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**WHO ARE YOUR *DZMAK'ATSEBI*?
FORMALIZED FRIENDSHIP ON THE STREETS OF TBILISI**

A B S T R A C T. The article looks into *dzmak'atsoba* relations, which demonstrate similarity to both friendship and kinship and have been an integral part of the Georgian urban street culture for the late Soviet and early post-Soviet periods. Following the approach formulated by Evan Killick and Amit Desai, who stress the close interweaving, and at times inseparability of the concepts of friendship and kinship, this paper does not aim to rigidly classify *dzmak'atsoba* into this or that category. Instead, its objective is to show by what means and ideologies these relations are shaped as a separate and distinct phenomenon that contrasts with the other forms of relations. Drawing on qualitative data and research method, I show that *dzmak'atsoba* is an institutionalized and formalized form of friendship, where the relationship between friends is subject to certain explicit rules. I argue that *dzmak'atsoba* is largely based on reputation exchanges and modeling of kinship, which determine the main features of this form of relationship.

KEY WORDS: formalized friendship, kinship, reputation, neighborhood, street, taboo, incest, sworn brotherhood, fraternities

УДК 392.71(479.22)

DOI 10.31250/2618-8619-2020-4(10)-178-188

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Friendship as a subject of research has remained for a long time on the periphery of anthropologists' attention. But in recent decades, there has arisen a noticeable interest in this social phenomenon, which resulted, among other publications, in two collections of articles devoted directly to friendship (Desai & Killick 2010; Bell & Coleman 1999). Both offer a debate about the relative conceptualization of friendship and kinship and criticize the previously established tendency to subsume the discussion of friendship within the study of kinship. At the same time, both publications show that despite the researchers' desire to analytically divide kinship and friendship it is not always easy or even possible to sustain a clear distinction between the two. Many ethnographic accounts lead to the conclusion that kinship and friendship should be understood as partially overlapping, rather than mutually exclusive terms.

Although this article considers precisely such a complex and ambiguous case of friendship, it does not seek to determine to what extent this case can be attributed to the first or second category. Instead, I will rather follow the approach formulated by Evan Killick and Amit Desai, who demonstrate "the close interweaving, and at times inseparability, of the two concepts" (Desai & Killick 2010: 2). Dealing with the category of friendship, they propose to "study the spaces, histories and ideologies that allow and shape its constitution as a particular type of relationship (in the context of other types of relationships)..." (Desai & Killick 2010: 1).

In this paper, I will look into the relations of *dzmak'atsoba* (from the Georgian words *dzma* ('brother') + *k'atsi* ('a man')) that are an integral part of the Georgian urban street culture. My objective is not to classify *dzmak'atsoba* in terms of friendship or kinship, but to show by what means and ideologies this relation is shaped in culture as a separate and distinct phenomenon that differs from other types of relations. I will show that *dzmak'atsoba* is an institutionalized and formalized form of friendship, where the relationship between friends is subject to certain explicit rules. My argument is that *dzmak'atsoba* is largely based on reputation exchanges and modeling of kinship, which determine the main features of this form of friendship.

For the late Soviet and early post-Soviet periods, the 'street' has been one of the most important social institutions that organized youth in Georgia. The street as a specific space for discourses and practices was characteristic of Tbilisi and many other urban areas of the republic. The distinctive feature of the Georgian street culture was the vital socializing role assigned to it by the society. In contrast to the largest body of street culture research that was conducted in the US cities, the Georgian street culture was neither marginalized, nor stigmatized, nor pushed to the city outskirts (Anderson 1999; Jankowski 1991; Venkatesh & Levitt 2000; Koehler 1999; Zakharova 2015). This culture was largely defined by the street code, which formed under the strong influence of Soviet and post-Soviet prison norms.

The main locale for the Georgian street culture is *birzha*, the male peer groups that form on local basis¹. *Birzhas* belong to the range of phenomena which social researches commonly classify as street-corner societies (Whyte 1943). In urban Georgia, *birzhas* are one of the key institutions for neighborhood communities, as well as for Tbilisi street culture.

