A considerable degree of ‘in-between-ness’ exists among the Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli regarding collective affiliations and positionalities. This state of liminality is both a byproduct of and contributor to symbolic and material bordering processes at multiple scales. This dissertation examines how officially sanctioned forms of national identity are propagated by state actors and how these identities are encountered, contested, and negotiated by individuals at the grassroots level.
THE DYNAMICS OF IDENTITY NEGOTIATION IN A BORDER REGION:
THE CASE OF THE GEORGIAN AZERI-TURKS OF KVEMO KARTLI
Karli-Jo Storm

THE DYNAMICS OF IDENTITY NEGOTIATION IN A BORDER REGION:
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ABSTRACT

A study of identity is a study of felt similarity and difference, affinity and dissimilarity that takes into consideration individual agency as well as social, inter-personal relations. A study of collective identity, then, is a study that merges psychological and sociological theories of self- and other- relations and makes use of multi-disciplinary methodologies of data collection and analysis. This study examines the ways that members of a socio-cultural minority grouping, the Georgian Azeri-Turks, negotiate their own collective identity/ies in light of and in response to official nation-building initiatives by Georgian and Azerbaijani state authorities. To begin such a study, one form of collective identity, that of national identity, is examined at the level of the state with the aim of identifying the predominant symbolic markers and identity narratives propagated by Georgian and Azerbaijani officials. Examination of officially propagated identity narratives provides the background and context for further studies of the ways that individuals encounter, perceive, and respond to these narratives in their own daily lives. The Georgian Azeri-Turks, predominantly settled in the region of Kvemo Kartli, which borders Armenia as well as Azerbaijan, have been exposed to nation-building initiatives since the early Soviet period. The speed, intensity, breadth and depth of these initiatives has only intensified in the post-Soviet period with regard to the sheer number of projects, policies, and political rhetoric targeting members of this population. Both states ‘claim’ Georgian Azeri-Turks in one way or another, yet neither one fully accepts the responsibility inherent in these claims. Georgian officials relate to Georgian Azeri-Turks as though they are ‘seconds among equals’ in the Georgian homeland—welcome, or at least tolerated, yet not ‘native’ to Georgian territories and, therefore, not privy to the same status afforded to Georgian-speaking, Georgian-born Orthodox Christians. For Azerbaijani officials, Georgian Azeri-Turks are a charitable cause as well as a political tool. By supporting Georgian Azeri-Turks through infrastructural and charitable contributions, Azerbaijani state elites are able to highlight the beneficial nature of the state while building up an additional support base for its interests. Yet how do Georgian Azeri-Turks interpret and negotiate their own identity/ies in light of the national identity narratives originating from officials within and across state borders? Ethnographic data from fieldwork visits, involving data from original questionnaires, photographs, and fieldjournals are combined with data from interviews with state officials, community leaders, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and social activists with the aim of shedding further light upon this question. Analyses of social and news media channels, too, inform this study by uncovering issues of collective concern within Georgian Azeri-Turk-populated locales and providing valuable indications of locals’ opinions of and responses to said issues.

Identity negotiation is an ongoing, ever incomplete process. Individual and collective circumstances change, individuals learn and grow, and the stakes for cooperation and/or discord shift in accordance with changing geopolitical, economic, and socio-cultural trends. It is for this reason that any suggestion of identity as a complete, unitary, and static phenomenon ought to be viewed with suspicion. Taken together, the articles of this dissertation demonstrate that a basis for collective identification exists among the Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli. This basis for identification is complicated by conflicting pulls of attraction as well as systemic repulsions, facilitated by the policies and projects of both the Georgian and Azerbaijani states. This study demonstrates that a considerable degree of ‘in-between-ness’ exists among Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli regarding their collective affiliations and positionalities. This state of in-between-ness is both a byproduct of and contributor to abstract, mental and material, physical bordering processes at the local, regional, and state-wide levels. The multi-scalar bordering processes involved touch individuals’ lives in various ways, some more unexpected than others. This dissertation examines the ways that officially sanctioned forms of national identity are propagated by state-affiliated actors as well as how these identities are encountered, contested, and negotiated by minority representatives at the grassroots level.

Keywords: collective identity; national identity; nation-building; Georgia; Azerbaijan; Georgian Azeri-Turks; border region; borderlands
TIIVISTELMÄ

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Those who know me well know that I am a perfectionist as well as an individual who wears her heart on her sleeve. My supervisors would likely add that I have the propensity to be verbose, too. As a sensitive and verbose perfectionist, then, I suppose that you, dear readers, will be on the receiving end of each of these attributes during whatever amount of time you choose to spend reading these acknowledgements and this dissertation. It is my understanding that one is entitled to exercise a certain amount of sentimentality in the writing of his or her acknowledgments, and, true to form, I fully intend to exercise this right. I find I cannot avoid being sentimental when attempting to find the right words to convey my gratitude to those nearest and dearest to me for the many, many ways they have helped me to get to this point in my life.

I grew up in a miniscule southwest Iowan town by the name of “Logan”. It often seemed as though my relatives made up the majority of the town’s population. My parents, Monty and Laurie Storm, were always my strongest supporters, even when my plans threatened to take me far from the home of my childhood and adolescence. These plans did indeed take me to faraway places, where I met countless amazing people and experienced countless new experiences. Among other places, these plans took me to Russia, then to Azerbaijan, and to Finland. These places have given me new friendships, skills, and knowledge—knowledge about the world, its peoples and cultures, and knowledge about myself. Yet all of this started with two people, Monty and Laurie Storm, who never stopped believing in their daughter or her dreams. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for being better parents than I could ever have deserved and for demonstrating to me what it means to be a good person. Your unfailing support has long given me the confidence to make and execute my plans, however elaborate or lofty. Your support helped me get to where I am today—on the brink of defending my doctoral dissertation and becoming “Dr. Storm”. To my siblings, Terra Uhing, Tonya Fustos, and Jarron Storm: you and your amazing families have been there for me the entire time, always with words of encouragement and a stubborn pride and belief in my abilities, even when I doubted them myself. My travels might have taken me far away from you all, but you’re never far from my thoughts.

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When I started the journey toward my doctoral degree in 2013, I no doubt appeared to be as clueless as I felt. My supervisors, Paul Fryer and Jeremy Smith, have helped me navigate this journey every single step of the way, and, in so doing, have ultimately helped shape me into the academic that I am today. Thank you both for your patience, understanding, guidance, and friendship. Despite the “exuberance of my verbosity”, as my high school math teacher, Mr. Doug Snyder, would call it, you both have helped me learn to be an individual who can and will adhere to word and page limits. Okay, perhaps this learning process is still ongoing, but it has progressed in leaps and bounds since 2013. Your comments, critiques, encouragement, and comradery have helped me get to this point, and I will never forget it.

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And to you, dear reader, I say this:

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I hope that you enjoy the fruits of this six-year labor!

Joensuu (Finland), 10 September 2019
Karli-Jo T. Storm
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PREFACE

ENCOUNTERING COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES ON THE TBILISI-MARNEULI MARSHRUTKA

Approximately 45 kilometers southwest from Georgia’s historic capital city, Tbilisi, is a rather small municipality by the name of Marneuli with a population of 20,211 individuals as per the 2014 census. The journey to Marneuli from Tbilisi is not necessarily for the faint of heart, but then again, neither is any journey embarked upon within the confines of a rusty marshrutka fitted with extra seats and yet devoid of any seatbelts. The roads from the capital to this city in the Georgian region of Kvemo Kartli have improved considerably over the last two decades, particularly as a result of the infrastructural projects initiated by then-President Mikheil Saakashvili during his time in office (2004-2013), but deference to and enforcement of traffic laws remain elusive. The sights, smells, sounds, and even physical sensations to which one is privy on his/her Tbilisi-Marneuli marshrutka journey alone make for fascinating ethnographic research, beginning from the moment one identifies said marshrutka at one of its various stopping points in the city.

The eye somehow drifts naturally to the ‘Tbilisi-Marneuli’ sign in the window, as it is distinguishable from many other such signs by virtue of the languages chosen to display the route in question—in the Russian and English languages rather than in Georgian. The driver, most likely a man, converses with the passengers in Georgian or Russian as they buy their tickets. Swinging from the rearview mirror, or perhaps sitting on the dashboard alongside a makeshift list of prices to the destinations offered, images of Georgian saints and/or miniature crosses remind the passenger of the strong influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church in this country and connote the driver’s affiliation, however specious, to the Church. Over the sound of the motor, the radio, the honking of horns, and occasional gasps of passengers in response to the brazen and perilous maneuvers of the driver, one is likely to catch snippets of whispered conversations in various languages, perhaps primarily in Azerbaijani, but also in Georgian and Russian. As the driver speeds past numerous churches, he and the other Georgian-speaking passengers might make the sign of the cross and seal it with a touch of the lips to their joined thumbs and index fingers. Other passengers, however, will remain outwardly indifferent to the sight displayed both inside and outside the vehicle.

Official signage from Tbilisi to Marneuli along Highway 6 is a mixture of Georgian and English, and businesses’ makeshift signs vary from Georgian to Russian, or, the closer one gets to Marneuli, to the Azerbaijani and Turkish languages. Azerbaijani, Turkish, and Russian language signage becomes more prevalent as the marshrutka passes by the Mother Marneuli monument at the municipality’s entrance. The monument features a highly gendered articulation of the Georgian nation, a mother, standing at the backs of her two young sons. Her palms are extended, her face uplifted and solemn, as in prayer, seemingly offering up her own life as well as those of her sons in service to the nation. The little boys themselves are working together to hold a sword that surpasses them both in size, forearms cradling the blade. It is a somber, yet awe-inspiring sight. Perhaps, if passing by this monument in the spring or summer, then one would be fortunate enough to witness a wedding party posing for photos in its proximity. Some 500 feet away from the monument in question is yet another monument, this one featuring words rather than a three-dimensional scene. Its colors are red and white, the same as the colors of the Georgian flags that are depicted floating above the lettering. The Georgian-language sign reads: “Georgia above all”. To the left of this monument is a somewhat rusted metal cross, illuminated in the evenings by a singular footlight.

If the symbolic and social interplays between various languages and interactions between speakers of these languages has not yet hinted to the unknowing passenger that Marneuli is somehow different from other similarly sized municipalities in the country, then travelling further into the municipality itself will surely produce this effect. The passenger will soon discover that Marneuli is not the typical Georgian city. It is as one 31-year-old female from this region of Georgia, Kvemo Kartli, puts it: “If a foreigner comes to Kvemo Kartli (Borchali), you might think by your surroundings that you are not in Georgia, but that you have stumbled into some region of Azerbaijan” (Participant N. 10, Spring 2016).

"WHY GO THERE? THE AZERBAIJANIS/AZERIS LIVE THERE": FRAMING AND CONTEXTUALIZING MY OWN RESEARCH INTERESTS

Over the years, I have become accustomed to the occasional disgruntled response elicited from Tbilisi-based hotel employees inquiring of my plans to travel outside of the capital city (“Why would you go there [i.e. a location in Kvemo Kartli]? The Azerbajianis live there. Wouldn’t you rather go see X, Y, Z, etc.
[insert any of the country’s countless other tourist destinations]”), typically accompanied by kind offers to arrange what is deemed to be a more comfortable, enjoyable itinerary for a foreigner such as myself. Yet I remain unfazed in the face of such interactions, for how could these well-meaning individuals possibly know that the very juxtaposition implied in their queries is itself at the heart of my interest in the Kvemo Kartli region and its diverse population?

Having spent time living, teaching, and volunteering in Baku, Azerbaijan as a Fulbright grantee from 2009-2010, I view any chance to meet individuals in the region evincing diverse patterns of language use, religious affiliation, norms, values, and traditions as cause for intellectual curiosity rather than disinterest. Having heard from friends and colleagues in Azerbaijan about the large ‘Azerbaijani minority’ population living across the border in Georgia and the various obstacles impeding members of this group’s inclusion into wider Georgian socio-economic and political structures, I became interested in acquiring more knowledge of the situation for myself. Questions the likes of “Would members of this group, typically referred to as ‘Azerbaijanis’, have terribly much in common with the Azerbaijans of Azerbaijan in terms of their collective socio-cultural and normative attributes?” and “What would their relationship to the Georgian state and titular Georgians be like?” began to take shape within my mind as early as 2009. What began as a 2013 Master’s thesis at Indiana University focusing on this group’s language-related obstacles to integration soon became a doctoral research project on a similar theme, albeit this time at the University of Eastern Finland. I quickly realized, however, that language was but part in parcel of a larger, more complicated issue with questions of collective identity at its core.
1. INTRODUCTION

Georgia is a country of contrasts and contradictions, where one can find ultra-modern constructions of steel and glass in the very same vicinity as centuries-old remnants of religious structures and military fortifications. It is a territorial state caught between conservative narratives of nationhood emphasizing Georgians' common linguistic, religious, and felt ties of shared ancestry (e.g. perceived ethnicity) and those linking Georgia’s past, present, and future to the modernizing forces of the West. The territorial state is framed as a historical, bounded container of cultural, economic, and political dimensions, all of which are perceived as having come into being by and for representatives of a uniquely Georgian 'nation'. Yet it is precisely the question of both who and what constitutes said nation that forms the background and basis of this doctoral dissertation. It is as Georgian anthropologist, Nutsa Batiashvili, asks in the very first pages of her book, *The Bivocal Nation*:

what is nation-ness like in a place that is construed as standing and prevailing in an ambiguous state of liminality between diverse forms of marginalities, both spatial—being between 'east' and 'west'—and temporal, being in the state of becoming and unbecoming—European, Soviet, postcolonial, developing, modernizing, and so forth? (2018, p. xi)

The theme of this dissertation goes beyond state-centric understandings of nationhood and national identity in Georgia, however. This is a multi-scalar study of how collective identities are encountered, perceived, and negotiated, specifically with regard to individuals existing within “an ambiguous state of liminality” between official conceptions of both Georgian and Azerbaijani national identity—the Georgian Azeri-Turks of the Kvemo Kartli border region.

Georgia is the most demographically diverse of the South Caucasian countries, with nearly 13 percent of its population of approximately 3.7 million comprised of representatives of what state officials, civil society representatives, and laypeople alike refer to as ‘ethnic’ and/or ‘national minority’ groups (cf. GEOSTAT, 2016). The largest of these so-called ‘ethnic’/‘national minority’ groups is made up of a group of individuals commonly referred to as ‘Azerbaijani’, ‘Azeri’, or, in this work, as ‘Georgian Azeri-Turks’, who comprise 6.3 percent of Georgia’s overall population. Members of this collective are typically distinguished from titular Georgians by virtue of their mother tongue, religious affiliation, and store of particular socio-cultural norms and traditions. Furthermore, representatives of this grouping are known to have maintained a historical presence in the southern and eastern territories of present-day Georgia, more specifically within Georgia’s border region of Kvemo Kartli, where they comprise approximately 42 percent of the regional population. Yet, despite this historical presence and centuries-long legacy of relatively peaceful co-existence with Georgians, a situation persists wherein the majority of this minority group’s representatives in Kvemo Kartli have limited and largely superficial interaction with representatives of the titular Georgian nation. The reasons for this limited interaction are multifarious and worthy of further examination within the pages of this dissertation, as they have in turn limited the success of integration initiatives targeting members of Georgia’s Azeri-Turk population.

One need look no further than the labels applied to the collectives in question to gain some inkling as to the far-reaching and systemic processes operating behind the scenes to construct such labels. For example, the ‘Georgian’ label connotes membership in a geographically, politically, and socio-culturally bounded collectivity for whom the territorial state is the rightful, autochthonous homeland. Similar connotations emerge with regard to the labels of ‘Azerbaijani’/‘Azeri’—inherent within certain labels are perceptions of indigeneity and belonging within and to particular territories by virtue of membership in a given ‘nation’ (e.g. ‘Georgians’ in Georgia, ‘Azerbaijanis’/‘Azeris’ in Azerbaijan, etc.). This work is dedicated to the very phenomena underlying the categorizations of individuals into such seemingly clearly demarcated groups—the psychological and sociological, territorial and political bases of collective identities and positionalities. More than this, though, this is a study of how representatives of a peripheral, under-privileged collective formulate and frame their own positionalities in relation to available, contextually embedded categories of belonging.

The focus of this doctoral dissertation is the ways that members of Georgia’s largest ethnic minority group, the Georgian Azeri-Turks, construct their own collective identity/ies in light of the identity discourses and narratives emanating from elites in Tbilisi and Baku. The articles contained herein examine the ways

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1 See pages 15-17, this work, for more information regarding Georgian Azeri-Turks' historical presence on the lands of contemporary Kvemo Kartli.
than as 'azerbaycanli' (being 'of Georgia') rather than as 'gurcustanli' (being 'of Azerbaijan') could and often do refer to themselves as 'gurcu'. Then, could be anyone who is from the territorial state of Georgia. Georgian Azeri-Turks express a territorial identity that does not necessarily connote ethno-nationality at all. An individual described as 'kartvelebi', as does the term 'gurcu', The Georgian-language terms connote the existence of a particular collective, that of the 'Georgians', or 'gurcustanli/kartveli' (in Georgian) and 'gurcu/gurcustanli' in Azerbaijan, despite the English-language translation of all of these terms as 'Georgian'. The Georgian-language terms connote the existence of a particular collective, that of the 'Georgians', or 'kartveli', as does the term 'gurcu' in Azerbaijan. 'Gurcustanli' in Azerbaijan, however, refers to a spatial, territorial identity that does not necessarily connote ethno-nationality at all. An individual described as being 'gurcustanli', then, could be anyone who is from the territorial state of Georgia. Georgian Azeri-Turks travelling to Azerbaijan could and often do refer to themselves as 'gurcustanli' (being 'of Georgia') rather than as 'azerbaycanli' (or 'of Azerbaijan').

Although this particular study focuses primarily upon the identity-related issues and concerns faced by Georgian Azeri-Turks in Kvemo Kartli, it goes without saying that the exigent demographic, socio-economic, and/or political concerns for members of this geographically compact grouping may differ from those experienced by Georgian Azeri-Turks living elsewhere in the country. A number of interviewees and questionnaire participants encountered over the course of this research project perceived differences in levels and ease of integration between Georgian Azeri-Turks residing in Tbilisi and Marneuli, for example. These participants perceived Tbilisi-based Georgian Azeri-Turks as being more socio-culturally, in levels and ease of integration between Georgian Azeri-Turks residing in Tbilisi and Marneuli, for example. A number of interviewees and questionnaire participants encountered over the course of this research project perceived differences in levels and ease of integration between Georgian Azeri-Turks residing in Tbilisi and Marneuli, for example. These participants perceived Tbilisi-based Georgian Azeri-Turks as being more socio-culturally, economically, and politically integrated within associated spheres in Georgia due to the aforementioned individuals' increased contact with titular Georgians. Still, study participants commonly perceive such

1.1 A NOTE ON LABELS

I have previously used the term 'Georgian Azeri' in my work in order to emphasize the legal and territorial relationships between members of this collective to Georgia—as Georgian citizens with long-standing ties to Georgian territories—while simultaneously acknowledging the socio-cultural, linguistic, and religious similarities of members of this group to the titular people of Azerbaijan. Yet this label, like the labels 'Azerbaijani' and 'Azeri', continues to be unsatisfactory, as it does not adequately express the multifaceted nature of the history of the individuals in question, nor does it do sufficient justice to existing debates among the socially- and politically-active members of this grouping regarding their desired collective namesake. An uneasy consensus exists amongst most of the participants of this case study concerning pride in their 'Turkic' roots and the importance of these roots to the historical formation of this socio-cultural grouping within Georgia. By attaching the addendum of 'Turk' to the previous label, resulting in that of 'Georgian Azeri-Turk/s', I am calling attention to the various ideological positions and spatio-temporal cues underlying each of the label's constituent components and featuring regularly in locals' debates regarding the label/s most suitable for their felt community.

By referring to the grouping and its members as 'Georgian Azeri-Turks', for example, 'Turk' serves as both a distancing device and a bridge. It serves as a distancing device by offering an alternative locus of identification for those seeking to downplay the affiliations of the group with the Azerbaijani people and state while acknowledging the differences between members of this group and titular Georgians. As a bridge, it links references to particular Turkic tribes historically present on the territories of present-day Georgia (for example, the Agh Qoyunlu, Qara Qoyunlu, Borchalu, and Qarapapaq-Terekem Turkic tribes) to the people and politics of the Azerbaijani and/or Turkish states. In sum, the label 'Georgian Azeri-Turk' seizes upon what is a common thread in the seemingly disparate narratives of both camps. Still, this label is not without its own problems.

Some of the individuals with whom I have spoken concerning their choice/s of preferred labels expressed dislike of the label 'Azeri', connecting it to a particular tribe in Iran rather than to the titular people of Azerbaijan. This is but one example of the limitations imposed by particular language systems and the ways in which connotations of words in one language do not always travel to translations of those same words in other languages. 'Azerbaijani' and 'Azeri' are used interchangeably in the English language in popular as well as academic literature touching upon the people, politics, history, and culture of Azerbaijan. This is also true to some extent among the members of the collective in question in Georgia, as evinced in the interviews and questionnaires referenced in the articles of this dissertation. Yet, for some community leaders, the label 'Azeri' connotes an Iranian tribe and is therefore considered inappropriate when applied to the Turkic peoples historically located in eastern Georgia. Furthermore, there are significant normative differences between the descriptive labels 'kartulikartuli' (in Georgian) and 'gurculugurcustanli' in Azerbaijan, although the English-language translation of all of these terms as 'Georgian'. The Georgian-language terms connote the existence of a particular collective, that of the 'Georgians', or 'kartveli', as does the term 'gurcu' in Azerbaijan. 'Gurcustanli' in Azerbaijan, however, refers to a spatial, territorial identity that does not necessarily connote ethno-nationality at all. An individual described as being 'gurcustanli', then, could be anyone who is from the territorial state of Georgia. Georgian Azeri-Turks travelling to Azerbaijan could and often do refer to themselves as 'gurcustanli' (being 'of Georgia') rather than as 'azerbaycanli' (or 'of Azerbaijan').

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increased integration as the exception rather than the rule for the majority of the country’s Georgian Azeri-Turk population. Conversely, individuals who were born and raised in more or less cosmopolitan environments and in close contact with others from diverse socio-cultural, linguistic, and/or religious backgrounds might not choose to self-identify as ‘Azerbaijani’/‘Azeri’/Georgian Azeri-Turk’ at all. The atmosphere (demographic, geographic, linguistic, religious, socio-cultural, etc.) in which one is socialized no doubt plays an integral role in determining which categories of self-identification are reasonably available to said individual within a given time and place. The experiences underlying what it means to be a ‘Georgian Azeri-Turk’ today might differ from person-to-person and from place-to-place. ‘Georgian Azeri-Turk’, then, is neither a monolithic category nor a blanket assumption of homogenous inter-personal experience.

