is normally attributed to men and that *tamadoba* (toastmaking) is a manifestation of *vazhkatsoba* (masculinity). Sometimes a woman may perform a male cultural role at the table and act as *tamada*. However, it is unthinkable for a man to perform cultural roles associated with women.

Mühlfried argues that the Georgian *supra* in its present form is a product of the 19th century rather than an ancient tradition. His argument is that the Georgian *supra* was a major means of preserving oral traditions about Georgian culture and history. The *supra* works on two levels: firstly, it reiterates coded acts in the course of its

performance, ensuring the continuity of tradition; secondly, it marks a point in time and creates individual and social memory. The author considers the Georgian *supra* a cultural technique for maintaining national identity. It seems to have been especially important in the 19th century and in Soviet times, becoming stronger in times of oppression.

In the former Soviet Union the project of ethno-cultural unification involved a broad campaign against so-called “harmful traditions” whose main goal was to transform traditional culture. In Georgia, the *supra* was considered a dangerous vestige of an old lifestyle. But the adaptive mechanisms of culture made it possible to provide new forms for elements of traditional culture. In this construction of new cultural codes, historical memory usually serves as a starting point. Mühlfried argues that the *supra* contributed to social cohesion within the family and to the transfer of knowledge from older to younger generations. He also shows that the process has not always been smooth, and is sometimes fraught with conflicts. Young people may disrespect the rules of the *supra* and regard it as something no longer quite suitable for Georgian society. Perhaps in the future the *supra* will be centered more narrowly on symbolic events such as weddings and funerals. Yet globalization and modernization, for all their homogenizing effects on culture, also provoke resistance and bring ethnic identity back to the fore. In Georgia, identity markers are often centered on the festive and the culinary, such as the question of who will prepare the biggest *gozinaki* (New Year sweet) or *khachapuri* (filled bread). The Georgian *supra* is a good example of such enactments of ethnic identity.

In sum, Florian Mühlfried provides an engaging ethnographic portrait of Georgia. His knowledge of context and his clear writing style make this a fascinating book.