A special form of friendship, *dzmak'atsoba*, is not specific to *birzha*, but the most expressive forms of *dzmak'atsoba* can be most easily observed here. Although the word 'dzmak'atsoba' can be applied to the relationships outside of the street settings, I will address *dzmak'atsoba* as it is perceived and practiced within the street culture. Seen from this point of view, *dzmak'atsoba* is vastly different from the *megobroba* form of friendship that is not related to the street and is based on free choice and voluntarism.

This article is based on the field data (interviews and observations) that I collected in Tbilisi between 2007 and 2012. Most of my interlocutors were young people aged 19–30, many of whom were students. In the interviews, most of them talked about their teenage or student years, when participation in the street life was relevant for them. Accordingly, their narratives about *dzmak'atsoba* belong to these periods

¹ This meaning of the Georgian slang word *birzha* is probably associated with one of its usages in the Russian language. Historically, in Russia, informal hiring markets, for example, for cabbies, could be called 'birzhas' (Dal' 1955).

of their lives (when they were 12–23 years old). In addition, I used materials from Georgian-language internet forums.

In private Georgian conversations, and even more often on the internet, one can find frequent attempts to give one's own 'sociological' understanding to important and sensitive social phenomena which people observe and perceive in their everyday life. In non-sociologist conversations, such popular conceptualizations as 'the *tamada* institution', 'the institution of virginity', and 'the institution of the street' are quite common. 'The institution of *dzmak'atsoba*' also stands in this line. From those who share the Georgian culture you can often hear that *dzmak'atsoba*, with its special high values and obligations of friends to each other, is unparalleled in other cultures.

The relations between *dzmak'atsebi* (*dzmak'atsebi* is a plural form of *dzmak'atsi*, a friend or pal) have their own specific features and normative prescriptions, absent within *megobroba*. The temporal boundaries of *dzmak'atsoba* are formally marked. This is clearly seen in the following excerpt from an interview:

This k'utok'i (slang word meaning 'crew', 'gang' – E. Z.) were cool guys, and I was drawn to them. I gradually started dzmak'atsoba with them, first with one, then with the other—not with all at once. I have not yet said to everyone "we are dzmak'atsebi". Although with some it was said (Tbilisi 2011).

Until the establishment of *dzmak'atsoba* is mutually confirmed, the participants cannot name each other *dzmak'atsebi*. The moments when a person gains / loses this right must be clearly marked.

Dzmak'atsoba relationships are largely governed by the street code, a street frame of reference that defines the just and unjust in this setting. It is constituted by a set of instructions and norms, denoted by the emic term *kuchuri gageba*, or street notions. The street code as a component of the street culture has penetrated all the strata of the society. On the Georgian street, filiation of street notions with the thieves' code is regarded as one of the grounds that determine its validity. At the same time, in Georgia the street code is strongly associated with the national ideas of manliness. Everything in conflict with the 'street notions' is prosecuted by severe sanctions.

The success on the street, and the reputation and social ties gained here are relevant in the future 'adult' life. This success is determined by the size of the social network in which the person enjoys positive reputation. Those with high street status achieve the best results in the construction of their social network.

Here is one more fragment from an interview, where my interlocutor recollects his teenage years:

About one of my dzmak'atsebi I was told all the time [by other dzmak'atsebi – E. Z.] that I have to break up with him, because he looked somehow wrong, behaved in a wrong way. Once this dzmak'atsi had a fight, after which he remained in minus, that is he was beaten. If he won, it was called 'to remain in plus'. After the fight, he immediately made peace with those who beat him, you know the one who remains in plus no longer wants problems, he easily reconciles. Even before this incident, my dzmak'atsebi kept bugging me that I should break up with him. However, there was another incident when this dzmak'atsi of mine acted very courageously [vazhk'atsurad].

Once, in some confrontation, this dzmak'atsi was asked: 'Who are your dzmak'atsebi?' He named me. He was told that it was not true. After this incident, those my dzmak'atsebi came to me and said that since it happened, since he did not respond to the insult, break up with him (Tbilisi 2011).