The point is that labels are political as well as subjective, varying both between and within groups and their utilized languages. As such, they are open to contestation and change. My current adoption of the label ‘Georgian Azeri-Turk’ is not intended to serve as the definitive or authoritative namesake of/for the collective in question. I make use of this term in order to draw attention to current and ongoing debates concerning the use of particular labels as well as the various meanings and values underlying them. These labels and the meanings and values that they connote facilitate the creation and dissemination of collective identities at numerous scales, among individual villagers in remote locations of Kvemo Kartli as well as among politicians in Tbilisi and/or Baku.

1.2 COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND INTER-GROUP RELATIONS IN GEORGIA: A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE EXISTING LITERATURE

The work of scholars such as Batashvili (2012, 2018), Baramidze (2012), Berglund (2016a), Chkhartishvili (2013), de Leonardis (2016), Kekelia (2014), Nodia (2009), T. Metreveli (2016), Reinsner (2009), Suny (1994), Wertsch & Batashvili (2012), and Wertsch & Karumidze (2009) examines various aspects of nation-building processes in Georgia during particular points in time, ranging from antiquity to the Soviet and/or Post-Soviet period. These scholars each demonstrate in their own unique ways the manners in which historical narratives have been variously applied as mnemonic devices to construct, embed, and legitimize the existence of a Georgian national identity in social cognition as well as political institutions, particularly since the mid-19th century. There have been few studies to date, however, that seek to critically unpack the relationship of perceived ethnicity to nationhood and national identity in Georgia and/or analyse the concrete impacts that such a relationship has or could have upon majority-minority relations in the country. Driscoll, Berglund & Blauvelt (2016), Gamsakhurdia (2017), and Khalvashi & Batashvili (2009) make admirable inroads in this direction by studying the meanings and values that Georgians commonly associate with membership in the Georgian nation and providing some insight as to how these meanings/values condition perceptions of individuals from other, more diverse backgrounds. Yet, at present, very little scholarly research has been conducted which focuses upon how representatives of non-titular minority groupings perceive and respond to Georgian nation-building initiatives and/or inter-group, societal relations on the ground and outside of the state capital. Recent and notable exceptions to this statement include the work of scholars like Popovaite (2014) and Zviadadze (2018) regarding dynamic processes of identity negotiation among local Muslims in Adjara.

Studies of Georgia’s ‘ethno-national’ minority populations generally lack discussion and analysis of the deeper issues at play in majority-minority relations—with Georgia as well as in broader historical and contemporary geopolitical contexts. Reports issued with the backing of non-governmental organizations like the Civic Development Agency (CiDA, 2011), Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy, and Development (CIPDD, 2002), European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI; Wheatley, 2005, 2009a), International Crisis Group (2006), Human Rights Monitoring Group of National Minorities (MRMG, 2011a), Public Movement Multinational Georgia (PMMG, 2007), United Nations Association of Georgia (UNAG, 2013) and those published by Georgian state bodies like the Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality (2014) and the Public Defender’s Office (Tolerance Center, 2012) tend to be focused primarily upon policy-related concerns impacting majority-minority relations and minority integration in Georgia. The work of scholars like Berglund (2016a, 2017), Broers (2008, 2009), George (2009), Jones (2003, 2013), Nodia (2009), and Wheatley (2009) emphasizes macro, Tbilisi-centric policies, processes, rhetoric, and ideological changes often accompanying political, structural change in Georgia. While these scholars do engage in careful, detailed, and perspicacious analyses of such macro-scale phenomena, relatively little attention has been paid to micro-scalars processes impacting formation and maintenance of perceptions of inter-group difference in Georgia. That is, few studies concerning Georgia to date analyse how, why, and in what manner members of such groups conceptualize, perceive, and perform their collective identities in ways that in turn heighten or decrease perceptions of both intra- and inter-group similarity and difference.

To be more specific, research pertaining to Georgian Azeri-Turks tends to employ a top-down,
avoidance of the powerful and their forces. Given the gradual intermixture of Turkic and Persian-inspired
Ottoman, Persian, and Seljuk Turkic as well as Greek, Roman, and Russian forces—created a situation
of today's Georgian Azeri-Turk population will be exceedingly difficult, involving hours upon hours of
sifting through overtly political references in Georgian, Azerbaijani, Russian, Armenian, and Turkish
histiography. The various in- and out-fluxes of peoples—including troops of various Arab, Mongol,
Ottoman, Persian, and Seljuk Turkic as well as Greek, Roman, and Russian forces—created a situation
wherein peoples moved in and out of various territories at the behest of the powerful and, at times, in
avoidance of the powerful and their forces. Given the gradual internmixture of Turkic and Persian-inspired

A recent report, issued with the backing of the Human Rights and Monitoring Centre (EMC), the
Operation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Centre for Studies of Ethnicity
and Multiculturalism (2018), was conducted and released with the aim of studying identity-related
developments among the Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli, whom the authors of the report referred
to as ‘ethnic Azerbaijanis’ (Zviadadze et al. 2018). Although the individuals involved in the creation of
this report sought to incorporate the voices of average Georgian Azeri-Turks into their study of collective
identity, the sampling was small (35 individual interviews) and contained significant ambiguities
pertaining to participant selection. One of the main pitfalls of this report is that it makes over-simplified,
unproblemitized claims about the ways that the individuals in the small sampling perceive of their own
subject positions and ultimately applies these claims to the entire collective in question. The authors do not
critically assess participants’ responses, nor do they spend any time comparing participants’ demographic
characteristics with those of others in the region (e.g. with regard to levels of education, language skills,
etc.). While the report provides a good general overview of the common challenges faced by members of
Georgia’s Azeri-Turk population and frames these challenges in light of relevant historical and political
processes, the report ultimately provides a very skewed and incomplete view of what are in fact highly
dynamic and ongoing processes of identity (re)construction and negotiation. Additionally, work concerning
the so-called ‘Azerbaijani Diaspora’ tends to either reify official positions on the subject (Uslu & Kocaman,
2013) or critically examine officials’ creation and utilization of said ‘Diaspora’ for political purposes
(Rumyantsev, 2010 and 2017). The latter work does an admirable job analysing the official motivations
behind the creation of the ‘Azerbaijani Diaspora’, but does not examine to what extent diasporic attitudes
or identities are internalized among representatives of particular populations subsumed under this label.

This doctoral dissertation aims to fill in the gaps in existing literature pertaining to collective
identity (re)formation as well as majority-minority relations in Georgia by incorporating lesser-heard
voices into discussions of national identity and nation-building. Similarly, the work presented in this
dissertation is intended to augment scholarship concerning ‘Diasporas’ and diasporic identities in the
region, particularly with regard to Azerbaijani diaspora-building initiatives. It is hoped that the multi-
scalar and multi-disciplinary nature of this case study will spur further discussion of the roles played by
contextually embedded, collective narratives and memories in processes of collective identity formation,
contestation, and change in the post-Soviet space as well as elsewhere in the world. In a corner of the
globe plagued with as-of-yet unresolved disputes concerning the territories of Abkhazia, South Ossetia,
and Nagorno-Karabagh, collective (‘national’) identities often appear to be immutable as well as mutually
exclusive and reinforcing at the same time. There are always grey areas and spaces for creativity and
negotiation along the margins of national identity discourses, narratives, and memories, however, and, as
this dissertation demonstrates, these ‘grey areas’ represent opportunities for individuals to imagine their
own subjectivities in ways that occasionally run counter to official aims and interests. It is in these ‘grey areas’
that new identities can gradually form, take root, and gain purchase among wider segments of states’
populations. While some identities may prove to be more or less intractable, no identity is immutable or
irrefutable.

1.3 CONTESTED HISTORIES, CATEGORIES, AND BORDERS

The tumultuous history of the South Caucasus is such that any attempt to determine the precise origins
of today’s Georgian Azeri-Turk population will be exceedingly difficult, involving hours upon hours of
sifting through overtly political references in Georgian, Azerbaijani, Russian, Armenian, and Turkish
histiography. The various in- and out-fluxes of peoples—including troops of various Arab, Mongol,
Ottoman, Persian, and Seljuk Turkic as well as Greek, Roman, and Russian forces—created a situation
wherein peoples moved in and out of various territories at the behest of the powerful and, at times, in
avoidance of the powerful and their forces. Given the gradual internmixture of Turkic and Persian-inspired

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attributes that eventually came to shape the collective known today as titular ‘Azerbaijanis’ as well as the
Georgian Azeri-Turks, members of both groupings whom are closer linguistically to the Turkish language
and spiritually closer to Iran than to Turkey by virtue of Shia Islam, it is unlikely that either is descended
from but one tribe. Rather, it is more likely that these characteristics came to be shared by members of both
collectives through the gradual intermixture of Persian and Turkic peoples settled throughout the region
and, further, in juxtaposition to the religious confessions and languages of groups soon subsumed into the
categories of the ‘Georgian’, ‘Armenian’, and ‘Russian’ ethno-nations. The numerous power struggles and
movements of people in the region between the 11th and 19th centuries likely set the scene for this gradual
intermixture of peoples.

Still, this does not prevent historians in Azerbaijan and Georgia from putting forth competing
claims pertaining to the first appearance of Georgian Azeri-Turks’ ancestors on contemporary Georgian
lands. Earlier or later dates of arrival are often assigned to Georgian Azeri-Turks by historians on either
side, with aims to strengthen or refute claims of indigenousness as well as to lament or justify the parameters
of the current political borders of both states. Interviews with Georgian Azeri-Turk community leaders also
demonstrate a lack of consensus as to the dates of their ancestors’ arrival as well as to the specific tribal
affiliations of these early ancestors. Given the considerable movement and intermixing of peoples in these
territories throughout the centuries and the highly politicized nature of historiography in the region, it is
therefore unsurprising to find marked variance between historical accounts from one state to the next. This
variance is similarly reflected in the murky historical accounts expounded by various Georgian Azeri-Turk
community leaders in Kvemo Kartli.

What is more easily proven by the earliest available census data in the region (i.e. the Imperial
Russian census of 1897) is the concentrated presence of Turkic-speaking peoples—referred to as ‘Tatars’
in census materials—in the Tiflis Governorate and its Borchali district (see Table 1 and Figure 1, p. 17, this
work; Demoscope Weekly, n.d.) as well as parts of the neighboring governorates. Prior to the incorporation
of the lands of the South Caucasus into the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 19th century, the area known
as ‘Borchali’ had changed hands at various points over the centuries, passing from under the auspices of
Persian khans and sultans to those of Georgian kings throughout the course of the 16-18th centuries. This
is significant because the name ‘Borchali’ had changed hands at various points over the centuries, passing from under the auspices of
Persian khans and sultans to those of Georgian kings throughout the course of the 16-18th centuries. This
is significant because the name ‘Borchali’ maintains significant currency among Georgian Azeri-Turks in
Kvemo Kartli as well as among historians in Azerbaijan. For many Georgian Azeri-Turks, Borchali is the
ancient territory of their ancestors and, as such, evinces the centuries-long roots of their people in present-
day southeastern Georgia and northern Armenia. Borchali is referenced by some historians in Azerbaijan
as a historic stronghold of early Azerbaijanis in the region that was gradually coopted into Georgia and
Armenia, first via its annexation into Imperial Russia in the 19th century, then through the demarcation of
administrative borders in the early Soviet period. A large proportion of the ‘Borchali’ of old is now encased
within the borders of today’s Kvemo Kartli region. The term ‘Borchali’ endures in the popular imagination
of the Turkic peoples of the region—Georgian Azeri-Turks as well as titular Azerbaijanis—while arousing
suspicions among some others (i.e. Georgian and Armenian officials).
### TABLE 1. POPULATION OF TIFLIS GOVERNORATE BY [NATIVE LANGUAGE-BASED] NATIONALITY*, 1897

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tiflis Governorate (guberniia), total</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Number of Those Classified as ‘Tatars’</th>
<th>‘Tatar’ Percentage of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tiflis district (uyezd)</td>
<td>234,632</td>
<td>13,764</td>
<td>5.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akhalkalaki district</td>
<td>72,709</td>
<td>6,572</td>
<td>9.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akhaltsikhe district</td>
<td>68,837</td>
<td>12,370</td>
<td>17.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borchali district</td>
<td>128,587</td>
<td>37,742</td>
<td>29.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gori district</td>
<td>191,091</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>0.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dusheti district</td>
<td>67,719</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signaghi district</td>
<td>102,313</td>
<td>5,272</td>
<td>5.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telavi district</td>
<td>66,767</td>
<td>1,873</td>
<td>2.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tioneti district</td>
<td>34,153</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&lt;0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaqatala area (okrug)</td>
<td>84,224</td>
<td>28,950</td>
<td>34.37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In the Imperial Russian Census of 1897, ‘nationality’ was primarily based upon one’s mother tongue. The category of individuals later classified as ‘Turks’ in the Soviet census of 1926 and later as ‘Azerbaijani’ in Soviet censuses from 1939-1989 were classified as ‘Tatars’ in the 1897 Imperial Russian census. The term ‘Tatar’ (‘tatrebi’ in the Georgian language) is still used informally on occasion in reference to today’s Georgian Azeri-Turks, but it is considered by many to be a derogatory and offensive term. The data shown here is the author’s adaptation of 1897 census data from the Tiflis Governorate, retrieved from: http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/emp_lan_97_uezd.php?reg=521.

### FIGURE 1. MAP OF THE TIFLIS GOVERNORATE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY, HIGHLIGHTING BORCHALI UYEZD

*Original map kindly provided by Pekka Närväinen for use in this work. Map based upon the Ethnographic Map of the Tbilisi Governorate and the Zaqatala Okrug, published in 1902 (based upon data from the 1886 census), as well as the map of the Tiflis Governorate, published in "Maps of Imperial Russia by Governorates and Regions [Oblasts]", published in 1913. Shaded area shown is that of the Borchali Uyezd, much of which corresponds to the administrative borders of today’s Kvemo Kartli region. The Tiflis Governorate, or Province, was divided into nine uyezds, or counties, and the Zaqtala Okrug, like a district, which was included into the territorial configuration of the Tiflis Governorate since 1859.
1.4 THE SOVIET PERIOD

Just as the designations, parameters, and proprietors of the various political configurations in the region changed throughout the centuries, so, too, did the names of particular populations encapsulated within them. Recall, for instance, the brief reference the last Imperial Russian census of 1897 and the use of the term ‘Tatar’ to classify the Turkic-speaking peoples of the Borchali district; prior to the official adoption of the term ‘Azerbaijani’ under Stalin’s leadership in 1937, terms like ‘Tatar’, ‘Moslem’, ‘Turk’, and ‘Azerbaijani’ Turk had all been intermittently applied in reference to members of the population in question and in juxtaposition to other groups in the region, such as ‘Armenians’, ‘Georgians’, and ‘Russians’. Following the demarcation of official borders between the Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republics in 1936, the ‘Azerbaijani’ label was officially adopted in 1937 as the collective namesake of the titular population of the Azerbaijani S.S.R. This namesake was applied to the Turkic-speaking population of the Georgian S.S.R. in Borchali/Kvemo Kartli as well.

Central Soviet leadership sought to alleviate the perceived threats posed by pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism in the South Caucasus as well as Central Asia. The reinforcement and strengthening of political borders between these areas and the nationalizing neighboring states—Turkey and Iran in particular—was accompanied by further efforts to increase the mental distance between Soviet populations and the populations of neighboring states, irrespective and in spite of any linguistic and/or spiritual similarities between members of these populations. It would not do to continue to refer to the Turkic-speaking peoples concentrated in territories of the then-Azerbaijani and Georgian S.S.R.s as ‘Turks’. Instead, they would be known as ‘Azerbaijanis’, and a uniquely ‘Azerbaijani’ history would be constructed and reconstructed at the behest of Soviet leadership. This history would emphasize the indigeneity of titular Azerbaijanis within the Azerbaijani S.S.R. and highlight the unique historical development of the ‘Azerbaijani ethno-nation’ vis-à-vis neighboring peoples and states (Yilmaz, 2013). Similarly, the Georgian Azeri-Turks of Borchali/Kvemo Kartli were coopted into the Azerbaijani ethno-nation and were officially encouraged to view the territory of the Azerbaijani S.S.R. as their ‘historical homeland’.

Authors like Hirsch (2005), Kaiser (1994), Martin (2001), Suny (1994), Suny & Martin (2001), and Tishkov (1997) have highlighted the role that the policies of korenizatsia (i.e. indigenization) in the 1920s and 1930s played in the formation and institutionalization of territorially-based ethno-national identities in the Soviet Union. This indigenization campaign was endorsed by Lenin and, initially, by Stalin with the dual aim of garnering the support of non-Russian elites and populations in the peripheries and simultaneously ‘speeding up history’ to facilitate the gradual falling away of national identities (eventually to be replaced by an overarching ‘Soviet’ socialist identity). The institutionalization of ethno-national identities within their respective ‘homelands’ and the prerequisites accompanying titular status within said homelands had the effect opposite to that envisioned by Lenin and his successor, however. Rather than facilitating the succession of an overarching Soviet identity, the indigenization policies of the 1920s-30s served to solidify the connections between ethno-nations and territorial proprietorship in collective consciousness. After the mid-1940s, the central Soviet leadership began to promote sblizhenie (‘drawing more closely together’) followed by slianie, or the merger of the various national peoples of the U.S.S.R. into one ‘Soviet’ body, relying heavily upon policies promoting Russian as the lingua franca as well as fear-inducing tactics to quell ethno-nationalist tendencies.

Despite the relative success of Soviet language policies in promoting Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication across the Soviet space, these policies achieved varying levels of success in displacing or undercutting the status of national languages from republic to republic. In the Georgian S.S.R., for example, knowledge of Georgian as the mother tongue remained widespread among members of the titular population (Broers, 2009, p. 104; Berglund, 2016, pp. 47-49). For others such as the Georgian Azeri-Turks, knowledge of Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication tended to be much more widespread than was knowledge of Georgian. Whereas Russian language instruction was compulsory in all schools in Georgia, titular or non-titular, Georgian language instruction was not obligatory in minority language schools (cf. Berglund, 2016, p. 48). Soviet language policies prioritizing knowledge of the Russian language as the lingua franca undoubtedly helped form the basis of the present status quo among Georgian Azeri-Turks in Kvemo Kartli, wherein the balance between knowledge of Georgian vs. Russian (and now Russian vs. English) has only recently begun to shift.

The twilight years of the Soviet Union brought civil war and territorial conflict to the doorsteps of independent Georgia and Azerbaijan. Alongside calls for autonomy or outright separatism from elites in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabagh, internal power struggles in Georgia and Azerbaijan stymied the establishment of political and economic stability in the region and its newly-independent constituent states. The resurgence of Georgian ethno-nationalism in the late 1980s-early 1990s is most closely associated with the short-lived leadership of Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1990-1992), whose calls of “Georgia for Georgians!” resulted in lasting and painful collective memories for representatives of non-
titular minority groupings. The early 1990s were frightening for such individuals, as the threat of the economic and political collapse of the new state existed alongside threats of inter-group violence and forced displacement. Georgian Azeri-Turk community leaders recall the sense of urgency and fear that led to the alleged forced displacement of more than 800 minority families from villages in Kvemo Kartli in the early 1990s. It was under conditions of such economic, political, and societal turmoil that former Soviet apparatchiks, Eduard Shevardnadze and Heydar Aliyev, returned in the early 1990s to Georgia and Azerbaijan with the aim of restoring some semblance of stability to their respective ‘homelands’.

1.5 THE POST-SOVIET PERIOD

Whereas Azerbaijan’s natural resource wealth proved to be a boon for the establishment of socio-economic stability in post-Soviet Azerbaijan and provided circumstances fortuitous for the accumulation and retention of executive power in the person of Heydar Aliyev and, later, his son, Ilham, the situation in Georgia was not nearly so propitious. Despite Shevardnadze’s stemming of ethno-nationalist tendencies in the country and acquisition of copious amounts of Western aid intended to help democratize the country, corruption and cronyism ran rampant. By the time that the Rose Revolution of 2003 brought the Western-educated reformer, Mikheil Saakashvili, to the political forefront, disillusionment with Shevardnadze’s leadership of the country was widespread. Meanwhile, little had been done to effect real change in the realm of majority-minority relations in Georgia outside the realm of official rhetoric. Georgia’s constitution, established in 1995 under Shevardnadze’s leadership, offers official protections of linguistic, religious, and cultural rights to members of minority groups at the same time that it establishes the primacy of state symbols that are indicative of rather exclusive boundaries of ‘Georgian-ness’. Relationships with the United Nations (of which Georgia has been a member since 1992), the Council of Europe (since 1999), and the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (since 1992) were continued and deepened after the Rose Revolution, yet members of the country’s minority groups remained largely as economically, politically, and socially isolated on the eve of the Rose Revolution as they were in the 1990s.

The Rose Revolution of 2003 and the incoming leadership’s propensity toward anti-Soviet and anti-Russian rhetoric tipped the uneasy balance that Shevardnadze sought to maintain in Georgia’s East-West relations. By engaging in policies and practices designed to both appeal to members of Georgia’s traditional titular nationality and appease the country’s non-titular populations, Western donors, and representatives of human rights organizations alike, Saakashvili maintained the exclusive boundaries of membership in the Georgian nation in principle while simultaneously promoting civic, inclusive notions of nationhood at the official level. Saakashvili and his government undertook significant measures to improve infrastructure (i.e. building and repairing roads and increasing access to electricity, gas, and drinking water) in the regions and villages outside of the capital and sought to integrate members of the country’s non-titular groups into Georgian society through the Georgian language (Berglund, 2017). These efforts, alongside the creation in 2005 of the Council of National Minorities under the auspices of the Public Defender’s Office, certainly helped to lessen the socio-economic and political isolation of non-titular minority groups from wider Georgian society. With the exception of Saakashvili’s establishment of the ‘1+4 Program’ in 2010, simplifying entrance exam procedures and increasing access of non-native Georgian speakers to higher education in Georgia, few additional measures were implemented during his second term that had a marked and lasting impact upon majority-minority relations on the ground and outside of the capital. Emotions over Georgia’s 2008 war with Russia over the status of South Ossetia continued—and continue still—to run high and the political-economic repercussions of the war featured heavily on the government’s agenda. Integration of the country’s non-titular minority groups no longer appeared toward the very top of the so-called ‘national agenda’, official rhetoric aside.

Much like the circumstances under which his own predecessor left office, Saakashvili stepped down from the presidency in 2013 amid accusations and allegations of corruption, abuse of executive power, and nepotism. The most vocal of Saakashvili’s opponents at this time was billionaire businessman-turned-politician, Bidzina Ivanishvili, and members of his newly formed opposition party, Georgian Dream (GD). Ivanishvili and his party stepped up to the political fore in 2012 and have remained there since. The GD governments strayed very little from Saakashvili’s domestic and foreign policies, with the exception of GD leadership’s softer rhetoric and desire for rapprochement with Russia. Saakashvili’s aspirations to attain membership for Georgia in the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) remained in place under the successive Georgian Dream governments and the Georgia-EU Association...
Agreement of 2014 was succeeded by a Georgia-EU visa-free travel regime that went into effect in March 2017. The GD government took little to no initiative to expand Saakashvili’s efforts that aimed to increase the representation and integration of non-titular minorities in public and political life.

The recent election of Georgia’s first female President, Salome Zurabishvili, in the heated run-off election 2018 came as a surprise to few, despite her official stance as an ‘independent’ candidate. At the time of writing it remains to be seen how Zurabishvili’s stance on majority-minority relations will compare to those of her predecessors, although a number of comments made by Zurabishvili during her electoral campaign hint at the potential for the further degradation of these relations. What we have seen in the post-Soviet period is a vacillation between nation-building discourses emphasizing a civic, citizenship-based approach alongside continued adherence to more exclusive, ‘ethnicity’-based conceptualizations of Georgian national identity. The period of overt ethno-nationalist discourse in Georgian politics, represented by the leadership of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in the late 1980s-early 1990s, has gradually been displaced by national identity discourses emphasizing civic, citizenship-based membership in the Georgian nation. Displacement does not automatically equate to replacement, however, nor does it imply steady, linear development in any one particular direction.

Despite having moved closer to the West via greater political, economic, and socio-cultural contact in the post-Soviet period, there are conservative segments of society in Georgia that seek to push back against the liberal values that the West is thought to represent. The conflict between Georgia, Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia has problematized majority-minority relations and has led to the widespread fear that greater autonomy (cultural, linguistic, or territorial) for minority groups would lead to further destabilization of the country. The conflicts surrounding Abkhazia and South Ossetia have made it difficult for politicians to agree on any sort of action pertaining to minority rights in Georgia, let alone to come to an agreement as to concise legal definitions of minority groups or the rights these groups ought to possess. There is also a question of both willingness and ability to implement existing policies ensuring the protection of even the most minimal legal protections of minority groups and their members—both public sentiment and lack of sufficient funds play an important role in determining if or how existing policies are carried out in Georgia (cf. Storm 2016). These issues, public sentiment and financial difficulty borne by the Georgian state, inform and affect the multi-scalar dynamics of majority-minority relations in the country.

Looking at the economic and political trajectories of post-Soviet Georgia and Azerbaijan in a comparative perspective, however, it is clear that, while Azerbaijan’s economy is currently much stronger than the Georgian one, due in large part to Azerbaijani resource wealth, Georgia’s political development has developed in a far more democratic manner than has been the case in Azerbaijan. The Georgian political system has proven itself capable of democratic transfer of power, although significant issues continue to plague the inner workings of the party system and the holding of elections (cf. Gilbreath & Balasanyan, 2017; Mierzejewski-Voznyak, 2016), not to mention the development of an active civil society (cf. Jones, 2013; Nodia, 2005). In Azerbaijan, however, authoritarianism and clan politics continue to impede the development of democratic principles of governance and adequate protections of individuals’ rights and freedoms. This study tends to emphasize the workings of the Georgian political system over those in neighboring Azerbaijan due to the legal relationship between the Georgian state and Georgian Azeri-Turks, the vast majority of whom are Georgian citizens. For the purposes of this study, discussion of the Azerbaijani state and elite discourses and narratives is introduced as it directly relates to Georgian Azeri-Turks—i.e. state-centric attempts to influence the subject positions of members of this socio-cultural grouping within Georgia.

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2Zurabishvili had the public support of Ivanishvili and the GD party and therefore enjoyed an undue advantage over her number one competitor, United National Movement (UNM) and Saakashvili-backed Grigol Vashadze.

3A number of human rights organizations have claimed that Zurabishvili has voiced xenophobic, discriminatory speech in reference to representatives of various minority groups, including of individuals of Turkic, Chinese, and Arabic descent. For example, while visiting a Georgian Armenian village on Oct. 2, 2018 as part of her electoral campaign, Zurabishvili made inflammatory remarks comparing Saakashvili’s alleged preferential treatment of Turks over Armenians. For more on these issues, see: Humanrights.ge, 2018; JAM News, 2018; Mgalobishvili, 2018. As the President of Georgia, Zurabishvili traveled to Martuni on the eve of the Novruz celebration of 2019, a holiday celebrated predominantly by the Georgian Azeri-Turks of the region. Zurabishvili did not return for the main festivities and, furthermore, refused to speak Russian with the Georgian Azeri-Turks present, many of whom reportedly did not speak or understand Georgian. Instead, Zurabishvili emphasized the need for Georgian Azeri-Turks to learn the Georgian language (Agenda.ge, 2019).

4For more on issues regarding the differential economic and political development of Georgia and Azerbaijan in the post-Soviet period, see, for example, Franke, Grawrlich & Alakbarov (2010), Guliyev (2005), Palonkorpi (2015), and Radnitz (2010).
1.6 THE GEORGIAN AZERI-TURKS OF KVEMO KARTLI TODAY: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND LOCALIZED POWER RELATIONS

The aim of this section is to illustrate the geographic, socio-economic, and political forces and influences operating in the region and among its Georgian Azeri-Turk residents. These forces and influences demonstrate the ways in which macro-level phenomena become perceptible at the grassroots level and take on concrete meaning for average individuals. What follows is a discussion of Georgian Azeri-Turks' overall numbers and geographic areas of settlement as well as a brief survey of the chief barriers faced by members of this collective regarding integration into Georgian state and societal structures. Further context is provided in terms of detailing local hierarchies of power relations and the influence of central Georgian and Azerbaijani elites/authorities within local Georgian Azeri-Turk communities.

Table 2 (p. 22, this work) highlights demographic changes in Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia as per census data from 1939-2014. This table demonstrates a number of key trends: 1.) Georgia has become decidedly more 'Georgian' over the years, despite the outflow of titular and non-titular Georgians since 1989, 2.) A dramatic demographic shift has taken place with regard to the Armenian and Russian populations of late Soviet/post-Soviet Georgia, and 3.) The aforementioned demographic shift has resulted in Georgian Azeri-Turks comprising post-Soviet Georgia's most populous non-titular minority group. Although the proportion of the population comprised by Armenians appears to have been declining gradually since the early Soviet period, the Russian population enjoyed steady growth until the late 1950s, after which time it, too, began to decline. The most marked drop in the numbers of Armenians and Russians in Georgia took place between 1989 and 2002, and the results of Georgia's first census as an independent, post-Soviet state in 2002 demonstrated a much lower relative decrease in the size of the Georgian Azeri-Turk population during this same period. Furthermore, the proportion of Georgian Azeri-Turks steadily increased from 1959-1989. Despite overall decreases in the population size of Georgia between 1989-2002 and 2002-2014, the census data suggest that Georgian Azeri-Turks are leaving the country at a much slower rate than are Armenians, Russians, and even Georgians.

Approximately 79 percent of the country's Georgian Azeri-Turk population resides in the Kvemo Kartli region, where, as a whole, they comprise 42 percent of the region's population and make up absolute majorities in the districts of Bolnisi, Dmanisi, and Marmeuli. The Gardabani district's population is divided between titular Georgians and Georgian Azeri-Turks (54 and 43 percent, respectively). Outside of Kvemo Kartli, sizable communities of Georgian Azeri-Turks are located in the regions of Kakheti, Mtskhet-Mtianeti, and Shida Kartli as well as in the capital city, Tbilisi (see Table 3 and Figure 2, pp. 22-23, this work). Census data are not infallible, however, and factors including higher-than-average birth rates as well as rates of unregistered births and marriages among Georgian Azeri-Turks in Kvemo Kartli must be taken into account when attempting to draw any definitive conclusions from said data (cf. Hakkert, 2017, p. 3). Furthermore, data collection issues are made even more problematic by the tendency of members of the Georgian Azeri-Turk population (primarily males) to travel between Georgia, Russia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan as economic migrants.
TABLE 2. DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN THE GEORGIAN S.S.R. AND POST-SOVIET GEORGIA

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Pop.</td>
<td>3.54 million</td>
<td>4.04 million</td>
<td>4.69 million</td>
<td>4.99 million</td>
<td>5.40 million</td>
<td>4.37 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgians</td>
<td>2.17 m.</td>
<td>2.60 m.</td>
<td>3.13 m.</td>
<td>3.43 m.</td>
<td>3.79 m.</td>
<td>3.66 m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Azeri-Turks</td>
<td>188,058</td>
<td>153,600</td>
<td>217,758</td>
<td>255,678</td>
<td>307,556</td>
<td>284,761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenians</td>
<td>415,013</td>
<td>442,916</td>
<td>452,309</td>
<td>448,000</td>
<td>437,211</td>
<td>248,929</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


2 Data adapted from Georgian 2002 census data (population by region, district, and ethnic group). Retrieved from: http://www.ecmicaucasus.org/upload/stats/Census%202002.pdf. Georgian 2014 census data (population by region and ethnicity) retrieved from: http://census.ge/en/results/census1/demo. Figures in millions and percentages are rounded to the nearest hundredth. The 2002 Census did not include most of the disputed territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

3 Referring to official census data as "Azerbaijanis" since 1939. In the first Soviet Census of 1926, members of this group in Georgia were included in a broad category of "Turks", which also included Metskhetian Turks, Anatolian Turks, and Muslim Adjarians. Giorgi Sordia of the Centre for Studies of Ethnicity and Multiculturalism (CSEM) estimates the number of Georgian Azeri-Turks to be around 189,000 individuals in 1926 (Khundadze, 2016a).

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TABLE 3. GEORGIAN AZERI-TURK POPULATION OF POST-SOVIET GEORGIA, 2002-2014*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2002 Census</th>
<th>2014 Census</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Georgia, total</td>
<td>284,761</td>
<td>233,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kvemo Kartli region, total</td>
<td>224,606</td>
<td>177,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Rustavi city</td>
<td>4,993</td>
<td>4,661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Bolnisi district</td>
<td>49,026</td>
<td>33,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Gardabani district</td>
<td>49,993</td>
<td>35,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Dmanisi district</td>
<td>18,716</td>
<td>12,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Marneuli district</td>
<td>98,245</td>
<td>87,371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Tetri Tsqaro district</td>
<td>1,641</td>
<td>1,548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Tsalka district</td>
<td>1,992</td>
<td>1,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tbilisi, total</td>
<td>10,942</td>
<td>15,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kakheti region, total</td>
<td>40,036</td>
<td>32,354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mtskheta-Mtianeti region, total</td>
<td>2,248</td>
<td>2,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shida Kartli region, total</td>
<td>5,768</td>
<td>5,501</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Georgian Azeri-Turk population of Georgia by region and district. Total numbers/percentages of population included for referential purposes. In addition to data concerning the Kvemo Kartli region and its districts, data pertaining to territorial units with a Georgian Azeri-Turk population of more than 1,000 individuals is also included above. Data from 2002 census retrieved from: http://www.ecmicaucasus.org/upload/stats/Census%202002.pdf. Data from 2014 census retrieved from: http://census.ge/en/results/census1/demo in addition to author’s personal email communication with Ms. Donora Rukhadze of GEOSTAT, February 2019.
Census and other data regarding the socio-economic status of the Kvemo Kartli region’s population are misleading when pertaining to unemployment conditions. Closer examination of the criteria of ‘employment’ in official census and survey materials demonstrates that those engaged in subsistence agriculture are considered ‘self-employed’ (cf. Storm, 2019). That said, the unemployment rate in the region—listed as 14.1 percent in 2017 (GEOSTAT, n.d.)—is likely much higher than this figure suggests. The majority of Georgian Azeri-Turks resides in rural areas in Kvemo Kartli where they are engaged in subsistence agriculture, animal husbandry, and petty trade. Shortages of arable land—typically accompanied by allegations of discriminatory processes of land distribution in the post-Soviet period—create further difficulties for individuals whose livelihoods stem primarily from the land. Lands in the region changed hands in the early 1990s in a manner that was both arbitrary and opaque and tended to benefit well-connected members of the titular population rather than local Georgian Azeri-Turk farmers or shepherds/livestock owners (Wheatley, 2005, p. 35; Wheatley, 2009, pp. 42-45). Land-ownership issues remain salient today and are exacerbated by linguistic barriers as well as knowledge of rights and responsibilities in this regard.7

Insufficient knowledge of the Georgian language remains a significant impediment to socio-economic advancement for many Georgian Azeri-Turks, although joblessness is a common concern for titular Georgians as well as members of non-titular groups. Although the situation has begun to improve since the implementation of legislation in 2010 improving Georgian Azeri-Turks’ access higher education in Georgia (e.g. Saakashvili’s ‘1+4’ Program), many college-aged Georgian Azeri-Turks continue the Soviet-era tradition of going to Azerbaijan to receive a higher education in their native tongue.4 Turkey has become another popular destination for degree-seeking individuals in the post-Soviet period as well. Georgian Azeri-Turk youth taking part in the ‘1+4’ program, however, are required to successfully complete Georgian language courses (one year of the ‘1+4’ formula) prior to progressing to their desired field of study in a Georgian university, where they would ideally complete the remaining four years of the ‘1+4’ Program. While this program is very popular among members of the Georgian Azeri-Turk community in Kvemo Kartli, it remains unclear how far into the future it will continue. Given the remaining difficulties pertaining to quality of teaching instruction in minority language schools, only 25.6 percent of Azerbaijani speakers were able to pass their general entrance exam with a score sufficient to earn a spot in the ‘1+4’ program between 2010-2013. This created a tendency wherein there were more spots for Georgian Azeri-Turks in the program (given the five percent quota allotted them) than there were students taking part in it (Popovaite

8Author’s unpublished interview with officials from Georgia’s Ministry of Education and Science, including Despine Koiava, Giorgi Amariani, Salome Kipiani, and Tamar Toloraia (Aug. 25, 2016: Tbilisi).
2015). These trends demonstrate continued deficiencies in primary and secondary education in Azerbaijani language schools. Given the continuation of various obstacles inhibiting the integration of Georgian Azeri-Turks into socio-economic, political, and civic spheres of Georgian society, the discontinuation of the ‘1+4’ program would severely hamper any future progress in integration processes.

Most of these issues relate to insufficient, differential access by Georgian Azeri-Turks to public resources such as employment opportunities, quality education, property ownership, and representation in the spheres of politics and civil society. The bulk of existing data regarding Georgia’s socio-cultural minority groups outlines such issues as collective concerns rather than as chiefly territorially-based ones; that is, given that the majority of Georgia’s Georgian Azeri-Turks is concentrated in the Kvemo Kartli region, little other data exists pertaining to Georgian Azeri-Turks in, say, Kakheti or the capital city (cf. International Crisis Group, 2006; Komakhia, 2004; Open Society Georgia Foundation, 2019; Wheatley, 2005, 2009a). One can but surmise the ways that the issues faced by Georgian Azeri-Turks might compare to those detailed in the aforementioned reports as well as in the data presented in this work. Given that Georgian Azeri-Turks comprise a significant percentage (42 percent) of Kvemo Kartli’s total population, one might expect the representation of Georgian Azeri-Turks in civil and political bodies of the region—though still low by all accounts—to be considerably better than in Kakheti, for example, where Georgian Azeri-Turks comprise approximately 10 percent of the population (2014 Census). Similarly, while participants in this study typically allege Tbilisi-based Georgian Azeri-Turks’ Georgian language skills to be better than those of Georgian Azeri-Turks in Kvemo Kartli (due, according to participants, to increased contact with Georgians and higher quality education in the capital), unemployment, representation, and participation in the public sphere remain problematic for Georgian Azeri-Turks both within and outside the capital. More research is needed to compare the collective concerns and situations of Georgian Azeri-Turks both within and outside of the Kvemo Kartli region.

There are currently four representatives of the Georgian Azeri-Turk community serving in the Georgian Parliament (Azer Suleymanov, UNM; Mahir Darziyev, GD; Savalan Mirzoyev, GD; Ruslan Hajiyev, GD), all of whom represent constituencies in Kvemo Kartli, and there is presently one Georgian Azeri-Turk mayor (Zaur Dargalli, Marneuli municipality). Despite the existence of these representatives in official posts, Georgian Azeri-Turks remain under-represented at virtually all levels of the government, from local sakrebulos (city assemblies) to posts of mayors and regional governors. Notably, Teymur Abbasov (GD) was elected to the post of Mayor in the Marneuli municipality in October of 2017 and was the first Georgian Azeri-Turk to be elected to such a post in Georgia. His tenure was short-lived, however, following his alleged involvement in an incident involving the public videotaped humiliation of a local citizen. Abbasov was arrested in the summer of 2018 and at the time of writing remains embroiled in a legal battle over his alleged role in the incident. Prior to Abbasov’s detention and the announcement of charges against him, local social media users celebrated the unprecedented election of one of their compatriots to the post of Mayor in Marneuli. Following his arrest, public sentiment was mixed among Georgian Azeri-Turks in the region; some saw his arrest to be the fitting outcome of behavior unbecoming of a person in such a position, irrespective of ‘ethno-national’ background, while others attributed Abbasov’s arrest to more nefarious, discriminatory motivations on the part of Georgian governing officials. Abbasov’s affiliation with Georgian Dream certainly helped him to rise to the post of Marneuli Mayor, yet was insufficient to allow him to retain it.

The fanfare that surrounded Abbasov’s mayoral campaign in the months preceding the election far outshone the resources of the competition, which included Akhmed Imambuliyev (European Georgia party) and Rahim Askarov (UNM). Abbasov’s strongest challenger was Imamquliyev, who, despite his considerable following, simply could not compete with the resources and connections afforded to Abbasov by virtue of his association with the ruling party. Famous Azerbaijani singers were brought in for concerts to support the GD candidate and other carnival-esque events were held in the normally quiet Marneuli to support Abbasov in his mayoral bid. Abbasov’s youthful physique and background as a semi-professional athlete were accentuated in the videos and other campaign materials circulated prior to the election. The circumstances surrounding Abbasov’s mayoral campaign are indicative of a widespread phenomenon in Georgia—the strength of party politics and the undue advantage garnered by representatives of the ruling party over other parties and their representatives. NGOs continue to highlight higher-than-average allegations of voter fraud in electoral precincts in the Kvemo Kartli region following key elections in Georgia and events at polling stations have turned violent even in recent years, owing again to the strength of party politics and animosity between representatives of Georgian Dream and United National Movement (cf. ERCAS, 2008; PMMG, 2010; RFERL, 2010. See also: JAM News, 2017; Khundadze, 2016).

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8 For more on this issue, see, for example, Sharvashidze & Bryant (2014) and Mekhuzla & Roche (2009).
9 Following his deposal and a brief interim period of mayoral leadership by Zaur Tabatadze, former Vice Deputy Governor of Kvemo Kartli, GD nominee, Zaur Dargalli, was elected Mayor of Marneuli in May 2019 with 70 percent of the vote (JAM News, 2019b). The regional government has not yet replaced Dargalli as the Georgian Azeri-Turk representative of the Governor’s Office.
The strength of the party machine remains considerable in Georgia, as evinced by the recent election of officially ‘independent’ (yet GD-endorsed) Salome Zurabishvili and events surrounding the election of Teimur Abbasov to the post of Marneuli Mayor in 2017 (the fanfare of which was largely repeated during Dargalli’s spring 2019 mayoral campaign). Community leaders working for state institutions—including, for example, Mr. Dargalli (in his previous as well as current post) and the GD-affiliated members of Parliament (MPs) listed above—regularly promote the ruling party’s interests and candidates in public interviews and vis-à-vis participation at GD events. There is a sense that, to have better chances to serve in the Georgian government, one must belong to the ‘right’ political party and that speaking out against said party means risking one’s livelihood and, in some cases, personal safety. The same can be said of local GD-affiliated state representatives; being too outspoken or failing to follow the party line could jeopardize one’s position as well as any fringe benefits that it incurs. Safe positions are those that are promoted by top GD officials.

Azerbaijan’s influence is felt, too, in the official as well as public sphere in both Tbilisi and the municipalities of Kvemo Kartli—Marneuli in particular, where its affiliates hold events in commemoration of dates connected with Azerbaijani national narratives, such as those related to the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict and the Heydar Aliyev cult of personality.11 Local Georgian Azeri-Turk MPs regularly attend these events. Although most Georgian Azeri-Turk MPs maintain an inconsistent attendance record and rarely speak during parliamentary proceedings, a brief pause in the status quo occurs regularly around the date of the Azerbaijani state’s commemoration of the Khojaly Genocide in February.12 Azer Suleymanov (UNM), long-time member of the Georgian Parliament, regularly engages in impassioned speeches regarding the Khojaly Genocide and urges fellow lawmakers to officially acknowledge its occurrence. The tone of these speeches often turns vitriolic in response to similar speeches and calls by Armenian representatives for the official recognition of the Armenian Genocide (see Machaidze, 2012; Çağara, 2016). Public ire is currently high in Kvemo Kartli concerning the recent unveiling of a monument dedicated to an Armenian soldier in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, which is home to the majority of Georgia’s Armenian population. This monument was publically unveiled on January 20, 2019, the Day of National Mourning in Azerbaijan (a date commemorating the lives lost during the Soviet Army’s violent crackdown of Nagorno-Karabagh-related protests in Baku in 1990). The monument in question is a bust of Mikhail Avagyan, a local soldier who died during the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict in the early 1990s. Suleymanov addressed the Georgian Parliament in early February regarding the monument, public protests were held by Georgian Azeri-Turk activists in front of the Parliament building in Tbilisi on February 8, 2019, and Ilham Aliyev has since summoned the Georgian Ambassador to Baku to discuss the implications and future of this monument (see JAM News 2019 and 2019a; OC Media, 2019; Report.az, 2019). Local GD representatives have remained relatively silent on the issue.