To understand the logic followed by the narrator's *dzmak'atsebi*, we need to consider the street social hierarchy. While the social status of the families where young people come from is of little importance in this setting, the hierarchy that forms on the street is a rigid and powerful structure (Koehler 1999: 42). It consists of the triad of street statuses with their own designations, present not only in street jargon, but also understandable to everyone who shares the Georgian culture. Georgian street system of social coordinates is built on three major positions: (1) *dzveli (k'ai) bich'i* ('old or good guy'); (2) *p'at'iosani* or *vazhk'atsi bich'i* ('decent' or 'courageous' guy) and (3) *chmori* or mama's boy (actually the obscene term for the male genital organ is more common).

The two most important positions that play the role of opposite poles in the street social hierarchy are *k'ai bich'i* and *chmori*. These two statuses are largely determined by the degree of adherence to the

street code, with *k'ai bich'i* being considered infallible in terms of its norms, and *chmori* being the one who least meets its standards.

In the quoted passage, the narrator's friend, without giving back, makes peace with his offender and thus violates the street code. As a result, his status is downgraded to *chmori*, and according to *dzamak'atsoba* norms, you cannot be friends with someone who transgresses the code and has a low position in the street hierarchy. *K'ai bich'i* must not have low status friends. If his friend performs a serious violation of the code, *dzamak'atsoba* should end.

Justice is the highest value in the street culture. Justice and the code which asserts it are placed above the imperative to support one's relatives or friends. However, this is true at the level of discourse only. As young people gain experience, they see how others circumvent the requirements of the code in cases when it is against their personal interest to follow strict rules. In reality, the code is used strategically. It is more a means of interpretation than a prescription.

Igor' Kon, in his study of friendship, correlates the ideals of friendship with two types of society, which Yuri Lotman identified according to the prevailing way of assimilating culture (Kon 2005; Lotman 1971). "In some societies, cultural education occurs predominantly via an individual example, and in others by mastering a system of more or less general rules" (Lotman 1971). The first type of learning, as a more personal one, dictates the primacy of devotion to the teacher over loyalty to his teaching. According to Kon, in such cultures the normative ideal of friendship also differs: "In the first case, unconditional personal devotion to a friend is affirmed ("What kind of friend is he to me if he judges me?!"), and in the second, the formula works: "Plato is my friend, but truth is a better friend". Therefore, what is deemed right in one culture will be wrong in another" (Kon 2005).

If we try to apply the proposed typology to the norms of friendly relations on the Georgian street, then formally, according to the prescriptions of the street code, it appears to be among the social systems where truth is preferred. De facto, in real relationships, Plato is still a better friend than truth as the code is used strategically to benefit one's associates.

On *birzhas*, the well-known saying "a man is known by the company he keeps" would have a literal meaning. However, it would refer not to the similarity of lifestyles, attitudes or values among the friends. It is reputations of friends that are being shared, and the idea is not just that they are common, it is implied that *dzmak'atsebi* have *the same* reputation.

One friend's miss automatically becomes another's reputation damage. Likewise, one friend's positive reputation spreads to the other. This can be called the 'rule of shared reputation': my reputation is the same as the reputation of my friend and vice versa. My reputation is equivalent to the reputation of the entire circle of my friends, and vice versa. This expands even wider—my reputation and the reputation of my neighborhood are equivalent.

Dzmak'atsi can represent his friend in any street situations, act on his behalf or 'replace' him in fights and showdowns. The interchangeability of *dzmak'atsebi* in matters of reputation is so pronounced that formally *dzmak'atsi* do not act *on behalf* of each other, they are completely interchangeable in street affairs, performing almost as doubles.

The principle of shared reputation was at the heart of the widespread practice of the street vendettas in the lawless 1990s. In case of a conflict, revenge could be directed not at the offender himself, but at his friend.

The principle of shared reputation is also realized within the practice associated with gambling. The amount of money paid in case of loss in any of the gambling games, be it cards or slot machines, is called *tavani*. Gambling debt has a special status. If the money is not transferred in the appointed time, the loser becomes *fuflo*. The word is used to denote those whose status has been downgraded because of non-payment of a gaming debt in time. The status of a *fuflo* on the street is extremely low. Anyone who has been declared a *fuflo* ceases to be *k'ai bich'i*, being *fuflo* is a big shame. If the loser cannot pay *tavani* on his own, his *dzmak'atsebi* and even a wider circle of people collect the necessary amount for him. It is customary to ask for money for the payment of *tavani* even from almost unknown people.

If a rumor spreads that a *fuflo* has appeared in the circle of *dzmak'atsebi*, a shadow will fall on the reputation of both the block and this group of *dzmak'atsebi*, as well as on that of each individual separately. *Dzmak'atsoba* cannot be a personal affair of the two individuals involved in it, since their reputation also affects the interests and reputation of the groups to which these individuals belong.

Protecting one's reputation is the duty of *dzmak'atsebi* not only in relation to themselves, it is also a mutual duty. Thus, *dzmak'atsebi* become a kind of visiting card for each other. In a conflict situation, it may be enough to name the common *dzmak'atsi* for the parties to abandon claims against each other. By acquiring the right to call someone his *dzmak'atsi*, a person gets the opportunity to use his name as a recommendation. The rule of shared reputation makes *dzmak'atsoba* an important tool for building relationships of trust and expanding social connections between *birzhas* and beyond.

The street code prohibits informing and involving those who do not belong to the street space (family members, teachers, the police, etc.) in conflict resolution. At the same time, according to the rules of the code, *dzmak'atsebi* are obliged to assist each other in street conflicts, refusal being a reason for the loss of *k'ai bich'i* status.

It is important to note that the requirement of support applies not only to situations in which *dzmak'atsi*'s interests are personally affected, but also when *dzmak'atsi* asks for support for a third party. This serves as a tool for mobilization of large masses of people. The code-based prohibition of involving those exterior to the street space in street affairs makes the support that *dzmak'atsoba* provides vital in this setting.

On the Georgian street, a person's influence and power is largely determined by what kind of people and groups stand behind him. Largely thanks to *dzmak'atsoba*, by a certain age a young man, if he is successful on the street, builds a network of 'reliable' people. This social network extends beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood and covers the city area.

The principle of shared reputation, coupled with the requirement of mandatory help to *dzmak'atsi*, has the potential to transform circles of friends into strong and well-organized communities. When necessary, these communities can act in concert and thus be very effective. For example, during the turbulent time of the Civil War in Georgia in 1991–1993, some of the circles of friends evolved into *sadzmoebi* or fraternities, highly cohesive gangs that engaged in economic activities, provided and imposed protection services.

In addition to the guarantees of mandatory support provided by *dzmak'atsoba*, there is a downside as well. For a young person, the peer collective of *dzmak'atsebi* (*sadzmak'atso*) becomes not only a 'back', but also an agent that sets a rigid framework for his life. This is well shown in the Georgian feature film *A Walk to Karabakh*². The film tells about the unsettled life of a young man in Georgia in the 1990s. There is a storyline that deals with the character's love for a girl of loose morals. In addition to the young man's family, it is his circle of *dzmak'atsebi* who makes the most active efforts to prevent the lovers from being together.

The principle of the shared reputation of *dzmak'atsebi* that operates on the streets and *birzhas* of Tbilisi fits well into the concept of the 'equality of honor', which Pierre Bourdieu proposes in his *Practical reason* (Bourdieu 2001). He considers the relationship of honor among other acts of exchange. According to Bourdieu, to comprehend all the observed acts of honor, it is enough to trace the operation of one fundamental principle, i.e. that of equality of honor. In contrast to unilateral violence or aggression, the exchange of honor, like any other act of exchange (of gifts or words), becomes possible because it implies the recognition of a partner.

Dzmak'atsoba is a relationship of reputation exchange, which means that it can only be built and maintained between equals, that is why *dzmak'atsoba* with the one whose status has been downgraded is impossible.

² *A Walk to Karabakh* (*gaseirneba qarabaghshi*), 2005, is directed by Levan Tutberidze and based on the 1992 novel *Journey to Karabakh* by Aka Morchiladze.