Georgian Azeri-Turk community leaders and NGO representatives have alleged in the past that local majoritarian MPs have long been hand-picked by the party leadership with one key aim in mind: to choose representatives who will not greatly disturb the status quo by speaking out too loudly, too often, or too freely against the ruling government. Prior to the 2016 parliamentary elections, Georgian Azeri-Turk candidates typically had little to no command of the Georgian language and could therefore play only a limited role in parliamentary proceedings. Most of the current MPs appear to have only limited knowledge of the Georgian language, with the exception of Savalan Mirzoyev (GD) (Author’s fieldwork observations, Jan. 2016-August 2018). The 2016 parliamentary elections and the 2017 mayoral elections have demonstrated that trends are changing, however; races between ruling and non-ruling party candidates are gradually becoming more competitive and the candidates themselves have demonstrated both their willingness to and capability of using the Georgian language in public debates. Although Georgian Dream candidates were elected to the majority of the above posts, opposition candidates are gradually becoming more attractive to Georgian Azeri-Turk voters (cf. Shiriyev, 2016).13

In sum, the situation remains such that, despite improved infrastructure and easier commutes between the locales of Kvemo Kartli and Tbilisi, Georgian Azeri-Turks remain geographically, socially, politically, and, to a lesser degree, economically isolated from wider Georgian society. Georgian Azeri-Turks tend to remain within their rural communities. Political antipathy runs high in the region, given the disproportionate advantage afforded ruling party representatives in campaigns and elections, as well

12The event known as the ‘Khojaly Genocide’ in Azerbaijan took place in late February 1992, when several hundred Azerbaijanis were gunned down by separatist forces while attempting to flee the town of Khojaly. Both Armenian and Azerbaijani politicians and media outlets regularly spread propaganda concerning these and other tragic events, including those surrounding the anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumqayit, Azerbaijan, in 1988. For more information on events surrounding the Khojaly and Sumqayit tragedies, see: Cartner, 1997; Hirose & Jasutis, 2014, pp. 8-9; Kucera, 2017; Libaridian, 2014; McGuinness, 2012.
13Zaur Khalilov, Director of the NGO, Civic Integration Foundation, also expressed this viewpoint in an unpublished interview with the author (Aug. 19, 2016: Tbilisi).
as commonplace allegations of voter coercion and fraud in minority-populated districts. Local Georgian Azeri-Turk representatives of the governing party rarely speak out of turn regarding issues of importance to their constituents. A language barrier continues to exist for many Georgian Azeri-Turks that exacerbates perceptions of such isolation and impedes the successful integration of members of this group within Georgia’s socio-economic and political spheres. Despite the considerable hardships encountered in this regard, migration trends suggest that Georgian Azeri-Turks are leaving Georgia at a slower rate than are representatives of other groups, titular Georgians included. Economic hardships have necessitated the economic migration of many Georgian Azeri-Turks from the country in pursuit of work in places like Russia, Turkey, and/or Azerbaijan, yet immigration-related difficulties in such countries (particularly Russia and Azerbaijan) make permanent relocation problematic. As more and more Georgian Azeri-Turk youth have come to study in Georgian universities since 2010, language and other socio-cultural barriers between themselves and their fellow titular Georgian classmates have gradually decreased as a result of increased inter-group contact, which has been facilitated, in turn, by the acquisition of better Georgian language skills by Georgian Azeri-Turk students. Yet deficiencies pertaining to the quality of education received by students in minority language schools have continued to result in lower entrance exam scores and, therefore, fewer Georgian Azeri-Turks studying in these universities than otherwise could be. As long as the future of the ‘1+4 Program’ remains uncertain, so, too, will be the future of the integration process.
This research project demonstrates the contradictions inherent in conceptions of national identities and the ‘historical homelands’ with which they are intertwined. We see here how ‘nations’ are imagined into existence through the confluence of historical, mnemonic, socio-cultural, political, and even demographic trends, trends which are rooted in space and time as well as in individual and collective consciousness. We observe further, however, the ways that symbolic constructions of nationhood are marred with internal frictions and fissures. This research contributes to literature on the subject of nations and associated nationalisms by demonstrating the socially-constructed, instrumental, and elite-driven nature of nationnesses and national identities—all while acknowledging the roles played by historical accounts and events in the negotiation of nations and their associated national identities. In brief, the work represented within the pages of this dissertation is neither an espousal of primordialism (Gumilev, 1990)14, Smith’s ‘perennialism’ (1991, 1994) or ‘ethnosymbolism’ (1998), nor strictly of the work of ‘modernists’ the likes of Breuilly (1985) and Gellner (1983). Rather, the theoretical framework represented in this work lies between that of Smith (1995) on nations as gastronomic, geological structures awaiting ‘(re)discovery’ by cultural and political entrepreneurs (see also Hutchinson, 2004), Anderson (1983/2006) on nations as ‘imagined communities’, and Brubaker (1996, 2002), Gellner (1983), and Hobstbawn (1990) on nations as elite-driven constructs popularized through varying mixtures of fancy and socioeconomic advancement. The approach to studies of nations and national identities represented here acknowledges the importance of the existence of certain historical phenomena to the creation and salience of contemporary ‘nations’, while simultaneously emphasizing the elite-driven, instrumental, and affective nature of collective social organization. This study contributes to contemporary discussions of the non-binary nature of nation-ness and national identity—as not either/or (ethnic or civic, liberal or illiberal, democratic or undemocratic), but, rather, both/and (cf. Hanson & Hesli, 2009; Zimmer, 2003). In most contexts, conceptions, discourses, and narratives of nations and national identities contain an intermixture of these elements, and expressions of these concepts will inevitably vary from scale to scale, audience to audience, and spatio-temporal context to spatio-temporal context.15

Similarly, this work contributes to literature within the realms of Geography (Cultural, Human, and Political) by uncovering the ways in which geopolitical abstractions of nation- and state-hood tend to present an inadequate and problematic view of social existence. Although scholars in disciplines like Anthropology and Sociology have been problematizing notions of seemingly ‘fixed’ categorizations of social existence such as ‘nations’ since the early 1990s (Appadurai, 1996; Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1994; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992), geographers were not far behind in furthering discussions of hybridized, mobile subject positions (Blunt, 2007; Mitchell, 1997; Marden, 1997; Rios & Adive, 2010). Research in this direction has promising implications for studies of ‘Diasporas’ and diasporic identities, as frequently such research operates from the problematic assumption that members of non-titular collectives are, in a sense, ‘diasporic’ in that they originally ‘come from’ somewhere else. Such studies have been commonplace in a number of disciplines—from Anthropology to History, from Geography and Political Science to Sociology (Brubaker, 1996; Cohen, 1996; Gamlen, 2014; Safran, 1991; Sheffer, 2003; Smith, 2010; Walker, 1986). Why then, given scholarly attempts to de-essentialize certain forms of collective identity (i.e. ‘ethnic’ and/or ‘national’ identity) through ‘Diaspora’-related discourse, have attempts to do so often been accompanied by reversions—by ‘fallings back’—into old patterns of essentialization? It really is exceedingly difficult to escape the ‘territorial trap’ (Agnew, 1994) represented to us via visual, auditory, and written forms, through the transmission of both overt and subliminal messages. Diasporas are not phenomena that simply exist ‘out there’ in the world; they are projects and processes that are facilitated by the actions of political and cultural entrepreneurs, and these entrepreneurs exist in multiple states—in the so-called ‘sending’ states as well as in the ‘host’ or ‘receiving’ states (cf. Brubaker, 2005; Delano Alonso & Mylonas, 2019; Mavroudi, 2007). In this sense, then, this research contributes to the multi-disciplinary literature of ‘Diaspora’ by encouraging a critical examination of the concept’s very theoretical foundations as conducive to simplified, binary categorizations of social existence—such as ‘host/home’, ‘sending/receiving’, ‘native/newcomer’, and ‘rooted/mobile’. One of the goals of this dissertation is to draw attention to the shortcomings in such literature and to encourage a more critical approach toward the study of nations as well as ‘national’ (‘titular’, ‘non-titular’/‘diasporic’) identities.

14See also critiques by Suny (2001) and Tishkov (n.d.).
15For more on theorizations of nations and nationalism, see Chernilo (2011), Conversi (2012), Penrose (2002), and Thompson (2001).
The challenge of researching and speaking about identity-related issues is embedded within the very language that we as researchers employ in reference to individuals and collectivities. That said, the challenge is to draw attention to the phenomenon that is ‘groupness’, or the self-ascription of multiple—often vast numbers of individuals—to common categories or stances without either reifying the categories themselves or taking for granted the individual’s ability to choose if or how s/he self-ascribes. This is the gist of the argument made by Brubaker & Cooper (2000) in their well-known critique of common trends in identity-related studies, as well as the basis of the argument made by Brubaker in his critique of the language commonly applied to studies of ethnicity (2002). What the aforementioned authors are keen to emphasize to scholars interested in identity studies is that the language used to describe what are in fact complex, flexible, and dynamic processes tends to be overly simplistic and serves to reify that which can be fleeting and riddled with internal contradiction. In addition to implying internal cohesion and acquiescence, language pointing to the unproblematic existence of ‘groups’—be they ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic, national, etc.—obscures the processes underlying the selection of parameters to symbolize a given category and distinguish it from others. The aforementioned authors were prudent in highlighting these issues as common pitfalls in many studies of identity, yet their identification of such pitfalls is not meant to discourage scholars from further investigating the processes and categories of self- and other-ascription. Rather, it becomes the responsibility of researchers like myself to frame identities as stances or claims—fields of identification—rather than static, immutable categories.

Furthermore, we researchers are tasked with identifying the key processes and actors helping to determine the boundaries of membership in a so-called collectivity at a given point in time. The task requires the researcher to study the ways in which categories are disseminated, legitimated, and, over time, shifted to reflect changes in influential geopolitical and socio-economic trends. My previous reference to Georgian Azeri-Turks as members of a minority community/group/collective, therefore, is meant to call attention to the multi-scalar processes—from the formation of the individual’s worldview and interpersonal relations within a locale to officially recognized categories of ‘Us’ as opposed to ‘Them’ (i.e. ‘Georgians’ vs. ‘Armenians’, ‘Azeris/Azerbaijanis’, ‘Russians’, etc.). That said, by referring to ‘Georgian Azeri-Turks’ and their existence as a ‘group’, ‘community’, etc., I do not mean to imply the existence of one united, arbitrary, and coherent field of identification. Such a designation is meant simply as a cognitive device aiding in the expression of elements of an everyday reality: there is a large number of individuals living compactly in the region of Kvemo Kartli who share a number of commonalities, perhaps first and foremost of which is their distinguishability from other, better institutionally represented individuals (i.e. titular ‘Georgians’). These differences most often take the form of language (individuals speaking mother tongues from different language families), religious affiliation (individuals commonly aligning themselves more closely to one religion rather than another, irrespective of actual religiosity), and both normative and value-based distinctions (encompassing observance of particular dates of importance and of common spoken or unspoken guidelines of behavior). The purpose of this particular research project is to assess whether or not these inter-personal differences and similarities can be considered to constitute a collective identity—that is, as a collective stance or claim of ‘groupness’ or shared, felt affiliation with other ‘like’ individuals.

It all comes down to questions of scale and agency. At the level of the individual, one could self-ascribe to a number of available categories—male/female, rich/poor, single/partnered, student/teacher, parent/child, etc. Yet, according to most psychologists, sociologists, human geographers, and political scientists, if an individual was to attach any importance to membership in a given category, then belonging to said category would need to be meaningful for the individual in question (Chandra, 2012, pp. 1-49; Cohen, 1985; see also Phillips, 2002). Does the individual acquire material gain, self-esteem, feelings of joy, comradery, safety, or selflessness by virtue of his/her self-ascription to a particular grouping? Furthermore, how similar are the individuals who comprise the membership of the group? If the availability of resources is finite, then will the similarities between the group members—all aligned under a common category of identification—be sufficient to withstand internal and external pressures? These are all questions with which researchers dealing with questions of collective identity have no doubt had to grapple at various junctures. These questions are also at the heart of research pertaining to two variants of collective identity of particular relevance to this study—‘national’ and ‘ethnic’ identity.
2.2 ‘NATIONAL’ AND ‘ETHNIC’ IDENTITY: TWO OFT-RELATED FORMS OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

The concept of ‘ethnicity’ is a contestable one, given the ways the term connotes or implies biological or genetic distinctions between members of certain populations (Brubaker, 2002; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Kolossov, 2003; McCrone, 2008; Tishkov, 1997). All too often the ‘ethnic’ label is applied to people and the traits which are said to form the basis of distinction between individuals in social settings, and too often the label is utilized for nefarious purposes (i.e. discrimination and/or violence). Being ethnically X, Y, or Z implies the existence of pure biological categories into which individuals are born, categories that are inherited through blood and patrimony. Yet very few collectives can truthfully lay claim to biological purity and inter-generational exogamy. People have been moving and interacting with others from different backgrounds to a greater or lesser degree since antiquity, and, in the absence of such interaction (i.e. in contexts of complete isolation), collective, so-called ‘ethnic’ traits would likely mean very little. After all, if one knows nothing else of the world and its peoples beyond one’s own village, how is one to know that such differences exist in the first place? Biological intermixture has proven to be a steady feature of the human existence since time immemorial, as has the mixture of various cultural traditions—from the spread and adaption of features of various cuisines and art forms to other peoples and places to the gradual incorporation of loan words into various languages. It is through inter-personal and inter-group contact that individuals come to formulate their own subjectivities in light of perceived similarities and differences (Barth, 1969; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Paasi, 1996, 1999). This means that terms like ‘ethnicity’ should be treated with caution. Although such categories can and often do carry considerable popular currency among members of particular populations, as an academic concept they are flimsy at best and biased at worst.

Furthermore, meanings of particular terms often vary from time to place. Take, for example, the concept of ‘nationality’ as commonly utilized and understood in the Soviet context—one’s nationality had ethnic and territorial connotations. National territories were those officially considered to be the ‘homelands’ to particular configurations of individuals. The ‘nation’ was conceived as a body of individuals sharing a common language, history, culture, and territorial homeland. Membership in the nation was considered to be inherited at birth in conjunction with the categories of one’s parents. Biological similarities between members of the ‘national body’ were touted by the respective national intelligentsias in conjunction with the ideological whims of the center. By solidifying the link between people as members of a unique ‘nation’ as well as of the ‘nation’ to its rightful ‘homeland’, the ‘nation’ in the Soviet sense was really a culmination of narratives promoting perceptions of shared biological, blood-based ties (i.e. perceived ethnicity) and territorially-based categories of affiliation (Hirsch, 2005; Kaiser, 1994; Martin, 2001; Tishkov, 1997). To a large extent, such conceptions of ethno-nationality remain influential across the countries and territories of the post-Soviet space to this day, yet such coupling of ethnicity and nationality is not uncommon elsewhere throughout the world, either.

A student, scholar, or researcher with an interest in the post-Soviet space would be extremely hard-pressed to speak about territorially-based entities without making use of terms like ‘ethnic’, ‘national’, or even ‘groups’. The Soviet legacy of institutionalized ethno-nationality lives on in the post-Soviet period, despite recent endeavors and political rhetoric concerning the widening of symbolic parameters of nationality to encompass much more than either titular or non-titular ethno-territorial identities. That said, despite contemporary discussions in political and civic circles over inclusive, civic narratives of nationality based upon citizenship rather than ties to blood and/or territory, the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union set about establishing their independent political regimes upon old institutional and ideological frameworks. In such frameworks, titular ethno-nationality remains a key legitimizing factor in intra- and inter-state politics.

2.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF TERRITORY TO CONCEPTIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Anssi Paasi’s work (1996, 1999, 2011, 2016) regarding the concept of spatial socialization focuses upon the processes and mechanisms through which states (re)create, disseminate, and regulate national identity narratives among members of the body politic. Paasi’s focus upon the state as a key actor in such processes is reflective of the continued authority and influence maintained by most states in the regulation of domestic (‘internal’) and inter-‘national’ (‘external’) politics. Despite the strains and limitations placed upon states in this, an era of ever-expanding multi-polar, inter-scalar interconnections and transfers of goods, services, and people, the state has not withered away or been superseded by the authority of transnational institutions or networks. Rather, the state has shown a propensity for adaptation and maneuverability. The financial, geo-political, and even socio-cultural resources at the disposal of the state and its constituent institutions
make the state uniquely positioned and adept to engage in nation(al identity)-building (ibid; Flint & Taylor, 2007; Guibernau, 2007).

A key aim in spatial socialization processes is to engrain the ‘nation-territory-state’ trifecta in mass consciousness. The embodiment of this idea—the territorial state as a bounded container of both power and culture—in collective consciousness means that, from birth until death, individuals are encouraged to think of themselves as inextricably linked to particular national territories, irrespective of where their lives as mobile individuals might take them. And yet this very idea constitutes what Agnew (1994) refers to as the “territorial trap”; in both popular consciousness and academic research, there is a tendency to restrict ourselves and our thinking regarding nations and states to bounded, static points on maps. We too often limit ourselves (consciously or subconsciously) to working with socially constructed categories of belonging rather than attempting to see the world and its complexities in a much more nuanced, contextualized manner. Although it is important to recognize the characteristics and pitfalls of such ways of thinking, it does not mean that we as researchers and scholars ought not to engage with, unpack, and problematize such mental constructions. It is through such engagement that we can better understand the means and motivations through which the territorial trap is reified or challenged under present circumstances as well as better identify the possibilities for future categories of affiliation and belonging.

2.4 BORDERLANDS: SITES OF IDENTITY ENCOUNTER, BLURRING, AND NEGOTIATION

A key conceptual theme underlying and connecting the various chapters of this dissertation is that of the *borderland*, or more specifically in this case study regarding the Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli, the *border region*. Geographers and non-geographers alike have taken note of the material and immaterial aspects of ‘in-between-ness’ represented by the spaces alongside states’ political borders and the populations residing in these spaces (Brah, 1996; Kaiser & Nikiforova, 2006; Markusse, 2011; Newman, 2011; Paasi & Prokkola, 2008; Prokkola, 2009; Zhurzhenko, 2011). These lived-in spaces and the peoples living out their lives within and between them exist along the frontiers of concrete, material borders as well as abstract mental constructions naturalizing connections between titular, ‘national’ populations and bounded, governed territorial entities (Konrad, 2014; Kolossov, 2011; Van Houtum, 2011). Yet as scholars from a diverse range of disciplines demonstrate, borderlands are particularly poignant nodes of identity negotiation, contestation, and change, due in large part to the proximity of these spaces to so-called ‘national borders’ on the ground as well as in collective cognition (Brah, 1996; Kaiser & Nikiforova, 2006). Whereas state officials and other elites can and often do exercise considerable authority over the securitization and/or porousness of particular political and administrative borders and the ways said borders are institutionalized and embedded within mass consciousness, individuals attribute meaning and value to said borders differentially (Konrad, 2014; Prokkola, 2009). In the words of Kaiser & Nikiforova (2006),

> borderlands are not only zones of contestation where the interiority and exteriority of place and identity between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ are reconfigured. They are also spaces of becoming or zones of conjuncture, where self-identification and other-ness are in dialogue with one another, where ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ get challenged and jumbled up, where other-ness is mapped onto self, and self onto other-ness. (P. 936)

The borderland of Kvemo Kartli is referred to more specifically as a *border region* due to the confluence of internal administrative borders and external political borders represented by the territory in question. That is, Kvemo Kartli is delimited by internal and as well as external political boundaries and exists as a ‘border region’ in official parlance as well as in theory. The long-term geographic concentration of Georgian Azeri-Turks within this border region, coupled with the geographic and socio-cultural proximity of peoples across the external political border in Azerbaijan, represents a particularly fascinating context for a multi-scalar, multi-polar study of identity negotiation.

Informing processes of identity construction, negotiation, and change are localized contexts of historical, economic, political, and socio-cultural interaction between representatives of various collectivities (Paasi, 1996; Paasi & Prokkola, 2008). The nature of the concrete and abstract boundaries separating individuals ‘on the ground’ and in social consciousness is determined by the historical and contemporary ‘realities’—economic, demographic, political, socio-cultural, etc.—that served to bring these boundaries into existence in the first place and sustain and/or challenge them in the present (Kolossov, 2011; Markusse, 2011; Paasi, 1996; Paasi & Prokkola, 2008; see also Kaiser, 1994). Over the course of this dissertation, I highlight the processes operating at both the macro- and micro-levels that target the territories of the Kvemo
Given the heterogeneous nature of societies as aggregates of individuals with different backgrounds, tastes, desires, and mobilities, how, then, is the state able to command the attention and interest of the society in a manner conducive to the dissemination and reification of a national identity? The work of scholars like Brubaker (1996, 2002; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Kong & Yeoh, 1997; Liebkind, 2010; Nash, 2000; Palmer, 1998) further complicates understandings and applications of categories of *nation* and *national identity*. Not only are there bound to be internal fissures marring the surfaces of nations and their constituent identities from within, but the situation becomes more complicated indeed when political and symbolic *national* borders do not align. In a context wherein exclusive categories of ethno-nationality maintain purchase in public and political circles, populations with members who do not wish to conform to popular understandings of nation and national identity often find themselves in an uncomfortable position. The nature of this position and the extent to which it is uncomfortable or even unbearable will indeed depend upon the context at hand. Members of so-called ‘ethnic’ or ‘national minority’ groups may enjoy a certain extent of cultural or political autonomy in one state, or be subject to scapegoating and heightened surveillance in another. Furthermore, the resources and aims of such minority groups will differ from place to place. Those with more active, mobilized members and sufficient financial and/or political resources may demand more cultural/political autonomy from their home or host states, whereas groups with fewer such resources might have little recourse to attempt to change the status quo (Brubaker, 1996, 2002; see also Dombinska, Maracz & Tonk, 2014).

When members of a non-titular minority group are regularly and politically considered to have ties—socio-cultural, linguistic, religious, historical, etc.—with the titular population of a neighboring nationalizing state, the collective relationship of members of the aforementioned group to the ‘host state’ becomes exponentially more complicated. The more diverse the actors, audiences, stakes, and power differentials involved, the greater the likelihood of identifying one common solution that is both feasible and palatable from all angles. Yet this certainly does not preclude the possibility of shared interests and fields of cooperation on particular issues, when the presumptive gains outweigh the potential losses. This is the challenge of the present day—to identify fields of shared interests and cooperation that have the potential to bring benefits (material, symbolic, or both) to the involved parties to a greater degree than would conflict (cf. Petersen, 2012).

### 2.5.1 Reconciling Intra-Group Similarity and Difference

Given the heterogeneous nature of societies as aggregates of individuals with different backgrounds, tastes, desires, and mobilities, how, then, is the state able to command the attention and interest of the society in a manner conducive to the dissemination and reification of a national identity? The work of scholars like Dombinska, Maracz & Tonk (2014) further complicates understandings and applications of categories of *nation* and *national identity*. Not only are there bound to be internal fissures marring the surfaces of nations and their constituent identities from within, but the situation becomes more complicated indeed when political and symbolic *national* borders do not align. In a context wherein exclusive categories of ethno-nationality maintain purchase in public and political circles, populations with members who do not wish to conform to popular understandings of nation and national identity often find themselves in an uncomfortable position. The nature of this position and the extent to which it is uncomfortable or even unbearable will indeed depend upon the context at hand. Members of so-called ‘ethnic’ or ‘national minority’ groups may enjoy a certain extent of cultural or political autonomy in one state, or be subject to scapegoating and heightened surveillance in another. Furthermore, the resources and aims of such minority groups will differ from place to place. Those with more active, mobilized members and sufficient financial and/or political resources may demand more cultural/political autonomy from their home or host states, whereas groups with fewer such resources might have little recourse to attempt to change the status quo (Brubaker, 1996, 2002; see also Dombinska, Maracz & Tonk, 2014).

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### 2.5 UNPACKING ETHNO-NATIONAL IDENTITIES AND HOW TO STUDY THEM

The borders of territorial states rarely, if ever, contain homogenous national populations. Furthermore, if one is going to speak about ‘nations’ at all, then which understanding/s of the concept is one to apply? Is one to understand the ‘nation’ as an exclusive category based upon perceived ties of blood and soil, or is one to apply a more inclusive, citizenship-based understanding to the concept? These questions relate to the substance of national identities as well. Given the dual nature of ‘nation’ as a concept and the lack of clear definitions typically applied to it, the nations and national identities referenced here are conceptualized and understood pragmatically. Nations and their associated national identities are, then, neither purely exclusive nor purely inclusive in nature; the actor/s invoking these terms and the audience/s being addressed address the ways that ‘nation’ and ‘national identity’ are understood within a given place and time. Routinization, too, is an essential component of meaning-making and dissemination. By regularly applying particular understandings and attitudes to particular categories (‘nation’ and ‘national identity’) in front of certain audiences, routines and patterns of speech become learned, expected, and replicated via other actors, audiences, and channels (cf. Kertzer & Ariel, 2002; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Paasi, 1996, 1999, 2016; Polese, et. al., 2017). Rhetoric and imagery alone do not impart meaning and value to understandings of the nation and national identity, however; performance, too, is key to such processes. The individual formulates and reformulates his or her own identity/ies in and through interaction with internal and external stimuli, all the while making decisions regarding what to do, where, when, with whom, and why. The individual performs his or her identity/ies in relation to interactions with others, exposure to rhetoric and imagery, and in contexts influenced by local and global pressures (socio-economic and geopolitical, for example) (ibid; Brubaker, 2002; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Kong & Yeoh, 1997; Liebkind, 2010; Nash, 2000; Palmer, 1998).