Let us go back to the story of the previously mentioned narrator. He did end *dzmak'atsoba* with his friend after his *dzmak'atsebi* had insisted on him doing it. Here is how he talks about it:

*Now I am very ashamed when I remember this moment, this is one of the most painful moments; it is hard for me to remember it. I was playing for time, I could not dare to tell him that we were no longer dzmak'atsebi. However, he had learned it earlier from someone. He asked me if this was true. I answered yes. He asked why, I explained that because of that situation [of not responding to an insult – E. Z.]. I said that it **would not affect our relationship, we will socialize as before.***

E. Z.: - *And what, your relationship has not changed after that?*

- *Maybe after that we did not see each other so often. That is, I gave preference to the gang of friends with which I then wanted to be. Then I was 12 years old. Now this dzmak'atsi is one of my best friends (Tbilisi, 2011).*

I have highlighted the statement that the end of *dzmak'atsoba* would not affect the friends' relationship and they would continue to socialize as before. At first glance, the phrase seems paradoxical. It stresses the status bound nature of *dzmak'atsoba*: losing *dzmak'atsoba*, the boys nevertheless retain *some* relationship.

How can we determine the relationship that friends maintain after *dzmak'atsoba* ends? What does the narrator do when he announces to his friend the termination of *dzmak'atsoba*, but assures him of maintaining the same relationship? He informs his friend that in terms of mutual obligations of reputation on the street, they are no longer bound. However, outside the street setting they retain an emotional attachment that lies outside the scope of regulation by *dzmak'atsoba*. The normative attitudes of friendship that the narrator tries to maintain are free from the rule of shared reputation, this friendship is regulated by the sources and agents external to the street life: everyday ethics known by examples from fiction, cinema, and from the family (although family members can also, to varying degrees, support the normative attitudes of *dzmak'atsoba*). This is an informal friendship called *megobroba*, which is opposed to *dzmak'atsoba*, a formalized and status bound friendship. When the street period of *dzmak'atsebi*'s biography ends, the rules of common honor no longer govern their relationship, although they retain increased obligations of mutual assistance. Similar e.g., to college fraternities in the United States, *dzmak'atsoba* is a way of building one's reputation and making lifelong connections (Syrett 2009).

However, the formalized nature of *dzmak'atsoba* does not exclude the idea of the emotional closeness and affection between friends, which has been vividly described by Martin Frederiksen (Frederiksen 2011a). Even more, the discourse and, to some extent, some practices of *dzmak'atsoba* allow to draw some parallels with those of romantic love. The *dzmak'atsoba* relationship is understood primarily as dyadic. Although *dzmak'atsebi* can form *sadzmak'atso*, a circle of friends, the starting point is a bond between the two. The stories told about *dzmak'atsoba* are often full of drama and romance. The intimacy of this relationship is often emphasized; *dzmak'atsebi* should know absolutely everything about each other. For example, this is what my 22-year-old friend says about his *dzmak'atsi*:

If I come to Niko and say that I need to get money somewhere [puli makvs sachalicho], if he stays at home or does not take it to heart, I will also stay at home. Where can I go when we are like one body, one person, my joy is your joy, my hardships are your hardships (Tbilisi 2011).

I agree with Frederiksen that the described ways of expressing feelings do not imply any sexual context (Frederiksen 2011b). The point of such stories is to express the exceptional and highly valuable closeness of the relationships with *dzmak'atsi*. This mode of speaking of one's feelings is immanent to *dzmak'atsoba*.

The nature of *dzmak'atsoba* may also be interpreted through the idea of the prohibition of love / sexual / marital relations with a *dzmak'atsi*'s sister, which is common on the street. In the interest of brevity, in what follows I will call this prohibition the 'dzmak'atsi's sister taboo'.

On one of the popular Georgian-language internet forums, a young man tells in the first person a story of his friend, 'the only son' and 'Georgian *vazhk'atsi*' ('Georgian brave man') who falls in love with his *dzmak'atsi*'s sister (*is mok'les*).

The narrator advises him to confess his feelings to the girl's brother and ask for her hand in marriage. The young man follows the advice, but his *dzmak'atsi*, the girl's brother, declares him a betrayer and shoots a bullet at him. Regardless of whether this story is folklore or true-to-life, it illustrates the real idea of a ban on any sexually charged relationships with a *dzmak'atsi*'s sister. I will make a reservation right away that emic opinions on the validity and legitimacy of this ban vary, as evidenced by the fact that this topic causes heated discussions, for example, in the internet space.