It is the question of individual agency that further complicates understandings and applications of categories of *nation* and *national identity*. Not only are there bound to be internal fissures marring the surfaces of nations and their constituent identities from within, but the situation becomes more complicated indeed when political and symbolic *national* borders do not align. In a context wherein exclusive categories of ethno-nationality maintain purchase in public and political circles, populations with members who do not wish to conform to popular understandings of nation and national identity often find themselves in an uncomfortable position. The nature of this position and the extent to which it is uncomfortable or even unbearable will indeed depend upon the context at hand. Members of so-called ‘ethnic’ or ‘national minority’ groups may enjoy a certain extent of cultural or political autonomy in one state, or be subject to scapegoating and heightened surveillance in another. Furthermore, the resources and aims of such minority groups will differ from place to place. Those with more active, mobilized members and sufficient financial and/or political resources may demand more cultural/political autonomy from their home or host states, whereas groups with fewer such resources might have little recourse to attempt to change the status quo (Brubaker, 1996, 2002; see also Dombinska, Maracz & Tonk, 2014).

When members of a non-titular minority group are popularly and politically considered to have ties—to socio-cultural, linguistic, religious, historical, etc.—with the titular population of a neighboring nationalizing state, the collective relationship of members of the aforementioned group to the ‘host state’ becomes exponentially more complicated. The more diverse the actors, audiences, stakes, and power differentials involved, the greater the likelihood of identifying one common solution that is both feasible and palatable from all angles. Yet this certainly does not preclude the possibility of shared interests and fields of cooperation on particular issues, when the presumptive gains outweigh the potential losses. This is the challenge of the present day—to identify fields of shared interests and cooperation that have the potential to bring benefits (material, symbolic, or both) to the involved parties to a greater degree than would conflict (cf. Petersen, 2012).
Cohen (1985), Hobsbawn & Ranger (1983), and Smith (1991) demonstrates that the characteristics chosen to exemplify the parameters of membership in the nation as an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983/1991) must be widely applicable to key members of a chosen population and, furthermore, have the potential to inspire feelings of pride, loyalty, unity, and even symbolic longevity among its constituents. Selecting and capitalizing upon prominent and widespread characteristics like a mother tongue, religious confession, territorial homeland, and localized values and norms of behavior, for example, allows nation-builders to attract ‘like’ members while distinguishing them from ‘unlike’ individuals and groups. These in-group similarities and out-group differences are then framed as sources of pride, as connections to a long-gone past in addition to hopes for a glorious future for members of the nation in question. In-group idiosyncrasies including, for example, regional dialects, religious sectism, and/or localized variations in cuisine, dress, etc. are downplayed as being subservient to the overarching nation and its dominant characteristics. Local and regional identities are subsumed within meta-narratives of national identity in much the same way as the matroshka doll is comprised of smaller, nested components (cf. Herb & Kaplan, 1999). These idiosyncrasies are framed by elites engaged in nation-building projects as having much more in common with the traits and characteristics of the overarching meta-nation than they differ. This popularly perceived commonality helps to reconcile and downplay in-group fissures. When the distance between chosen characteristics is considerably greater from one person and/or collective to the next, however, such differences become much more difficult to reconcile. For example, when the languages spoken in a given region are from completely different language families, the religious confessions have little to nothing in common, and the norms and values evinced by members of collective vary dramatically, other nodes of affiliation must be crafted or unearthed. These nodes of affiliation must have the potential to override existing differences by identifying and working toward a common goal that provides some sort of benefit to all parties involved, whether material or symbolic in nature (cf. Cohen, 1985). In this way, it is much easier to grasp the ways that categories like ‘majority’ and ‘minority’, ‘titular’ and ‘non-titular’ are imagined into existence. Yet how do states as well as political and cultural entrepreneurs go about disseminating them through state- and non-state channels?

Narratives are carefully selected from pre-existing (albeit oftentimes highly politicized) histories and collective memories and are modified and/or embellished to interests of those in power. Simultaneously, these narratives inspire feelings of pride in and protective ness of the nation and territorial homeland (Hall, 1996; Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1983; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Faasti, 1999; Tishkov, 1997; see also: Liu & Hilton, 2005, Smith, 1995, Wretsch, 2008, and Zimmer, 2003). In turn, actors appeal to particular narratives for the boost of legitimacy provided by these narratives as actors seek to appeal to peoples’ baser emotions and contemporary needs (Brubaker, 1996, 2002; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Connor, 2004; Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1983). National identity narratives frame the condition of the nation in the past, the present, and the future while legitimizing the existence of a sovereign state created by and for the people to govern within the political borders of the rightful ‘homeland’. Narratives make reference to popular and widespread categories like mother tongue, religious affiliation, heritage, and territory to construct symbolic parameters of ‘group-ness’. The groups (or, in this case, nations) under construction play the central role in historical narratives and collective memories (Smith, 1996, 2004). Historical narratives and collective memories serve as formative sites in the development of the ‘national character’ and typically involve shows of bravery in the face of internal and external threats (Smith, 1996, 2004). The category of the ‘Us’ is continually painted in a bright light that shines benevolently upon its adherents, whereas the category of the ‘Them’ is painted in ominous colors casting shadows upon those who fall under its umbrella. What exists within the symbolic and material borders of the nation and its territorial state is to be revered and protected; what exists outside is to be viewed with caution, as it is foreign and potentially threatening. Internal cracks in the fabric of the nation and its constituent population are obscured when viewed from a distance rather than up close; internal differences become more pronounced when viewed under a metaphorical microscope, and less easily discernable when surveyed from the vantage point of a satellite. In short, scale matters.

2.5.2 The Limits of Self-Identification

Just as individuals can express affinities to multiple identity categories (familial and gender-based, socio-economic, etc.), individuals can demonstrate affinities to different national categories (e.g. American by birth, Finnish by citizenship). Yet the nature of identity as both self- and other-ascribed means that, simply because one considers oneself to be ‘American’ as well as ‘Finnish’, ‘male’ as well as ‘female’, ‘Christian’ and ‘Muslim’, etc., there remains the question of how one will be received by others considering themselves to be representatives of said categories. While some categories are complimentary and exist easily alongside one another, others are reconciled with much more difficulty due to the exclusive and/or quasi-biological meanings and values that they come to acquire (Chandra, 2012, pp. 132-177). Examples could include categories such as ‘Black/White’, ‘Christian/Muslim’, ‘male/female’, and ‘indigenous/non-indigenous’.
These categories are expressive of social, contextual meanings and understandings of difference. When such categories are commonly cited in popular discourse as being opposite from and/or in competition with one another, it becomes difficult for one person to credibly ascribe to two competing or contradictory categories at the same time. Similarly, when ‘nation’ is understood in strict, exclusive terms based upon perceptions of shared ethnicity/ancestry, it becomes difficult to credibly self-ascribe to two nations simultaneously, especially when relations between the nations in question are strained. If membership in the nation is to be inclusive and dependent upon citizenship rather than real or imagined blood-based ties, then such a simultaneous dual self-ascription may be much more credible, both within the mind of the individual in question as well as to the constituent populations of the nations in question.

In the post-Soviet context, nationality as a citizenship-based category of belonging is only just beginning to acquire popular as well as political purchase. Whereas a native speaker of Azerbaijani or an adherent of the Muslim faith could theoretically self-ascribe as ‘Georgian’, would s/he, commonly understood or described as an ‘ethnic Azerbaijani/Azeri’ by state and non-state actors, be accepted by said actors as ‘Georgian’, if s/he chose to identify as such? This would very likely depend on who is doing the categorizing as well as where and for what purposes. In this particular case, certain obstacles arise that would likely inhibit the aforementioned individual’s acceptance as ‘Georgian’, irrespective of his or her parentage or place of birth. These obstacles might well include such aspects as religious affiliation, mother tongue, and perhaps even elements of physical appearance/dress (e.g. religious head coverings, etc.). That said, one might genuinely see oneself as ‘Georgian’, ‘American’, ‘Finnish’, ‘Russian’, etc., but varying proportions of the society in question may not agree with this self-assessment and may draw their own separate conclusions. The key to studying forms of individual as well as collective identity is to be ever mindful of the fact that identity is both self- and other-ascribed (cf. Fishman & Garcia, 2011).

The state exercises symbolic as well as technical monopolies of control and/or violence (cf. Paasi & Prokkola, 2008, p. 17; Weber, 1918/1946) and is therefore uniquely positioned to propagate select identity narratives. These narratives are in turn reflective of overarching geopolitical, socio-economic, and socio-cultural discourses prevailing within a given time and place. National identity narratives are imbued within domestic legislation regarding, for example, official language policies, educational curricula, and the selection of official symbols and countrywide dates of celebration or commemoration. National tourism agencies, bi- and multi-lateral treaties and agreements, too, reflect and facilitate particular perceptions of states and their constituent populations. By controlling the breadth and depth of official involvement in domestic and international politics and relations, states’ governing regimes attempt to influence the ways that their territorial states are perceived from both without and within (cf. Flint & Taylor, 2007, p. 191; Paasi, 1996 and 2003). Domestic and international policies and agreements further particular national identity narratives in hopes of balancing the centripetal and centrifugal forces that threaten the state’s existence. Yet even the state cannot exercise complete control over the ways that individuals perceive and respond to these narratives.

### 2.5.3 National Symbols and Narratives

The work of scholars like Abrahamson (2017), Anderson (1983/1991), Billig (1995), Brunn (2000), Foote & Azaryahu (2007), Hewitt & Unwin (2004), Johnson (1995), Jones & Merriman (2009), Kong & Yeoh (1997), Nora (1989), Penrose & Cumming (2011), and Unwin & Hewitt (2001) all demonstrate that allusions to national identity exist nearly everywhere, but especially within the public realm. What state-sponsored ‘birthright’ trips, national education programs, currencies, monuments, road signs, censes, maps, celebratory and commemorative dates have in common, for example, is that each encapsulates national identity narratives and makes them accessible to the public. Each represents a field wherein the state interacts with its constituents, even in situations where these interactions are subject to strict surveillance.

Approving select history books for use in schools, requiring language exams for citizenship, singing the national anthem at official and unofficial gatherings, and carefully selecting images for use on flags, coats of arms, etc.—all these measures reflect official conceptions of what it means to belong to a particular nation and state. These measures reflect a measure of inter-group uniqueness as well as intra-group similarity, and they point to future as well as contemporary goals. Assertions of uniqueness help to set the nation and its homeland, the territorial state, apart from other nations and states. The similarity is the call of the ‘like calling to like’; that is, the symbols and narratives are those that ought to be recognizable and meaningful to members of the target nation. These symbols and narratives separate the ‘native’ or ‘rightful’ people from the ‘outsiders’ or ‘newcomers’.

One has but to use ‘one’s’ imagination to consider the wide variety of vehicles utilized by the state to disseminate national identity narratives. These vehicles can exist in a variety of material formats and abstract forms, from stone to textile, paper, and metal to experiences such as inter-national flights, parades, and carnivals. Furthermore, these vehicles are present within closed-door meetings between state
officials and/or diplomats as well as in the schools and on the roads of remote villages. From the Georgian flag hanging within the parliamentary chambers to the one flying above the Presidential Palace in Tbilisi, and from the lapel pin on the MP’s jacket to the miniature plastic flag waved by the little girl attending the Independence Day celebration in Marneuli—discourses of territorial (nation-)statehood are omnipresent, as are their constituent narratives. National identity discourses and narratives can manifest in ways that are banal and inconspicuous, as Billig (1995) demonstrates, just as they can be mobilized in ways that facilitate the perpetration or threat of inter-group or inter-state violence (Paasi, 2016).

Yet the state does not exercise complete control over the hearts and minds of its constituents. Its nation-building endeavors can shape individual consciousness and/or constrain individual behavior, but the state cannot dictate either (cf. Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004; Johnson, 1995; Mitchell, 2003). For example, national systems of education and official language policies help to establish certain elements of the individual and group psyche; through language instruction (mother tongue, official, and/or foreign languages) as well as courses in History, Geography, and Civics/Government, centrally-planned systems of education teach youth about the history of their respective territorial (nation-)states and the places these units occupy in broader historical, political, economic, and cultural frameworks. Yet, for all of the state’s efforts to shape individuals into good citizens and/or members of the nation, even the most autocratic state cannot force individuals to blindly or inwardly accept all of the national identity narratives that it bestows upon them.

News outlets, social media pages and their subscribers regularly disseminate coverage of celebrations of public holidays, official commemorations of influential people and significant events, and meetings between state officials as well as foreign dignitaries. Internet, television, and radio platforms bring coverage of these events into individual homes, workplaces, and modes of transportation (cars, buses, etc.) in ways that merge the public and private spheres. Those unwilling or unable to attend the abovementioned events are able to witness them from afar if they so choose. Those who do not wish to witness these events may turn the channel/station, actively engage in some other means of employment, or simply ignore the proceedings. Still others may express disagreement or dissatisfaction with the content, aims, or bases of the proceedings and may express mental or bodily resistance, perhaps during physical attendance or behind the relative safety of a television or computer screen. Furthermore, individuals and groups can respond to such proceedings by engaging in forms of peaceful or violent protest. Individuals are not passive marionettes that will always bend in ways dictated by the whims and wishes of the powerful. Just as power can be and often is repressive, it can also be creativity generating. People are adept at finding ways around laws and practices that they dislike and creating spaces for themselves in contexts where such spaces are perceived to be scarce or overly restrictive (Waït, 2005; based on the work of Foucault, 1977). This dissertation examines officially propagated identity narratives as well as the vehicles through which these narratives are symbolized and circulated, but it also examines the ways that these narratives/vehicles are encountered, perceived, and, at times, countered by members of the Georgian Azeri-Turk population in Kvemo Kartli.

2.6 THE SCRIPTING AND PERFORMANCE OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN POST-SOVIET GEORGIA

It is important to note that there is no such thing as a singular, coherent national identity awaiting discovery by the enlightened academic or politician; rather, national identity is a field of multiple discourses and narratives, both of which are oft-times internally contradictory and always context-dependent. It matters who is selecting the narratives and symbols for dissemination as well as for whom (which audience) and for what purpose/s. The narratives or stories involved touch upon the unique characteristics/traits of the national body and the role of these characteristics in the historical, contemporary, and/or future development of the nation. The concepts of symbolic boundaries of group membership and flexible memory narratives are introduced in the first two articles of this dissertation as useful tools through which one can scrutinize and unpack discourses of national identity in Georgia as well as in other contexts.

The symbolic boundaries of membership in the Georgian nation are comprised of various narratives and symbols of groupness that are engineered to facilitate in-group recognition and out-group delimitation. Irrespective of variance in individual valuation and meaning-attribution, these symbolic boundaries make it possible to distinguish the ’Us’ from the ’Them’ while calling to mind commonly recognizable historical and collective memory narratives. In the Georgian context, the individual components of Ilia Chavchavadze’s Fatherland-Language-Faith triad continue to be relevant symbolic boundaries even today, although the interpretation and porousness of each boundary has undergone considerable changes since Chavchavadze wrote of them in the mid-19th century. Furthermore, changes in official ideologies and governing regimes have resulted in the downplaying or rejection of some narratives and symbols at the
expense of resurrected, reinterpreted, or even, on occasion, newly constructed narratives and symbols.

Georgia’s current or aspired membership in such international bodies as the Council of Europe, United Nations, and European Union has necessitated a pragmatic approach toward the framing of Georgian domestic and foreign policy, wherein these narratives are framed in less exacting, more open-ended terms—‘Georgia is the homeland of the Georgians, but it is home to many other ethnic groups as well’; ‘Georgians speak Georgian as their mother tongue, but the state respects the rights of ethnic and linguistic minority groups to use their mother tongues as well’; ‘Georgians belong primarily to the Georgian Orthodox Church, but all religions are respected in Georgia’, etc. This vagueness comes across in policy as well as political discourse within and across multiple scales. This is evident in, for example, the lack of precise definitions for what constitutes an ‘ethnic’ and/or ‘national minority’ group and the rights and responsibilities to which its members are privy, which in turn gives state officials wide berth in interpreting domestic constitutional provisions as well as those of international treaties (see Storm 2016). Georgia is merely following the lead of countless other states in Europe as well as the rest of the world by setting forth bare minimum constitutional guarantees for the protection of minority languages, cultures, and religions without stating in any certain terms that languages, cultures, and religions are to be safeguarded, as well as how. A key example of this ambivalence is the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the debates surrounding it in Georgia as well as in many other European states.

Georgia’s Constitution of 1995 guarantees that members of minority groups have the right to use their own languages, practice their own religions, and develop their own cultures without being discriminated against on these or other bases, but specificity is lacking. Indeed, most Georgian Azeri-Turks have access to primary and secondary education in the Azerbaijani language. Access of children to Azerbaijani language pre-schools, however, is problematic, and numerous other reports have detailed the insufficiencies of minority language schools at all educational levels in Georgia. Key problems include the quality of education (due in part to insufficient teacher training and scarce or poor-quality educational materials), insufficient knowledge of the Georgian language among both teachers and students, and, as is often the case, the dilapidated state of the school buildings themselves.

The relationship between the state and the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC), made official in the 2002 Concordat, sends a very clear message to members of other religious groups in the country—that these other religions and their adherents do not belong in Georgia in quite the same way as do the Georgian-speaking members of the GOC. The latter are seen to be native to Georgia, while the latter are not. The benefits of the official state-GOC relationship are most easily identified in terms of tax breaks and property, yet the unofficial benefits are widespread and opaque, much like what exists below the tip of an iceberg. Furthermore, the establishment of the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia in 2011 as a replacement for the Baku-based Caucasus Board of Muslims was seen by many Muslims of the region as an attempt by the Georgian state to maintain tighter control over Georgia’s Muslim population.

Through close examination and analysis of both official and unofficial forms of iconography in their various manifestations, the articles of this dissertation demonstrate attempts at the official level to maintain the symbolic boundaries of membership in the Georgian nation through the propagation of semi-exclusive symbolic boundaries of membership and flexible memory narratives of Georgian identity. Audience and positionality help to determine the ways in which these boundaries and their constituent narratives are invoked as well as the emotions these evoke among viewers and participants. Georgian national identity is scripted and performed through the selection and utilization of symbols layered upon and within official forms of national iconography—including, for example, the religious symbolism, Georgian language script, choice of color/s, and personages featured on banknotes. These official pieces of iconography, resplendent in their symbolism, are not reserved purely for use within parliamentary meetings or display within or outside official buildings. The state flag and national anthem are broadcast through various channels and are visible/heard first-hand at events ranging from soccer matches to Independence Day parades, just as the coats of arms change hands on the backs of the currency used to fund these grand events themselves. The narration of the Georgian nation is carried out within the built landscape as well, where governments and key officials vie for the power to imprint their own interpretations of nationhood upon the physical environment. Although Tbilisi is the most prominent setting for such narrations due to the unique place it occupies in the historical, socio-cultural, and political life and fabric of the country, such narration occurs everywhere, and in particularly in contested spaces such as border regions the likes of Kvemo Kartli (or, to locals, ‘Borchali’).
2.7 KVEMO KARTLI/BORCHALI AND POST-SOVIET AZERBAIJAN

Among both academics and officials in Azerbaijan, Borchali is part of the historical Azerbaijani homeland, yet not quite in the same way as is the contested territory of Nagorno-Karabagh. The differences between these two territories in terms of historical narratives and political priorities is implicit rather than expressly defined. The Borchali region is included into narratives of homeland and the socio-cultural traits of its people due primarily to the linguistic, religious, normative, and value-based affinities shared between the Turkic people of the region and the titular people of Azerbaijan. Borchali features regularly in scholarly research of ashiq (bard) music and carpet-weaving traditions of the region as part in parcel of overarching ‘Azerbaijani’ art forms. These art forms are recognized as sharing important features with similar traditions in other Turkic peoples in the larger region, yet are merely that—similar, not identical. Borchali schools of folk music and styles of carpet weaving are incorporated into traditional Azerbaijani art forms that evince commonalities with other Turkic peoples and yet are distinct due to the localized characters of the various schools of which the respective Azerbaijani traditions are comprised. The territory of Borchali, no doubt due in large part to its geographic proximity to the other regions/districts of contemporary Azerbaijan as well as the socio-cultural, linguistic, and religious similarities evinced between the peoples having long lived in these areas, is therefore incorporated into Azerbaijani national identity narratives with relative ease.

The historical periods during which Borchali existed under separate political configurations from Kartli, for example, and the relative geographic, economic, and socio-cultural isolation of the Turkic peoples of Borchali from the Georgian- or Armenian-speaking. Orthodox Christian populations nearby make it easier for state officials and historians in Azerbaijan to fold the land and people of Borchali into national identity narratives. Historians in Tbilisi, for example, account for the centuries-long concentration of Turkic peoples in the area by framing the arrival of said peoples as taking place during a period of war- and/or plague-induced depopulation of historical ‘Georgian lands’.16 From the Azerbaijani perspective, the historical territory of Azerbaijan has been reduced over time due to hostile and/or foreign interventions over the course of the Azerbaijani nation-state’s development—including by Armenian, Persian, Russian, and even other Turkic powers.

Georgian dependence upon Azerbaijani investments and fossil fuels has led to relatively unbalanced power differentials between the two countries. The strength of the Azerbaijani-Turkish liaison provides a formidable counter-point to Russian influence in Azerbaijan’s domestic affairs; Azerbaijan, then, has both resource wealth and powerful allies in the larger region—neither of which Georgia possesses in equal measure. These factors certainly help to explain why it is that Georgia seems to ‘look the other way’ regarding certain Azerbaijani doings on Georgian territory, whether in reference to the intimidation and/or bodily arrest of Azerbaijani citizens, the facilitation of anti-Armenian protests in Tbilisi, or attempts to sway Kvemo Kartli locals’ votes in presidential and/or parliamentary elections. Other measures in the humanitarian realm are received with thanks from local officials as well as laypeople in Kvemo Kartli. These measures include the provision of technical and educational equipment for classrooms and cultural centers, scholarships to students studying in Georgian universities, the hosting of language courses and sports activities, and the remodeling or new construction of educational and cultural facilities in Georgian Azeri-Turk locales in Kvemo Kartli as well as in Tbilisi.