There are two main discourses in the internet-debates on the topic. In general, supporters of the ban appeal to traditionalism, while opponents appeal to modernist discourse. The opponents of this norm associate it with 'backwardness', 'savagery', 'limitedness', or 'Asian attitudes'. The supporters, in turn, accuse their opponents of being overly 'European', associate the 'dzmak'atsi's sister taboo' with Georgian traditional values, and the rejection of it with European 'sexual promiscuity' (*dzmak'atsis dis p'roblema; is mok'les*). Failure to recognize this taboo is perceived as the rejection of the 'institution of *dzmak'atsoba*' as a whole.

Like many other street norms of behavior, the 'dzmak'atsi's sister taboo' may be emically associated with the thieves' rules, but it is more common to explain it by 'universal' moral and ethical norms, 'Georgian masculine code', religious canons and ethnographic tradition.

From the emic point of view not only the origin, but also the logic of prohibition is controversial. One of the common explanations is as follows. The brother, as one of the closest male relatives of his sister, is charged with the responsibility of protecting her female honor, and if the sister is in a relationship with his *dzmak'atsi*, a conflict of loyalties arises. The difficulty of accepting the possibility of sexual relations between a sister and *dzmak'atsi* is also often mentioned as reason for the ban on the relationship with a *dzmak'atsi*'s sister.

Another possible explanation for the logic of 'dzmak'atsi's sister taboo' is associated with the fact that the *dzmak'atsoba* relationship is seen as brotherhood. The very root 'dzma' (brother) in the word 'dzmak'atsi' is used as an argument in favor of considering *dzmak'atsoba* as a brotherly relationship: "It is not without reason that the word 'brother' appears in 'dzmak'atsi', it is sacred" (*dzmak'atsis dis p'roblema*). *Dzmak'atsoba* is associated with the sworn brotherhood known from the Georgian historical ethnography. In the past, this form of relationship was especially widespread in the mountainous regions of Georgia; now those who share the modern Georgian culture view it as an 'ancient Georgian unwritten law' (*dzmak'atsis dis p'roblema*).

Ethnographers observed sworn brotherhood as a living practice in Georgia as late as in the 1980s, when Tamara Dragadze described it for the rural Racha (Dragadze 2001). Only those of equal age and social status, not only men, but also women and people of different sexes could engage into sworn brotherhood. Dragadze writes about three categories of kinship that the inhabitants of the Racha Province distinguished: birth kinship, relation by marriage and spiritual kinship. Sworn brotherhood, together with suckling kinship and kinship through baptism, belonged to the category of spiritual kinship (Dragadze 2001: 96).

The opposition of spirituality and sexuality translates into the opposition of spiritual kinship to birth kinship. In case of birth kinship, cousins seven times removed cannot marry each other; the spiritual kinship implies that the number of generations for whom marriage is banned doubles to fourteen.

Considered from the emic point of view as brotherhood or 'brotherhood-like' relationship, *dzmak'atsoba*, by analogy with sworn brotherhood, fits into the category of spiritual kinship. The brotherly nature of *dzmak'atsoba* is believed to automatically rule out any sexuality in the relationship with the sister of *dzmak'atsi*.

Generally, a strong tendency towards exogamy persists in the Georgian culture. A boy and a girl who grew up in the same neighborhood are considered unlikely to enter sexual or marital relationship. Unlike the 'dzmak'atsi's sister taboo', in this case there is no direct prohibition. However, it is considered better and more natural to look for a date somewhere else, that is, further away.

There is evidence that a long history of growing up in close proximity leaves an imprint on the relationships of children. Romance rarely happens between such young people. For example, in Israeli

kibbutzim endogamous marriage is considered incestuous; marriages between children who grew up in Russian communal apartments are extremely rare (Utekhin 2004: 113).

In an exaggerated way, the exogamous feelings of urban youth are reflected in a quote from an internet discussion on the 'dzmak'atsi's sister problem'.