Azerbaijani state figures meet regularly with Georgian officials to discuss the needs and concerns of what Azerbaijan deems its ‘Azerbaijani diaspora population’ in Georgia, needs which primarily include improved access to quality infrastructure (roads, electricity, water, gas, etc.), education, and socio-economic advancement. These meetings take place most often in Tbilisi, although Azerbaijani officials are often brought to Kvemo Kartli to meet with local community leaders and activists and to attend ceremonies in support of local Azerbaijan-backed projects. In addition to constructing modern, well-equipped educational, cultural, and even sports centers in Georgian Azeri-Turk populated locales, the projects involved include events in promotion of Azerbaijani state-propagated identity narratives.

For the Azerbaijani state, Georgian Azeri-Turks are part of a strategic ‘diapora community’ through which the state can promote its narratives and interests. Should the relationship between Georgia and Azerbaijan worsen, however, the Azerbaijani state reserves the right to withhold or reduce the provision of benefits to Georgian Azeri-Turks, which in turn could be attributed to supposed Georgian disinterest or disdain for Azerbaijani assistance in these spheres. Alternatively, if felt or familial ties to the people, territory, and/or government of Azerbaijan are sufficiently maintained or even heightened among Georgian Azeri-Turks, then the Azerbaijani leadership can pursue its interests by taking advantage of these ties and attempting to mobilize the population for the achievement of particular aims. Meanwhile, however,

16This viewpoint was expressed in an unpublished interview between the author and two historians from Tbilisi State University, Leri Tavadze and Aleksandr Boshishvili (August 30, 2016: Tbilisi).
Georgian Azeri-Turks are encouraged by the Azerbaijani government to remain loyal to the Georgian state (read: the ruling party) and to physically remain living in Georgia, where they can enjoy the benefits of the Georgian-Azerbaijani friendship and agitate on behalf of the interests of the Azerbaijani state. Visits to the ‘historical homeland’ of Azerbaijan are certainly possible and are encouraged in political discourse, albeit for a period of 90 days or less. Stays longer than this become problematic for individuals due to convoluted and costly bureaucratic obstacles. A diaspora is only a ‘diaspora’ when it is located outside the borders of the territorial ‘homeland’ in question, after all, and the Azerbaijani ‘Diaspora’ is too important of a foreign policy tool for the Azerbaijani state to encourage or risk its declension in size or influence. The construction and propagation of a ‘worldwide Azerbaijani Diaspora’ by political elites in Baku affects the ways that Georgian Azeri-Turks encounter, perceive, and negotiate their own subjectivities as Georgian citizens with varying degrees of affinity to the people and territorial state of Azerbaijan. The discourse concerning the ‘Azerbaijani Diaspora’ and the branch of this ‘Diaspora’ that extends into Georgian territories affects individuals’ subjectivities by providing additional possibilities for self-ascription. Each available possibility involves its own set of costs, benefits, values, and meanings, and the individual’s own life circumstances and thought processes will inform his or her decisions to self-ascribe—or not—to a given identity position. The national identity propagated by Azerbaijani officials is but one ‘pull’ on local individuals’ positionalities, but this pull can be considerable, indeed.

2.8 ENCOUNTERING DOMINANT IDENTITIES ON THE GROUND IN KVEMO KARTLI

State-propagated narratives of Georgian and Azerbaijani national identity are manifested and encountered at the grassroots level in Georgia in obvious as well as inconspicuous manners. More explicitly, these narratives materialize physically and symbolically at official events, bringing together material and abstract, sensory symbolism with speakers’ verbal references to identity attributes and intra-/inter-group relations. The fusion of place, ritual, pomp and circumstance, spectacle, personality, and material and immaterial symbolism makes the hosting of events, celebrations, and commemorations particularly attractive to both laypeople and powerful individuals. For average citizens, these events often represent a break from the mundane and a glimpse of and into spheres with which they tend to have little contact—a chance to shake the hand of the Azerbaijani and/or Georgian President, for example, and/or to take part in the celebratory or commemorative activities planned for event participants (such as concerts and/or cultural exhibitions). For elites, these occasions offer the opportunity to display one’s influence, and increase one’s popularity or prestige by exchanging a few handshakes and words with other elites as well as audience members.

President Ilham Aliyev’s 2015 visit to Marneuli, for example, drew large crowds from Kvemo Kartli’s rural areas, and the visit occasioned the meeting of both states’ officials with the various Azerbaijani state-sponsored organizations in the region, including, for example, the leadership of the local offices of the Congress of Georgian Azerbaijanis and the Azerbaijani Cultural Center. Representatives of other local and Tbilisi-based NGOs were present as well, some of which were granted access to the Azerbaijani delegation, while others somewhat out of favor with both governments were kept at a distance. The Azerbaijani President was taken to review the fruits of recent Azerbaijani investments in the region, including, for example, the ‘Tea House’ educational/cultural center as well as the new cold storage facility in Marneuli, and the restaurant ‘Mugham’—adjacent to the Tea House building—was opened to serve Azerbaijani cuisine to the dignitaries. Speeches were given by both presidents, statements of thanks and gratitude were made to the Azerbaijani side for its generous support of Georgia as a whole and Georgian Azeri-Turks in particular, and lofty praises for the two countries’ historic and ‘brotherly’ relations resounded.

Such events regularly feature the prominent display of both the Georgian and Azerbaijan state flags, both on and in the premises of the venues used for the occasions and in the hands of audience members. Furthermore, concerts featuring both Georgian and Azerbaijani costumes and folk music are held for participants’ enjoyment as well as to please the honored guests. Marneuli’s Novruz celebration of 2017 featured all of this and more, including additional displays of Azerbaijani carpets, wrestling matches, and samplings of Azerbaijani and Georgian cuisines. The Novruz parade featured men on horseback, children in carriages and on foot, and lovely young women, all dressed in national costumes. The distinction between who and what was considered to be ‘Georgian’ or ‘Azerbaijani’ was made remarkably—even suspiciously—clear, if not within the hearts of the participants themselves, then certainly to the outside observer.

The speeches given by Georgian and Azerbaijani officials implicitly reify inter-group boundaries through actors’ innumerable references to ‘Georgians’ and ‘Azerbaijanis’ as separate groups with their own easily identifiable traits, characteristics, norms, and values. ‘Azerbaijanis’, for example, are understood as having a common mother tongue (the Azerbaijani language), historical homeland (the territorial state
of Azerbaijan), spiritual affiliation (Islam), pride and appreciation for traditional art forms (folk music, literature, dance, carpet weaving, etc.), cuisine, and other cultural traditions (such as the traditions marking the approach and celebration of Novruz, for example). For ‘Georgians’, these symbolic boundaries and markers are represented by Georgian as the mother tongue of Georgians, the territorial state of Georgia as their historical homeland, the Georgian Orthodox Church as their spiritual anchor, and pride and respect for their own cultural traditions (wine-making, feasting, styles of song and dance, etc.) as being the hallmark of any respectable ‘ Georgian’. Yet, despite the oft-times boundary-reaffirming nature of such rituals and spectacles, whether hosted alongside or for the benefit of foreign states and dignitaries, officiating actors typically take pains to point out what members of both groups have in common—love and/or loyalty to a particular state (Georgia), certain shared collective memories (suffering incurred under Soviet leadership) and interests (the restoration of Georgian and Azerbaijani territorial integrity in addition to the economic development of both countries), for example. These shared characteristics are most commonly invoked when the intended audience is mixed, consisting of individuals from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds—mixed domestic audiences or purely ‘foreign’ ones.

In addition to examining official narratives of identity that are propagated through national iconography and official celebrations/commemorations, this dissertation examines state-led endeavors to shape the landscape—physical and symbolic—in ways that reflect dominant narratives of national identity. State officials have taken great pains to ensure that the landscape of Kvemo Kartli, both physical and symbolic, is shaped and utilized by locals in ways that do not challenge popular narratives of Georgian national identity. For example, locals allege that state officials have intentionally deprived local Georgian Azeri-Turks from equal rights to agricultural lands in the region in the post-Soviet period, with the lands along the Georgian-Armenian and Georgian-Azerbaijani political borders being particularly problematic. Local Georgian Azeri-Turks are also subject to heightened surveillance and scrutiny by state officials regarding the ways that the former grouping collectively utilize local landscapes for purposes of socio-cultural and religious celebration and/or commemoration.

The state establishes guidelines concerning who is to be employed at the local, regional, and national levels (by virtue of language skills and/or affiliation with the ‘correct’ party or elite/s), selects the subjects to be taught in minority-language schools, determines which linguistic mediums through which these subjects are to be taught, and oversees access to educational materials in minority-populated locales. Yet the message sent is contradictory—whereas deputy governors, school directors, and teachers are increasingly encouraged to demonstrate adequate Georgian language proficiency, the ruling political parties of post-Soviet Georgia have thus far shown the propensity to support the candidacy of Georgian Azeri-Turks with little to no knowledge of the Georgian language to serve in the Parliament. Even employees of the Georgian Public Defender’s Office allege that this has been a common political strategy in the past to support the candidacy of non-Georgian speaking individuals in the Parliament in order to cultivate loyal supporters among members of minority groups, supporters who will not speak out of turn or against the interests of the party.17 Unfortunately, too often this results in poor attendance records of Georgian Azeri-Turk MPs in parliamentary sessions and silence on the part of these individuals regarding issues of importance to their local constituents. Official practices aiming to limit or reduce the visible symbolic presence of Georgian Azeri-Turks in favor of traditional ‘Georgian’ national symbols in minority-populated locales, then, tend to face little criticism from local officials. Party politics and state-centric identity discourses operate alongside one another in such ways to influence who can or will be chosen to serve as the ‘face/s’ of Georgia’s Azeri-Turk collective.

Georgian Azeri-Turk MPs tend to have a positive relationship with Azerbaijani state officials, given the mutually supportive character of the two countries’ bilateral relations and the tendency of Azerbaijani officials to encourage support for the ruling party among local Georgian Azeri-Turks. This was true during the Saakashvili period (2003-2012/13), and it has held true since. Azer Suleymanov, the only current opposition MP and member of UNM, is the most vocal proponent of the Azerbaijani state and its propagated narratives. Suleymanov addresses the Georgian Parliament at least once a year regarding issues like the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict and the Khojaly tragedy, even occasionally entering into verbal and nearly-physical altercations with Georgian Armenian MPs regarding these issues. The Georgian Dream MPs, however, have tended to take a much more measured tone with regard to the promotion of Azerbaijani interests and narratives. The tendency is to provide continued lip service to the strength and warmth of the Georgian-Azeri-Turk friendship and to provide gracious thanks for Azerbaijan’s attention to the problems of Georgian Azeri-Turks where and whenever necessary—all without providing explicit support for the narratives fueling and prolonging the antagonism between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This helps to appease Georgia’s wealthy neighbor without causing blatant offense or creating stirs in relations between Georgia and Georgian Armenians, Georgia and Armenia, or among Georgian Azeri-Turks and

17Author’s unpublished interview with Isabella Osipova and Nino Kokhinidze of the Public Defender’s Office (Oct. 3, 2016: Tbilisi).
Georgian Armenians. This is likely an advisable decision on the part of Georgian officials, as it is not within the best interest of the Georgian state to become a political battleground for feuds between the Azerbaijani and Armenian governments.

Although only a small handful of individuals evinced anti-Armenian attitudes within the questionnaires utilized in this study, examination of local Azerbaijani-language social and news media pages gives a somewhat different impression. The number of posts written and shared within social media and news networks on topics like the Khojaly ‘genocide’, ‘Armenian aggression’, and Nagorno-Karabagh, for example, flood one’s newsfeed on official dates of commemoration in Azerbaijan, and the circulated images of bloodied women and children appear to evoke strong emotions from commentators. Azerbaijani-funded bodies operating in Tbilisi and Kvemo Kartli play an active role in disseminating anti-Armenian texts and images, and these texts and images in turn circulate within local Azerbaijani-language news and social media outlets (in particular around Azerbaijan-based commemorative dates of Nagorno-Karabagh-related tragedies).18

I did not elicit specific responses from participants regarding the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict or their attitudes toward Armenians in general. Such lines of questioning can very quickly turn into unproductive, biased, and one-sided discussions wherein the actions of Armenians as a collective are demonized and those of Azerbaijani are glorified. In the end, I considered the interests of this particular research project to be best served by maintaining neutrality with regard to the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict and taking care not to consciously evoke negative attitudes in others on the subject of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. I surmised that, if formidable anti-Armenian sentiments were to be found among local Georgian Azeri-Turks, then these sentiments would be evinced in some way, shape, or form within interview and questionnaire data, especially given the space provided for participants’ elaborations of perceptions of collective ‘Self’ and ‘Other-hood’.19 Overall, explicit voicings of anti-Armenian sentiment proved to be rare within the interview and questionnaire data utilized in this study. The infrequent appearance of these sentiments in the data has led me to include references to the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict predominantly as they relate to Azerbaijani state-sponsored activities in Georgian Azeri-Turk-populated locales.20

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18For example, while conducting fieldwork in Marneuli, Georgia in February of 2016, I was asked to give my impressions of the Khojaly conflict during an event hosted by local Azerbaijani diaspora organizations. While I spoke to the cruelty of warfare in general, its disproportionate effects upon civilians, and my hopes for the establishment of peace in the region, reporters’ attempts to illicit anti-Armenian commentary required delicate navigation on my part. Although I was concerned about the potential for misquotation in this situation, subsequent Azerbaijani-language paraphrasing of my brief speech was, fortunately, relatively neutral (Justice for Khojaly [Xocaliya Edele], 2016).

19The topic of relations between Georgian Azeri-Turks, Georgian Armenians, and titular Armenians across the border is a subject that requires sensitive and thoughtful research in the future. Such research must be undertaken with extreme care in order to avoid the creation or exacerbation of inter-group tensions, tensions that may or may not currently be prominent within Georgian Azeri-Turk-populated locales. For more information on the relationship between anti-Armenian narratives and national identity in Azerbaijan, see: Philippe-Blumauer, 2016; Radnitz, 2019; Schumacher, 2016; Tokluoglu, 2011.
3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF IDENTITY

In this case study, a variety of vehicles are surveyed, including state- and non-state celebrations and commemorations, currency, built landscapes, news and social media publications, political speeches and statements, and even interviews and questionnaires. These vehicles include both material objects and immaterial reference points for the study of symbols and narratives as they are manifested in sensory experiences as well as political rhetoric. Although the data collected and analyzed here is primarily qualitative in nature, focusing upon underlying structures of meaning and the ways individuals and collectives operate within and gradually alter these structures, simple forms of quantitative analysis are applied with regard to questionnaires. By inputting questionnaire into SPSS and generating simple frequency tables and cross-tabulations, I have been able to identify common traits and characteristics among participants as a whole and by demographic groupings such as age, gender, place of residence, level of education, and occupation.

The mixed-method approach to data collection and analysis applied here involves discourse, narrative, and semiotic analysis as well as basic, descriptive forms of quantitative analysis. Scholars interested in utilizing discourse and/or narrative analysis in identity-related research will no doubt encounter a plethora of definitions of the concepts of discourse and narrative, definitions that will in turn affect their selection of source data and methodologies for data analysis. In Sociolinguistics, for example, these concepts tend to be examined as they are represented, manifested, and reproduced in specific kinds of texts, namely in the spoken and written word (cf. Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Bourdieu, 1991; Fairclough, 1992; Van Dijk, 1993). For psychologists, these concepts are often examined in terms of individual life histories and individualized expressions of selfhood and meaning-making (Burk, 2005; Cressley, 2000). The texts in question also tend to revolve around spoken and written words, chiefly as expressed in interviews. For anthropologists, human and political geographers, and sociologists, examinations of discourses and narratives within and between particular states, societies, and/or actors are ultimately reflective of existing power structures and/or social relations, albeit at varying scales (cf. Foucault, 1970/1981; Hall, 2000; Paasi, 1996 and 1999; Sutherland, 2005; Wertsch, 2008). The question of scale weighs heavily upon further questions regarding the nature and content of discourse and narrative as well as the distinctions between the two concepts. All too often the lines between discourse and narrative are blurred between and within particular disciplines, making it exceedingly difficult to determine where one ends and the other begins, and vice versa.

In this doctoral dissertation, discourses and narratives are taken to be two inter-related, albeit ordered or hierarchical, concepts. Discourse is understood in a Foucauldian sense, as being embedded and replicated within socially constituted and contextually dependent structures of power relations. Discourse, in this way, is very much the ‘taken for granted’ knowledge and norms present in particular contexts that govern or inform the ways that the actors within these contexts interact with one another. Discourse is the socially constructed and situated knowledge of social relations and power hierarchies within given contexts, such as within particular professional disciplines, governing institutions, and among and between the individual actors involved in these disciplines and institutions. Discourses regarding the ‘nation’, for example, are of particular interest as they are (re)produced in the socio-cultural, economic, and political institutions of territorial states and disseminated among the populations between and within a state’s administrative and political borders. There is no one universal discourse of ‘the nation’, but, rather, countless reiterations and interpretations that are constructed and embedded within particular territorially based institutions and power structures. Narratives are related to discourse in that they help individuals to order and make sense of the world as well as the position/s that they, as individual actors, occupy within it. Narratives are like the stories that individuals tell regarding their pasts, presents, and futures and the ways that particular spatio-temporal events/phenomena inform who they are as individual actors and social beings. Neither discourses nor narratives are immutable, however. Discourses and narratives are contextually embedded and informed, and contexts, too, are subject to change.

The discourses examined in this work are those surrounding the Georgian and Azerbaijani nations and national identities. The narratives that are identified and analyzed over the course of this dissertation are those story-like structures touching upon the nature, content, origins, present state, and future aims of the Georgian and Azerbaijani nations and national identities as they are encountered by Georgian Azeri-Turks in particular. While particular discourses and narratives often dominate over others within particular social and political collectivities in given spatio-temporal settings, such dominance does not preclude possibilities for resistance or change.
What the disciplines of Geography, Linguistics, Psychology, Political Science, and Sociology have in common regarding discussions of discourse and narrative is the centrality of the text within such discussions. Again, the nature of the ‘texts’ involved can and often does vary widely between disciplines, with some focusing upon the specific lexicology and grammatical structures of purely spoken/written words (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Fairclough, 1992; Van Dijk, 1993), and others understanding ‘text’ in a much broader sense, including, for example, two- and three-dimensional objects such as photographs, video materials, street signs, logos, or even monuments and statuary (cf. Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988; Duncan, 1990; Pavelka, 2014). In this work, ‘text’ is understood in a broad and integrated sense. The texts used in this study range from original interview materials and questionnaires to social and news media publications, from photographs and field journals to monuments/statuary, two-dimensional state symbols, and social happenings. All are ‘texts’ in that they convey information pertaining to individual experience as well as social and political relations—all imbed individual agency within social relations in given spatio-temporal contexts and all link the audience/observer/s and narrator/s to one another as well as to particular narratives and discourses. A mixture of thematic and semiotic analysis of these materials allows me to identify common themes across and within diverse texts as well as to identify and compare the ways that various actors evoke, challenge, and/or reproduce particular discourses and narratives under given circumstances. By taking inspiration from the disciplines of Anthropology, Ethnography, Geography, Linguistics, Psychology, Political Science, and Sociology in the identification and analysis of diverse texts, I am able to engage in a multi-faceted, multi-scalar, and multi-disciplinary study of the multivariate and diverse processes involved in the formation and negotiation of identity, individual and collective.

Although the questionnaires utilized in this work have been paired primarily with quantitative methods of data analysis, participants’ responses to a number of open-ended questions revealed a reverberation of a number of intra- and inter-group identity narratives. Reference to these narratives in individual questionnaires facilitated the triangulation of questionnaire data with the data obtained from engaging in discourse analysis of the other aforementioned verbal and written materials. Discourse analysis is combined with semiotic analysis of symbols displayed in pieces of officially propagated national iconography, such as the state flag, coats of arms, national anthem, and even banknotes and coins. By breaking down the use of particular colors, personages, visual signs and symbols, and language/s displayed within official pieces of Georgian national iconography, one is able to identify the abstract symbolism, meanings, and values behind such elements of material culture (cf. Hewitt & Unwin, 2004; Unwin & Hewitt, 2001).

The research is multidisciplinary in that it incorporates methods of data collection and analysis from fields such as Psychology and Sociology, Anthropology and Ethnography, and Political Science in addition to Human Geography. Individual questionnaires are utilized to assess individual and sociological processes of meaning-making, local languages are incorporated into research materials and researcher-participant interactions, local contexts are made more familiar through fieldwork stays and participant observation, and interviews are conducted with community leaders, state officials, and NGO representatives both within and outside of the capital. In addition to participant observation, fieldwork stays and interactions with locals make it possible to engage in analysis of local landscapes, built and symbolic, and the ways that individuals derive meaning from as well as give meaning to familiar and ‘lived in’ landscapes.

### 3.2 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The most challenging aspect of conducting research outside of Tbilisi and among members of a traditionally disadvantaged minority grouping was with regard to the distribution of questionnaires. Having prepared myself to construct questionnaires wherein great attention to detail was paid to specific wordings, order, and formatting of individual questions and overall questionnaire length, considerable difficulties were encountered when targeting and selecting potential participants. Suggestions and best practices for questionnaire distribution as detailed in research handbooks (cf. McGuirk & O’Neill, 2005) did not always correspond with the idiосyncrasies of the local context. Even though I had located a suitable ‘gate keeper’ to assist me with my efforts to contact individuals for interviews and, when necessary, help to interpret during interviews, I soon found that it would be next to impossible to target research participants in any strict, methodical manner. Outside of bazaars, there are but a few gathering places to go to interact with potential informants in a way perceived by informants to be nonthreatening.

When drafting the questionnaires to be used over the course of my doctoral research, I relied heavily upon a multidisciplinary perspective, drawing inspiration from political scientists (Anderson, 1983/2006; Brubaker, 1996; Connor, 2004; Guibernau, 2007; Kertzer & Arell, 2002; Tishkov, 1997), social anthropologists (Barth, 1969; Cohen, 1985), sociolinguists (Fishman & Garcia, 2010), psychologists (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Phinney, 1996; Phinney & Ong, 2007), and geographers (Diener, 2006 and 2007; Kaiser,
of the Tbilisi-based NGO, professional networks. Given my few contacts in Gardabani, for example, the assistance of representatives these districts, or, in some cases, offered to distribute the questionnaires among their own personal and social contacts. These individuals often put me in touch with school directors of village and municipal schools in Gardabani.

Combining various features from each of the aforementioned disciplines allowed me to identify and investigate the processes informing individuals’ perceptions and performances of collective similarity/difference at a variety of scales. By distributing questionnaires among unofficial, private individuals, I was able to gain valuable insight as to how processes of identity negotiation occur at the grassroots level. Such a vantage point would have been unattainable if I had chosen instead to rely solely upon interviews with state officials, NGO representatives, and/or community leaders alone for insight pertaining to the thoughts, viewpoints, attitudes, and opinions of Georgian Azeri-Turks outside the spheres of government and/or civil society.