There was one DJ on the radio, Dapna. He had a program "a woman and a man". Once a girl called and she was like "I like my classmate, but falling in love with a classmate is a bummer". Well, this Dapna listened to her and said: "What is it, falling in love with a classmate is a bummer, falling in love with a neighbor is a bummer, falling in love with dzmak'atsi is a bummer, falling in love with a friend's brother... what is going on, people, we decided not to reproduce anymore?" (dzmak'atsis dis p'roblema)

Thus, the exogamous views characteristic of urban Georgia extend not only to those who share ancestry, but can also be applied to representatives of one's social group. It seems that the 'dzmak'atsi's sister taboo' is associated with these views too.

Violation of the taboo is viewed not as biological incest, but as incest understood in a broader sense. Thus, one of the participants in the internet discussion explains the taboo by the fact that *dzmak'atsebi* are the closest people to each other, in other words, they are part of the primary social group:

It is very likely that you see your cousins or just relatives much less often than you see your dzmak'atsi (and this is most often the case), and the dzmak'atsi is the closest person to you!!! Well, what is then your closest person's sister relation to you ...??? For God's sake, please, don't understand incest in the literal sense!!! (is mok'les)

The formal regulation of friendship through invoking incest taboos is not uncommon in the world's cultures. For example, Yehudi Cohen writes of the Kwoma of New Guinea where friendship between men who are not 'true kin' is instituted through blood bonds, while incest taboos apply to the friend's close female relatives (Cohen 1961: 356 as cited in Bell & Coleman 1999).

What makes the *dzmak'atsoba* relationship a brotherly one? In other words, by what means is kinship constructed? Unlike the sworn brotherhood relations described by Dragadze, engaging in them requiring a blood mixing ritual, the beginning of *dzmak'atsoba* does not imply any ritual (other than the verbal confirmation described above). Although blood mixing ritual cases are sometimes reported, they are described as an arbitrary romantic gesture, but not as a mandatory procedure.

Janet Carsten in *After Kinship*, where she tries to get rid of the opposition of 'biological' and 'social' kinship, shows that sharing the same home space and joint family meals are the factors through which kinship is not given, but created, constructed. According to Carsten, sharing the same house and food is such an intense experience that the two processes gradually create a relationship even between those who are not linked by biological ties (Carsten 2004).

Many narratives of *dzmak'atsoba* mention the aspects of sharing house and food. For example, one of the interlocutors drew attention to the fact that he can come to a friend's house in his absence, take his clothes or ask his parents for them. Consider the following quote from the internet discussion, in which both of the aspects are stressed:

A person enters your house as your brother. He is treated as a family member, from whom nothing is hidden and in front of whom nothing is embellished. Your dzmak'atsi can live with you [...] it's shitty, when you enter your brother's house, you eat together, live together; your relationship is as open as possible and at the same time you are sexually attracted to a member of his family (is mok'les).

My interlocutors emphasized that the family of *dzmak'atsi* should accept a friend as a close person. It is implied that *dzmak'atsi*, in his turn, also has strong obligations towards the friend's family. Please consider the following abstract from an interview:

Well, let's say he died, right? His parents are your parents, his wife and children are like your daughter-in-law and your own sister, and you must take care of his children too... I told you, when my child died [the narrator was in prison at that moment – E. Z.], he was buried by my dzmak'atsebi. When I came back, the first thing my mother said was "God bless [venatsvale] your dzmak'atsebi. I didn't feel like you weren't here" (Tbilisi 2007).

These attitudes extend the metaphor of kinship to *dzmak'atsebi*'s family members. The street discourse describes the relationship with the *dzmak'atsi*'s family as 'pure' and the family itself as a 'holy temple' (*dzmak'atsis dis p'roblema*). It seems that on the street, just as in the relationships of spiritual kinship described by Dragadze, there is a tendency to exclude any sexual component from relationships with *dzmak'atsi*'s family members.

In the Georgian culture, it is the relationship of kinship that involves the strongest commitments and the most unshakable ties. Through the construction of kinship, *dzmak'atsoba* relationship reflects the urge to ensure those obligations and the trust that in this culture can be guaranteed primarily (if not exclusively) by kinship.