A ‘top-down’ approach was useful in building networks as well as rapport with participants. The state officials, NGO representatives, and community leaders whom I met and interviewed proved to be a valuable resource for advice as to how best to access additional participants. For example, perusal of NGO-issued reports, local news media publications (in Azerbaijani, Russian, and Georgian languages), and state-issued reports touching upon the issues facing the minority population of Kvemo Kartli helped me to compile a list of the most active Tbilisi- and non-Tbilisi based individuals and organizations. Further internet and social media searches typically provided contact information for Georgian Azeri-Turk MPs as well as NGO representatives and community leaders. After working my way down this list (and oftentimes engaging in multiple attempts to contact these individuals), I was able to secure interviews. I made it a common practice to ask interviewees’ advice at the end of the interview regarding the best ways to go about distributing my questionnaires in select districts of Kvemo Kartli—Marneuli, Bolnisi, Dmanisi, and Gardabani.

These individuals often put me in touch with school directors of village and municipal schools in these districts, or, in some cases, offered to distribute the questionnaires among their own personal and professional networks. Given my few contacts in Gardabani, for example, the assistance of representatives of the Tbilisi-based NGO, Aqsaqallar Surasi ('Council of Elders') proved to be crucial for the distribution of questionnaires in that district, as the representatives maintained homes as well as social and professional networks there. The same was true regarding the distribution of questionnaires in Dmanisi, where the Director of the Heydar Aliyev Computer Center, Ms. Dinara Karalova, was willing to distribute questionnaires both within the Center as well as within local Russian and Azerbaijani language schools. My contact from the Union of Azerbaijani Women of Georgia, Ms. Leila Suleymanova, put me into contact with the Director of a school on the outskirts of the Bolnisi municipality, which enabled me to distribute questionnaires there as well.

As a result, not only was I able to interview forty-two individuals from 2016-2018, but I was also able to identify potential venues for the distribution of questionnaires. These venues included local Azerbaijani and Russian-language schools and other educational and cultural centers in the Marneuli, Bolnisi, and Dmanisi municipalities. These centers included, for example, the Marneuli-based 'Tea House' and Azerbaijani Cultural Center as well as the Dmanisi-based Heydar Aliyev Computer Center. In addition to interviewing representatives of these centers, I was able to distribute questionnaires among their patrons and employees.
After contacting the Educational Resource Office in Marneuli to inquire about the possibility of visiting local schools and obtaining local officials’ verbal consent to do so, I began visiting village schools, meeting with directors and teachers, and explaining to them the goals of my research project. Having the approval of the local Educational Resource Office, though not mandatory for such research in Georgia, proved to be crucial for me to access village schools and speak with their employees. Typically, I would introduce myself to the school director in Azerbaijani or Russian, provide him or her with my business card, and explain why I had come. The director would most often inquire if the local Resource Office knew of my arrival, and this question was often followed by a quick phone call to the said office to confirm. This confirmation helped to set the school directors and teachers at ease, at which point I was able to more fully explain the aims and hypotheses of my research project and ask for permission to distribute questionnaires among the directors, teachers, and students (aged seventeen or older) to fill out at their leisure. I would return to pick up the questionnaires at mutually agreeable date/time, typically within one to two weeks. In all but one case, this process worked well. In the Azerbaijani language school of Kizilhajilo in the Marneuli district, however, my visit was not received well by the director of the school, and I was asked to leave. The director informed me that another foreign researcher had visited the school in the past, and the experience was such that he did not wish it to be repeated.

The schools of the Marneuli district were the top priority during my first fieldwork trip (January-March 2016). I did not yet know if I would be given another opportunity to conduct such fieldwork, and my social and professional networks were stronger in Marneuli than in the other districts. The opportunity did indeed arise, however, and I was able to return for another fieldwork period from August-October 2016. The aim of the second fieldwork period was to widen the geographic scope of questionnaire distribution to include the districts of Bolnisi, Dmanisi, and Gardabani as well as Marneuli. An interview with the then-Governor of the Kvemo Kartli region, Mr. Paata Khizanishvili, in August 2016 helped me to secure the Governor’s verbal permission for my research project as well as his pledged assistance where and whenever convenient and/or helpful. This support proved to be influential in my ability to visit schools in Bolnisi and Dmanisi to speak with directors and teachers and to distribute questionnaires. Additionally, I found that providing school directors with a letter, written in Russian as well as English—as sometimes the school directors were Georgians and did not speak Azerbaijani—on university letterhead, explaining the motivations, aims, and hypotheses of the research project, helped to ease the directors’ suspicions regarding my credentials and/or project. These letters always contained my local and international contact information and referenced my previous meeting with then-Governor Khizanishvili. As always, I ensured the directors and teachers that the questionnaires were anonymous and engineered to protect participants’ privacy, and that participation was purely voluntary. Questionnaires were distributed within the schools, targeted to teachers and older students only, so that participants could fill them out in their spare time in a location that was most convenient for them. My assistant and I would then agree with the directors on a date for the questionnaires to be collected.

The questionnaires distributed between January-March and from August-October 2016 differed slightly in terms of question wording and format (see Appendices 1-6, pp. 73-108 of this work). The changes to the questionnaires distributed from August-October 2016 were based upon information gleaned from prior questionnaires with the aim of decreasing instances of nonresponse. These changes did in fact result in higher response rates to sensitive questions concerning inter-group relations and attitudes (more on the specific changes instituted can be found in Article #5). The questionnaires were distributed online in addition to on paper from January-March 2016. Links to the surveys were distributed within my own social media networks as well as those of my local friends and acquaintances. Online and paper-based questionnaires were available to participants in the Azerbaijani and Russian languages. This enabled participants to fill out the questionnaire in whichever language was most comfortable for them. I collected a total of 407 questionnaires over the course of 2016, 179 during the first fieldwork period from January-March, and 228 from August-October 2016. The vast majority of questionnaires were completed in Azerbaijani and were paper-based. Despite the similarity between questions posed in both versions and languages of the questionnaires, differences in question formatting led me to input, code, and analyze the surveys in two separate databases, one for the first fieldwork period, and one for the second period. Such a separation did not result in insurmountable difficulties in analyzing and comparing questionnaire data, given the basic nature of statistical analysis involved. By generating simple frequency tables and cross-tabulations in SPSS, I was able to compare questionnaire data side by side and identify basic trends in participant responses. Responses to open-ended questions were coded by hand in line with the most common reemerging themes and responses, and values were inputted to allow for the verbatim retention of rich responses. Participants inadvertently helped to determine the nature of the codes used. These codes, then, informed the formats of particular questions in the second questionnaire (i.e. rather than leaving some questions open-ended, participants were asked to choose from a variety of optional responses based upon the most common responses obtained in the past). This helped to decrease item nonresponse (for
more on these issues, see Article #5).

Difficulties faced with regard to accessing potential participants resulted in a mixture of methods for questionnaire distribution—opportunistic, ‘snowball’ (or chain), and even a measure of targeted methods. I was able to target a number of schools as well as educational and/or cultural centers within particular districts, yet I could not narrow down my selection of participants in any other, more sophisticated way. Resources (time, financial, and network-related) dictated the nature of data collection in this manner, yet local, contextual factors played a large part in this as well. Working within communities that remain rather closed and suspicious of outsiders, whether from Tbilisi or another country, required tact as well as sufficient levels of creativity. In addition to reaching out to influential community leaders, it was important that I take additional efforts to prove to the people around me that I am nonthreatening and have a genuine interest in learning more about their lives, norms, values, and traditions. It is also for this reason that I took measures to improve my Azerbaijani, Russian, and even Georgian language skills. I wished to be able to use these languages with people in Kvemo Kartli and Tbilisi. I found that my humble linguistic skills helped me to build rapport with those around me. For example, wary looks were replaced by wide smiles and offers of coffee/tea following my attempts to use Azerbaijani with school directors and teachers on several occasions. I was honored other times by locals’ assumptions that I was of Azerbaijani or Georgian Azeri-Turkic descent. I responded to these assumptions with my sincere thanks along with a brief description of my background.

Knowledge of local languages also proved essential when transcribing and translating research materials from interviews, news and social media, and questionnaires. My research assistant and ‘gate-keeper’ within the local context helped with the translation and interpretation processes during interviews as well as with questionnaire materials, yet I was not obliged to rely completely upon this individual to speak with locals or translate/transcribe materials. The assistance of a local gatekeeper helped to improve my own translations of research materials and improved the ‘flow’ of the interviews by cutting down on the time needed to operate in and between different languages. For example, I would pose particular questions in English, my assistant would translate them into Azerbaijani, but I would not require his Azerbaijani-to-English translation of the interviewee’s response. I relied upon my research assistant for transcriptions of interviews conducted in Azerbaijani or Russian, but the translations of said interviews were ultimately my own. Any questions regarding the quality of translations were discussed with my native Azerbaijani-speaking research assistant and reviewed for accuracy.

3.2.1 The Problematics of Questionnaire Distribution

One very real issue worth considering at this point is the existing hierarchies of power relations within local schools in the South Caucasus and in Kvemo Kartli in particular. School directors are commonly more secure in their positions than are teachers, and, more often than not, there are gender divisions involved as well. Whereas the majority of school directors with whom I personally came into contact were male, most of the teachers were female. I was always aware of the possibility that school directors would use their positions to influence teachers’ responses, just as teachers might attempt to influence students’ responses. Allegations occasionally surface regarding directors’ attempts to influence the ways that teachers vote in elections, for example, therefore how could I possibly be certain that the same would not happen with regard to my own questionnaires? In short, I could not alter the given contexts in order to remove this possibility completely. All I could do was to adequately explain my aims and motivations and request purely voluntary, candid, and individualized responses from participants.

When reviewing the questionnaires and the data contained therein, I noted a couple of trends. Firstly, participants were more likely to leave ‘sensitive’ questions blank than other questions regarding, for example, age, level of education, occupation, knowledge of languages, etc. Secondly, questionnaires returned from certain schools evinced a certain level of verbatim repetition in response to such ‘sensitive’ questions (typically regarding attitudes and perceptions of inter-group relations and trust in state institutions or officials). My lack of knowledge regarding individuals’ motives for responding thusly—was it due to coercion, uncertainty, or genuine agreement, for example?—meant that I had little recourse but to code these responses similarly and make notes of them within the databases. Questionnaires were discarded only when the majority of questions were left completely blank, suggesting that a.) The participant did not have adequate time to complete the questionnaire, or b.) The participant did not wish to complete the questionnaire. Fortunately, there were but a handful of such instances and the majority of the questionnaires were coded. Blank responses were coded as item nonresponses so that, they, too, could feature within the analyses. Making note of nonresponses helped me to identify patterns in the ways that individuals chose to answer or skip over particular questions (for more on these issues, see Article #5).
At present, there is no perfect way to distribute questionnaires among Georgian Azeri-Turks in Kvemo Kartli. Various methods will result in varying outcomes affecting the quantity and quality of questionnaire data. It is for this reason that I sought out different venues for questionnaire distribution—individual networks of personal and professional acquaintances, educational and cultural centers, and visits to individual schools. It was my hope that, by approaching the issue from a variety of vantage points and venues, the data collected would reflect a greater level of geographic, socio-economic, and generational diversity than would have been possible by focusing on one particular venue or vantage point alone.

3.3 ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Great care was taken during the planning of fieldwork activities to ensure that all methods of data collection, analysis, and reporting complied fully with the rules and guidelines set forth by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK 2009 and 2012). These rules and guidelines correspond broadly to the categories of the rights and autonomy of individual subjects, avoidance of harm to said subjects, the maintenance of subjects’ privacy, and guidelines for the proper storage and publication of research data. With regard to questionnaires, individuals aged 17 or older were invited to take part in the project, although a number of schoolchildren aged 14-16 completed questionnaires as well. In these cases, questionnaires were completed during school hours with the consent of schoolteachers and directors, or, for the students of courses at the various cultural and educational centers in Kvemo Kartli, with the consent of the directors and course instructors. Questionnaires were purposely designed to limit identifying information and subjects were asked not to include information such as names, addresses, etc. When reporting questionnaire findings and citing specific individuals in research publications, additional measures were taken to anonymize the findings/citations. For example, when citing specific individuals’ responses to given queries, I included only the subjects’ ages, gender, and district of residence. I did not mention any specific village names, dates of birth, or other identifying information. Information regarding the theme and aims of the research project was disseminated to subjects verbally as well as on paper and in written form (electronically) prior to their participation in the project. Furthermore, subjects were informed that: A.) Their participation was purely voluntary and B.) The resulting information would be treated in a respectful, careful, and accurate manner during all phases of research.

With regard to interview participants, the vast majority of whom were public figures (e.g. state officials, NGO representatives, community leaders, and social activists), participants were informed about the theme, aims, and application of the research at the same time that the requests for the interviews were communicated. Interview subjects were encouraged to ask additional questions regarding the project and my background. Permission was expressly obtained at the beginning of the interviews to record said interviews and utilize interview materials in research publications. Although all interview participants consented to the recording of the interviews as well as the utilization of interview materials in research publications, I made decisions to include/withhold identifying information on a case-by-case basis by weighing the need for open, rigorous research with respect for subjects’ privacy and/or reputation.

The usage of social media in research is a topic for which rules remain less defined than for those governing questionnaires and interviews. In this dissertation, the only posts cited in research publications are those published publically by the authors. If the individuals posting publically were unknown to me, then I declined to use their social media handles/names. In other cases, if the authors of the posts were public figures who were posting publically on these social media sites, then it was unnecessary to conceal their identities.

Participation observation and note taking in fieldwork journals were conducted respectfully and in a non-threatening manner. Those with whom I regularly came into contact were fully aware of the purposes of my visit and the aims of my research. Photographs were taken either with the express permission of those present and/or visible in the photographs or in other, public contexts (e.g. public celebrations). When attending public events, I expressly asked permission to photograph particular individuals who were not attending the events as public figures or competitors in public competitions (e.g. horse races). In research publications, I made the decision to include only photographs wherein individual faces were obscured from view.

In accordance with TENK’s (2009 and 2012) guidelines for privacy and data protection, all data has been stored and archived in a secure manner, either behind locked doors or in secure virtual locations. With the exception of interview materials, the data involved are already highly anonymized, meaning that such storage of said data is merely an additional precaution taken to prevent unauthorized access to fieldwork data. Throughout the entire process of data collection, analysis, and publication, subjects’ privacy and autonomy have been safeguarded and the resultant data has been acquired, stored, and utilized in accordance with the aforementioned guidelines.
3.4 REVISITING POSITIONALITY AND RESEARCH AIMS

In addition to attempting to bridge the insider-outsider gap through the usage of local languages, my choice to arrange accommodation in Marneuli rather than in Tbilisi resulted in better familiarization with the local context. I wanted to know more about the ways individuals went about living their lives in this part of Georgia as well as the nature and scope of intra- and inter-group contact, therefore residing in Marneuli helped me to do this in a much more immediate way than would have been possible while residing in Tbilisi. Public transportation to and from Marneuli is not as comfortable or easily accessible as it is within Tbilisi, and access to and quality of local infrastructure (roads, water, gas, electricity) tends to be problematic. I found, however, that these difficulties could be relatively easily mediated by maintaining a more flexible schedule, affording more time for travel between destinations, and exercising patience in the face of technological difficulties.

My own age, gender, and personality traits proved to be additional mediating factors in my interactions with locals in Kvemo Kartli as well as Tbilisi. These factors helped to balance inter-personal power relations in ways that were, for the most part, beneficial for my research. For example, females tended to respond more positively toward me than did males. At the time, I inferred that the reasons for this were because, as women, we shared some sort of innate understanding of what it meant to be female in a generally male-centric world. Among males, my presence inspired varying reactions—oftentimes urges to inform, protect, or even, on occasion, to patronize me. I inferred from the outset that, in meetings and interviews with males, the metaphorical scale of power relations tended to shift to the side of my male interlocutors, whereas, in meetings with other females around my own age or older than myself, the scale appeared to be much more evenly balanced. I know myself to be generally kind, empathetic, open-minded, driven, and mild-mannered. Additionally, I tend to avoid conflict or confrontation whenever possible and often demonstrate a rather even mixture of extrovertist and introvertist traits. These personality characteristics helped me to navigate different social situations, both formal and informal, personal and professional. Although I cannot see myself through others’ eyes in order to claim the complete success of my attempts to integrate within the local community, I am confident that these attempts were not completely in vain, either. I emerged from the field with new and overwhelmingly positive professional and personal experiences as well as better networks of contacts both within and outside of the state or NGO spheres.

The methodologies for data collection and analysis applied in this research project have been carefully chosen for their propensity to engage in multidisciplinary, multi-modal, and multi-scalar research on questions of identity. The central premise of identity, both individual and collective, as being self- and other-inferred necessitates the study of what it means to be part of the ‘Us’ as well as the ‘Them’. Such a study, furthermore, is heavily dependent upon the vantage point from whence one begins. In order to answer the central research question of this project, “How, if at all, do officially propagated narratives of national identity in Georgia and Azerbaijan affect the ways that Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli negotiate and perceive their own collective identity/ies?” one must first investigate the dominant, officially-propagated, and often-times internally contradictory narratives of what it means to be ‘Georgian’ as well as ‘Azerbaijani’ today. Identifying such key national identity narratives and the predominant stakeholders propagating them (i.e. the Georgian and Azerbaijani states, or members of the political elite leading governing processes in either country) provides a springboard for further research concerning inter-group comparison in these narratives as well as ‘on the ground’ in Kvemo Kartli.

Over the course of this dissertation, the following queries serve as prisms through which the research question is unpacked and answered:

1.) What are the key identity narratives shaping popular conceptions of what it means to be ‘Georgian’ and/or ‘Azerbaijani’ today, who are the key actors propagating these narratives, and how do they go about doing this? (Articles 1-3)

2.) Where, if anywhere, do Georgian Azeri-Turks fit into these meta-narratives of national identity? (Articles 1-3)

3.) How are these narratives encountered, perceived, and negotiated among Georgian Azeri-Turks in Kvemo Kartli? (Articles 4-5)

4.) Do these narratives affect locals’ conceptions of what it means to be a member of this minority group in Georgia today? If so, then how? (Articles 4-5)
4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In Article 1 of this dissertation, I examine the roles played by official pieces of national iconography—namely the state flag, coat of arms, national anthem, currency, and holidays/commemorations—in disseminating, reproducing, and legitimizing particular national identity narratives in post-Soviet Georgia. These pieces of national iconography are used to market and promote a particular conception of Georgian national identity among foreign as well as domestic audiences. Particular attention is paid to period of leadership of then-President Saakashvili (2004-2013) and the ways that he engaged in the ‘narration of the Georgian nation’ (cf. Bhabha, 1990), particularly with regard to official changes to the country’s national iconography. During this time, a number of changes were instituted to this iconography, including the replacement of the state flag, coat of arms, and national anthem in 2004. Saakashvili was not the first Georgian leader to institute such changes, however, as was evidenced by the previous, successful bids in 1990, led by then-Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, to replace the flag and anthem of the Georgian S.S.R. with those of the short-lived Georgian Democratic Republic (1918-1921).

Saakashvili’s choice of the historic five-cross flag as the main emblem of his political party, United National Movement, in 2001 was a political move intended to demonstrate to domestic and international audiences a radical, historical break in Georgia’s fortune and philosophy—Georgia would no longer be subject to foreign (e.g. Russian) leadership, but would look to its Golden Age to realize its potential for future development. Members of Georgia’s various ‘ethnic’ minority groups would play a part in these development processes, too, thanks to Georgia’s legacy of multiculturalism and tolerance. This article demonstrates a disconnect between such rhetoric and actual policy, however. The inherent symbolism of the state flag, coat of arms, national anthem, and selection of dates of national import demonstrates continued adherence to exclusive conceptions of Georgian national identity, where being ‘Georgian’ invokes references to the autochthonous nature and status of Kartveli in their national ‘homeland’, the territorial state of Georgia. With the exception of the adoption of a number of civic working holidays, the constituent symbols of the flag, coat of arms, and national anthem present a vision of the Georgian territorial state as the rightful homeland of ‘ethnic’ Georgians. These pieces of national iconography reflect, disseminate, and legitimize particular symbolic boundaries of membership in the Georgian nation that are more exclusive than they are inclusive in nature.

These symbolic boundaries of membership continue to correspond with the territory (homeland)-language-faith tricecta invoked by Ilia Chavchavadze in the mid-19th century. Yet national identity, like any form of individual and/or collective identity, is not immutable. Over time and in conjunction with changes to geopolitical, economic, and societal circumstances, the symbolic boundaries of membership in the nation can shift, and the identity narratives underlying these symbolic boundaries, too, can undergo gradual reinterpretation at the behest of politicians and laypeople alike. In the concluding sections of this article, I briefly analyze the potential for the widening of two symbolic boundaries and their relevant narratives—homeland and language—to include members of Georgia’s non-titular populations. At present, ambivalence abounds with regard to the Georgian state’s approach toward the integration of the country’s various sociocultural collectives into its political, economic, and socio-cultural realms, despite references in policies and speeches to the contrary. If such individuals were to consider Georgia to be their rightful homeland and demonstrate fluency in the Georgian language, for example, would this be enough to condition their acceptance by elites and/or laypeople as being ‘Georgian’ rather than ‘Azerbaijani’, ‘Armenian’, ‘Muslim’, ‘Russian’, etc.? Such acceptance would be indicative of the widening of symbolic boundaries of membership in the Georgian nation and the gradual reinterpretation of the narratives informing and legitimizing these symbolic boundaries. Present circumstances do not suggest that such changes are impossible, of course, but that they are dependent upon significant perception-based and attitudinal changes at the level of the state and society.

Article 2 focuses upon the identification and analysis of flexible memory narratives and the ways that these narratives are imbued within the physical landscape of Tbilisi. In this way, key elements of the city’s symbolic and material landscape are shown to be important components of Georgian national iconography that promote official conceptions of Georgian national identity domestically and worldwide. Particular emphasis is placed upon the period following the Rose Revolution (2003) and Saakashvili’s presidency (2004-2013) due to the sheer number of state-led alterations to Tbilisi’s physical and symbolic landscape that took place during this time.

The concept of flexible memory narratives is utilized in this article to demonstrate the ways in which collective memories and their constituent identity narratives are selectively applied, discarded, stretched, and/or reinterpreted by those in power to suit particular aims and appease particular audiences. While collective identities are commonly recognized as contested and flexible, collective memories are often comprised of much more resilient components. These memories often lend credence and longevity
to particular national identity narratives (such as those relating to the historic presence of the Georgian language and Georgian Orthodox Christianity on Georgian lands). Still other memories and identity narratives, however, commonly face contestation from state authorities and laypeople, particularly during times of regime change. This contestation sheds light upon the ambivalent, oftentimes contradictory nature of collective memories and identity narratives. The concept of flexible memory narratives, then, helps to draw attention to the fractured, inconsistent, contested, and malleable nature of collective (‘national’) memories and identities and their applications in official policies, speeches, and national iconography.