* * *

I have suggested and argued above that *dzmak'atsoba* is a formalized and status bound form of friendship. Summing up, we can conclude that *dzmak'atsoba* is shaped along two main lines, i.e. the rule of shared reputation and the modeling of kinship, with the corresponding practices.

Dzmak'atsoba does not belong to the sphere of private life exclusively; it is subject to the control by the street communities, which *dzmak'atsebi* are part of. The control over *dzmak'atsoba* relationship is encouraged by the rule of shared reputation, which implies the interdependence of the reputations of *dzmak'atsebi* and wider community members from each other. *Dzmak'atsoba* is based on reputation exchanges, which means that only those having equal status on the street can engage in it.

Dzmak'atsoba, thanks to its rigidly prescribed obligations, provides social support, which is of vital importance on the street, given that the code prohibits any interference in the street affairs by the external agents such as family, school or the police. *Dzmak'atsoba* can be regarded as an adaptation strategy that enables young men to face the challenges of the street life. Along with providing guaranteed support, *dzmak'atsoba* requires adherence to certain standards of behavior. Usually these are traditionalist standards, but we can see that in reality they can be used instrumentally and interpreted freely.

Dzmak'atsoba is one of the tools used to create other types of social connections in the city. It is a way to expand networks of trust on *birzhas*, on the street and beyond by means of constructing kinship and using the guarantees provided by the principle of shared reputation. As Mars and Altman wrote, "trust is the basis of honour. A man who is not trusted has no honour: a man without honour cannot be trusted" (Mars, Altman 1983: 549).

Dzmak'atsoba is an institutionalized way of creating strong bonds between people, as alternative to birth or marital kinship. This form of friendship, on the one hand, is nurtured by the street culture, and on the other, parallels can be drawn with the Caucasian institute of sworn brotherhood. *Dzmak'atsoba* adopts the rhetoric of kinship, but kinship construction is not limited to the discourse of brotherhood. Kinship is also created through such practices as inclusion of relatives of *dzmak'atsebi* in the orbit of this construct, imposing appropriate rights and obligations on its participants, and exclusion of any sexuality in relations with members of *dzmak'atsi*'s family. The 'dzmak'atsi's sister taboo', as realized through the idea of an incestuous prohibition, is the most powerful way to bring *dzmak'atsoba* as close as possible to the logic of biological kinship. The furnishing of friendship ideology with the concepts of kinship is characteristic of societies where ideologies of kinship dominate social relations (Desai, Killick 2010: 7). With *dzmak'atsoba*, we see how the power of kinship can be used to provide a model for the new form of social relationship.

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КТО ТВОИ ДЗМАКАЦЕБИ? ФОРМАЛИЗОВАННАЯ ДРУЖБА НА УЛИЦАХ ТБИЛИСИ

АННОТАЦИЯ. Рассматриваются демонстрирующие сходство одновременно с дружбой и родством отношения *dzmak'atsoba*, которые были неотъемлемой частью грузинской уличной культуры в позднесоветский и ранний постсоветский периоды. Следуя подходу, сформулированному Эваном Киликом и Амитом Дисаем, которые указывают на тесное переплетение, а подчас и неразделимость концептов дружбы и родства, этот текст не ставит своей целью классифицировать отношения *dzmak'atsoba*, определяя их принадлежность к первой или второй категории. Цель статьи показать, каким средствами и при помощи каких идеологий эти отношения очерчиваются в культуре как особое явление, отличное от других форм отношений. Опираясь на качественные данные и метод, я показываю, что *dzmak'atsoba* носило институализированный и формализованный характер, отношения между друзьями подчинялись определенным эксплицитным правилам. Я прихожу к выводу, что *dzmak'atsoba* в значительной мере основывается на репутационных обменах и моделировании родства, что определяет основные черты этих отношений.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: формализованная дружба, родство, репутация, соседское сообщество, улица, табу, инцест, побратимство, братства

ЗАХАРОВА ЕВГЕНИЯ ЮРЬЕВНА — к.и.н., м.н.с. отдела этнографии Кавказа, Музей антропологии и этнографии им. Петра Великого (Кунсткамера) РАН (Россия, Санкт-Петербург)
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