Three particular flexible memory narratives are identified in official texts (speeches, legislation, news publications, and rhetoric) and local news media channels as being central to state-led attempts to shape the material and symbolic atmosphere of Georgia’s capital city: 1) foreign aggression and oppression, 2) uniqueness through antiquity, and 3) Georgia’s return to ‘the West’. These narratives and their concrete manifestations represent official attempts to instill and legitimize official conceptions of Georgian national identity into the landscape as well as the hearts and minds of the individuals within and outside of this landscape. The first flexible memory narrative—that of foreign aggression and oppression—emphasizes Georgian victimhood at the hands of Imperial Russian/Soviet/independent Russian leadership. This narrative is reflected in Tbilisi’s landscape, chiefly through the selection of particular buildings, monuments, place- and street names to be wholly or partially demolished, renamed, repurposed, and/or relocated.

The second narrative, uniqueness through antiquity, is largely visible through officials’ decisions to (re)construct monuments and statutory in honor of the various aspects of Georgian national identity that are perceived as having played a central role in the development of a uniquely Georgian nation through centuries of hardship. This particular narrative is expressive of both inclusive and exclusive expressions of Georgian national identity, typically traversing one of two particular trajectories—one in which ‘Georgianess’ is interpreted in exclusive, narrow terms (reminiscent of the thinking behind Gamsakhurdia’s slogan of “Georgia for Georgians”), and the other that folds non-titular Georgians into the narrative vis-à-vis Georgian legacies of multiculturalism and ‘tolerance’. I argue that the second trajectory is more representative of the image of Georgian national identity promoted by state officials and institutions today than is the first, although proponents of the first trajectory remain visible at both the official and popular levels. The second trajectory of uniqueness through antiquity emphasizes the uniqueness of the Georgian people as an ‘ethno-national group’ alongside the gradual absorption of ‘foreigners’ and their cultures into the fabric of Tbilisi as well as the entire country. This absorption was made possible by Georgians’ tolerant nature and historical legacy of benevolence toward members of other groups, including toward descendants of ‘enemy’ and ‘invading’ groups. Yet the absorption appears to be one-sided; whereas the former ‘invaders’ and ‘enemies’ were eventually incorporated into the socio-cultural life of the country, this incorporation is not framed as having any real impact upon the norms and traditions of ‘ethnic’ Georgians, at least beyond highlighting the benevolent nature of the Georgian people in the face of developing multiculturalism.

The third narrative is that of Georgia’s return to ‘the West’, which is exemplified in the symbolically imbued material landscape just as much as it is embodied in domestic legislation, international agreements, and political discourse. Yet recent landscape-based endeavors to connect Georgia to the countries of Western Europe and North America have occasionally clashed with efforts by elites and activists to promote Tbilisi’s historicity and protect it for future generations. The erection of structures such as the new Public Service Hall, the Rike Park ‘tubes’, and the Peace Bridge in the heart of Old Tbilisi, for example, has sparked considerable debate and controversy regarding the push and pull of forces seeking to modernize and/or preserve the historicity of the capital city. Similarly, a number of social and environmental activists, academics, and politicians have criticized the projects of New Life for Old Tbilisi and Panorama Tbilisi for irresponsibly altering the ecological, socio-cultural, historical, and socio-economic fabric of the city. While this discussion focuses predominantly upon debates over the importance of modernization vs. historicity in Tbilisi, it is also applicable to contemporary debates at the statewide level concerning economic modernization, political democratization, and the importance of preserving ‘traditional values/ways of life’ in the face of such modernization.

Whereas Articles 1 and 2 focus upon the narratives and initiatives undertaken at the level of the Georgian state to promote particular national identity narratives among the citizenry as well as foreign audiences, Article 3 examines official Azerbaijani efforts to imbue a separate, ‘Azerbaijani’ identity among Georgia’s Azeri-Turk population. This examination is undertaken utilizing narrative and discourse analysis of official speeches, declarations, and news pieces published in both state and non-state media portals. Additionally, participant observation, landscape analysis, and interviews with state and NGO representatives provide further sources for data triangulation.

Georgian Azeri-Turks’ collective identity is framed by state officials of both Azerbaijan and Georgia as being diasporic in nature, despite the centuries-long ties of the majority of the population in question to the territories of contemporary southeastern Georgia. The development of the Azerbaijani ‘Diaspora’ as a
foreign policy tool is examined in light of diplomatic and inter-personal relationships between independent Georgian and Azerbaijani heads of state. Furthermore, the geopolitical and economic circumstances prevailing within and between both countries at particular points of time have proven to be key factors in the development of bilateral relations between independent Georgia and Azerbaijan. Geopolitical and economic indicators as well as the nature and strength of inter-personal relationships between Eduard Shevardnadze and Heydar Aliyev, Ilham Aliyev and Mikheil Saakashvili, and Ilham Aliyev and Giorgi Margvelashvili are analyzed and discussed as key factors determining the ways in which leaders of both states frame and position Georgia and/or Azerbaijan as the ‘homeland’ of Georgian Azeri-Turks. These geopolitical, economic, and inter-personal relationships are explored via publications in online archives (the official archives of former Presidents H. Aliyev and M. Saakashvili) as well on the webpages of the current heads of state of both countries and in other local media channels.

The considerable imbalance in Georgian-Azerbaijani relations—caused in large part by Georgian dependence on Azerbaijan’s resource wealth as well as Azerbaijani investments in the Georgian economy—has contributed to a situation wherein Azerbaijan has positioned itself as the chief protector and benefactor of the Georgian Azeri-Turks. Participant observation and interviews have shown that, through investments to regional and local infrastructure, cultural affairs, and charitable projects, Azerbaijan and its Georgia-based affiliates—including, for example, the Mirza Phatali Akhundov Museum and Cultural Center, the ‘Tea House’, the Azerbaijani Cultural Center, the Heydar Aliyev Computer Center, the Congress of Azerbaijanis of Georgia, and the Azerbaijani Embassy of Georgia—operate to raise awareness concerning ‘Azerbaijani realities’, promote narratives of Azerbaijani national identity, and garner support among Georgian Azeri-Turks for official Azerbaijani interests. By promoting the territorial state of Azerbaijan as the ‘historical homeland’ of Georgian Azeri-Turks and helping to provide them with improved roads and access to electricity, water, and gas, the Azerbaijani state has demonstrated a commitment to improving the standards of living in Georgian Azeri-Turk-populated locales. By providing Georgian Azeri-Turk youth with opportunities to improve their skills in Georgian and other languages, take courses in carpet weaving, other art forms, and sports, and providing the necessary capital to (re)construct local schools as well as award scholarships to local students, the Azerbaijani state has provided members of its ‘Diaspora’ with opportunities for socio-economic and cultural development. These are opportunities that the Georgian state has thus far proven unwilling and/or unable to provide to Georgian Azeri-Turks at a sufficient or comparable level. Instead, the Georgian state has demonstrated its ready willingness to allow Azerbaijan to provide Georgian Azeri-Turks with these opportunities and services. Subsequent analysis of Marneuli’s material and symbolic landscape further demonstrates Azerbaijani interest and investment in Georgian Azeri-Turks and the locales in which they are compactly settled.

Azerbaijani investments in Georgian Azeri-Turk population points are not without strings attached, however. The Azerbaijani-state affiliated bodies and diaspora organizations operating in Tbilisi as well as various locations in Kvemo Kartli regularly host and take part in events celebrating, commemorating, and promoting officially sanctioned narratives of national identity and models for the further development of the Azerbaijani state, society, and economy. The narratives propagated by Azerbaijan-affiliated bodies in Georgia include: 1.) pride in and preservation of historical attributes of Azerbaijani national identity (e.g. knowledge and pride in Azerbaijan as the mother tongue, Islam as the spiritual anchor of the Azerbaijani people, adherence to other particular socio-cultural norms and values), 2.) acknowledgement of Armenian aggression and Azerbaijan victims in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and 3.) reverence for Heydar Aliyev and the role that he and his descendants have played in the development of the Azerbaijani nation-state.

These narratives do little to encourage local Georgian Azeri-Turks to look to Tbilisi rather than Baku for the alleviation of their collective concerns. Furthermore, the ambivalent and oft-times contradictory stances of both states in framing either or both territorial states as the rightful ‘homeland’ of Georgia’s Azeri-Turks breeds confusion among many locals at the grassroots level. When official stances diverge on particular issues, how are locals to respond? If, for example, Georgian Azeri-Turks are encouraged by the Azerbaijani government to feel and express vehemence toward Armenia and Armenians as a whole, then how is this to encourage inter-group integration and stability in Georgia? Alternatively, if Georgian Azeri-Turks are to become devoted members of the Aliyev clan’s cult of personality, then how will such devotion impact measures to better integrate Georgian Azeri-Turks into Georgia’s political structures? This article highlights the ways that official nation-building narratives and initiatives in both Azerbaijan and Georgia seek to condition local Georgian Azeri-Turks’ perceptions of/relationships with both or either ‘homeland/s’ and, furthermore, examines how inter-personal, geopolitical, and economic relations inform these narratives and initiatives.

Article 4 represents a view of officially propagated national identity narratives—alongside their material-symbolic manifestations in the landscape—and how they are encountered and perceived by local Georgian Azeri-Turks in Kvemo Kartli. This article makes use of interviews with social activists, social
media analysis, and participant observation to identify and analyze locals’ perceptions of and responses to official interventions in Georgian Azeri-Turk-populated landscapes. Content and discourse analysis of these data sources reveals a number of commonly recognized discursive categories among Georgian Azeri-Turk informants regarding these interventions. These discursive categories include: 1.) Physical presence/residence, 2.) Place names, 3.) Religious symbolism in the built environment, and 4.) Collective utilization. The first category, that of “physical presence/residence”, refers to the stories that individuals tell regarding the alleged forced out-migration of Georgian Azeri-Turks from their homes in various parts of Kvemo Kartli during the early 1990s, in the midst of rising ethno-nationalism in Georgia. The second category, “place names”, refers to arbitrary, opaque changes to Turkic place names in the region, particularly during the post-Soviet period—ranging from the early 1990s to the present day. The third category of “religious symbolism in the built environment” is dedicated to discussions regarding the arbitrary placement of crosses outside and/or within primarily Muslim Georgian Azeri-Turk-populated locales as well as the difficulties faced by Muslims in acquiring permissions to construct places of religious education and/or worship. The last category, that of “collective utilization”, describes attempts by officials to coopt local landscapes and control the visibility of local Georgian Azeri-Turks within these landscapes. The latter discussion includes analysis of locals’ responses to these cooptative measures, particularly when these measures impede the ability of locals to observe cultural and religious traditions and celebrations. Finally, this discursive category analyses locals’ responses to official attempts to control and/or reduce the visibility of Georgian Azeri-Turks in regional marketing campaigns.

This article demonstrates the ways that symbolically imbued landscapes are arenas of and for identity creation, dissemination, contestation, and, at times, change. Although elites have disproportionate power and access to the resources necessary to make alterations to the landscape and often do so in ways that help to solidify and legitimate existing, context-bound hierarchies of power relations, elites cannot fully control the ways that individuals at the grassroots level perceive such alterations to local landscapes. This article demonstrates how officials engage in the intermittent cooptation of local landscapes and ultimately affect the symbolic and physical presence of Georgian Azeri-Turks within them. What I find is that, while officials evince a propensity to sanitize, coopt, or occasionally ‘Georgianize’ landscapes of importance to Georgian Azeri-Turks, members of the latter collective often find ways to resist or counter official attempts to do so. Such resistance takes various shapes, some more active and/or outwardly demonstrative than others, ranging from personal lamentations between family members and friends to events/demonstrations in opposition to officials’ cooptation of locally meaningful landscapes. Local landscapes are framed as arenas within which identities are imagined into existence by multiple actors and, whereas some identities are legitimated and perpetuated through official patronage, others are repressed and marginalized. The local landscapes of Kvemo Kartli are sites where divisions between ‘Us’/’Them’—‘Georgians’ and ‘Azerbaijanis’/’Azeris’, ‘natives’ and ‘newcomers’, etc.—are symbolically and materially manifested.

The findings of this article suggest that, for Georgian Azeri-Turks, landscapes are sites within which fields of in-group similarity and out-group difference are often solidified and legitimated. By limiting the ways that Georgian Azeri-Turks can visualize themselves and be visualized by others within their own localities, the message sent by state authorities is that Georgian Azeri-Turks, their customs, values, and traditions, do not belong in Georgia in the same way as do those of titular Georgians. In this way, mental boundaries between members of these groups are solidified rather than retracted or dissolved.

The centuries-long concentration of Georgian Azeri-Turks in the territories of southeastern Georgia is a source of suspicion for Georgian state authorities, especially given the nature of the conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This suspicion and anxiety manifests itself in various ways, including in official efforts to control the ways that local landscapes in border regions are utilized and shaped by the peoples living there, especially when those people are considered to be members of ‘ethnic minority groups’. The nature of the landscape as a portrait of the bounded nation-state, a canvas upon which to paint the narratives of the titular nation, and an arena within which collective identities are created, disseminated, negotiated, and contested all contribute to a situation wherein border territories and their populations are subjected to heightened surveillance by state authorities. Yet this suspicion, alongside official endeavors to nationalize the landscapes of border regions inhabited by minority populations, does little to encourage inter-group cooperation or integration. This article demonstrates that, on the contrary, such official endeavors can and often do impede efforts toward the creation and dissemination of a civic-based, inclusive conception of national identity. In this case, not only do official attempts to coopt and control minority landscapes impede integration efforts, but they also undermine officials’ assertions that the state does in fact desire such integration in the first place. Official interventions in the local landscapes of Kvemo Kartli are more indicative of an assimilationist agenda than of a concerted effort to integrate Georgian Azeri-Turks into the country’s economic, political, and social fabric (and to do so in a manner that is respectful of their socio-cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity).
Article 5 examines the ways that Georgian Azeri-Turks construct and perceive symbolic, psychological distinctions between their collective ‘Selves’ and ‘Others’. Whereas Article 4 focuses upon the identification and analysis of particular discursive categories and the ways that these categories inform inter-group distinctions, Article 5 shifts the focus of discussion to individual attitudes and perceptions of their own subject positions as well as those of others (e.g. of titular Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijan and Georgians in Georgia). Data from 407 questionnaires distributed within four districts in the Kvemo Kartli region (Marneuli, Bolnisi, Dmanisi, and Gardabani) provide the basis for the article. Interviews with local Georgian Azeri-Turk officials, community leaders, and representatives of local NGOs are incorporated into the discussion as useful nodes for the comparison, contextualization, and triangulation of data.

The article begins with a discussion of the importance of labels in the creation, dissemination, and negotiation of collective identities. States in particular play a central role in determining and validating particular labels and categories, ultimately determining which categories of membership are available within a given society, and to whom. As Anderson (2006) notes in his chapter titled, “Census, Map, Museum”, the state has various ways of creating and disseminating available identities and imbuing them with particular values and meanings. The state, in this way, has an impact upon the ways that individuals perceive of themselves and their own subjectivities. Yet, as social agents, individuals can choose to emphasize or downplay particular categories of membership and value/undervalue the popular attributes associated with these categories (such as language and/or religious affiliation). This study makes use of questionnaires to identify and analyze the types of language that individuals use to speak about themselves, members of their associated collective or ‘imagined community’, and about the perceived collective identities of others. To do so, the questions posed within the Azerbaijani- and Russian-language questionnaires included queries meant to gauge the nature, scope, and extent of intra- and inter-group attitudes and interactions.

Questions regarding spheres and patterns of language use were posed with the aim of determining when, with whom, and for what purposes individuals use the Azerbaijani, Georgian, and/or Russian languages. Other queries pertaining to the frequency and nature of interactions with Georgians in the public and private spheres were articulated alongside other questions regarding individuals’ intra- and inter-state mobility. Individuals’ attitudes and perceptions of those classified as ‘Georgians’, ‘Azerbaijanis’ in Azerbaijan, and as ‘Azerbaijanis/Azeris’ were measured via a mixture of open-ended questions and Likert-scale metrics. Individuals’ attitudes toward the Georgian and Azerbaijani states were ascertained via questions regarding the desirability of staying in/moving to Georgia and/or Azerbaijan as well as questions regarding individuals’ level of trust in state bodies and public officials. All of the aforementioned themes were utilized with the aim of uncovering and analyzing fields of perceived in- and out-group similarity and difference, or, in other words, to determine who and what participants consider to be the ‘Us’ versus who/what is seen as the ‘Them’.

Simple statistical analysis of questionnaire responses reveals that the majority of individuals included in this study typically self-identified as ‘Azerbaijanis/Azeris’ for whom Azerbaijani is the mother tongue and Islam is the collective religion. It is important to note, however, that, for most participants, affiliation with Islam did not translate to religiosity (e.g. frequent mosque attendance or observance of daily prayers). Additionally, questionnaire participants made frequent reference to traditions, ‘worldviews’, and even hardships held in common with others deemed to be part of the same ‘Georgian Azerbaijani/Azeri’ collective. Although most questionnaire participants were in regular contact with Georgians, these contacts were chiefly in the spheres of work/education and were, for the most part, uncommon in other, more private spheres of life. Given the typical locations of questionnaire distribution (e.g. schools and other educational/cultural centers) and the nature and scope of unemployment issues in the region, it stands to reason that other Georgian Azeri-Turks outside of the educational sphere would have fewer contacts with Georgians than most participants in this study. The same can be said of Georgian language skills, as well. Even though most participants reported having at least average skills in the Georgian language and speaking Georgian with others in school/university settings, the vast majority of questionnaire participants reported using Georgian only in the public spheres. Very few respondents reported frequently spending free time with Georgians or members of other socio-cultural groupings.

A considerable level of both social and geographic isolation persists among questionnaire participants, due in large part to their residence in relatively socio-culturally homogeneous locales as well as the relative infrequency with which they travel outside of these locales. Despite such limited mobility, however, the majority of participants reported having travelled to Azerbaijan at some point in their lives, often for purposes of education, visits to family members and friends, or tourism. Nonresponse rates to questions regarding perceived differences between Georgian Azeri-Turks and Azerbaijanis in neighboring Azerbaijan suggested either indifference and/or uncertainty regarding such questions. Perceived differences between Georgian Azeri-Turks and Georgians, however, were typically much easier for participants to identify than were perceived similarities. Whereas the perceived similarities between Georgian Azeri-Turks and titular Azerbaijanis commonly included language, religion, norms and traditions, recognized
similarities between Georgian Azeri-Turks and Georgians were typically much more superficial, including, for example, assertions of shared humanity, culinary dishes, and state holidays. An important element that hints at the existence of a form of collective identity among questionnaire participants, however, is participants' identification of Georgia as their homeland, and not Azerbaijan.

The findings of this article suggest that there is indeed a basis for some form of collective identity among Georgian Azeri-Turks in Kvemo Kartli. This identity contains elements of the respective national identities propagated by Georgian and Azerbaijani leadership, yet corresponds entirely to neither. Whereas participants note feelings of ethnic kinship to titular Azerbaijanis due to similarities in linguistic, religious, and other normative and cultural values and traditions, participants' attachment to Georgia as the 'homeland' is a significant and deeply emotive element of their perceived identities. Although interaction with Georgians tends to be limited and restricted primarily to the public sphere, many participants expressed positive attitudes toward Georgians as a whole as well as toward the Georgian territorial state in particular. Although the vast majority of participants made no other, more specific mention of the territories comprising their perceptions of the 'homeland' beyond simply listing 'Georgia' as such, territoriality appears to be an important element of participants' identity that ties them to Georgians and the Georgian state as well as to one another. While participants' territorial and emotive ties to Georgia link them to the Georgian state and society, these ties serve to distance participants from those of Azerbaijan.
5. CONCLUSIONS

The articles of this dissertation collectively address the key national identity narratives propagated at the level of the Georgian and Azerbaijani states in the post-Soviet period as they affect Georgia’s Azeri-Turk population. Governing institutions and officials are identified as the key stakeholders involved in shaping and propagating these narratives due to their far-reaching spheres of operation and access to the resources necessary to disseminate identity narratives over time and space. Article 1 seeks to unpack the “symbolic boundaries of membership” in the Georgian nation as they are reflected and legitimized in and through official iconography and marketed for internal and external consumption. Article 2 examines the ways that the symbolically imbued material landscape of Tbilisi serves as a canvas upon which officials and elites paint their desired identity narratives. Article 3 examines the ways that Georgian Azeri-Turks are framed by both the Azerbaijani and Georgian states as members of a worldwide ‘Azerbaijani Diaspora’ for whom Azerbaijan, not Georgia, is the historical homeland. What we see is that, in both Georgia and Azerbaijan, national identity narratives contain both inclusive and exclusive elements emphasizing ethnic alongside civic associations of nationhood and national identity. The civic elements are primarily discernable in official discourse and maintain limited visibility at the grassroots level. Popular conceptions of ethnic-national identity, wherein one’s national identity is directly tied to one’s perceived ethnicity, remain commonplace at the grassroots and official levels in both Georgia and Azerbaijan. Official national symbols (e.g. elements of states’ national iconography) and interventions in landscapes both within and outside of Tbilisi demonstrate the continued salience of semi-exclusive identity narratives in Georgia and Azerbaijan. With regard to Azerbaijan, national identity narratives also involve elements of cultic ideologies (i.e. propagation of a cult of personality surrounding the first family, the Aliyev clan).

Additionally, the articles of this work examine what room, if any, exists for Georgian Azeri-Turks within the official meta-narratives of national identity in Georgia and Azerbaijan as they are represented in official symbolism and local and ‘national’ landscapes. The room that these articles uncover is less open, accommodative space than ambiguous and shifting ‘grey areas’. These ‘grey areas’ are identifiable in the gaps between official discourse, policy, and everyday practice. Whereas analyses of official identity discourses and narratives result in plentiful references to Georgian ‘tolerance’ and ‘multiculturalism’, such references are much less discernable on the ground and in individuals’ daily lives. The place names, celebrations, commemorations, monuments and statuary of Tbilisi predominantly promote a conception of ‘Georgian-ness’ that revolves around linkages between the Georgian language, Orthodox Christianity, and perceived ethnicity among members of the titular nationality, the kartveli. Narrations of Georgian national identity not only manifest themselves in predominantly Georgian locales or in the capital city, however; such ‘narrations’ are manifested on the ground in Georgian Azeri-Turk-populated locales as well. Additionally, Georgian Azeri-Turks are folded into official, Azerbaijani state-propagated conceptions of the ‘Azerbaijani Diaspora’. By emphasizing the socio-cultural, historical, religious, and linguistic linkages between titular Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijan and Georgian Azeri-Turks historically residing in the territories of southeastern Georgia, the Azerbaijani state is able to credibly frame Georgia’s Azeri-Turk population as part of its overarching ‘Diaspora’. As members of the so-called ‘Diaspora’, Georgian Azeri-Turks benefit from Azerbaijani state-sponsored infrastructural, educational, and cultural ventures, particularly in Kvemo Kartli and Tbilisi. Despite the grey areas symbolized by rhetoric of ‘famous Georgian tolerance/multiculturalism’ and/or the ‘worldwide Azerbaijani Diaspora’, neither Georgia nor Azerbaijan fully accepts responsibility for Georgian Azeri-Turks as individuals native to either respective territorial state. Georgian and Azerbaijani officials’ framing of both Georgia and Azerbaijan as the homelands of Georgian Azeri-Turks—Azerbaijan as the true ‘historical homeland’ by virtue of shared ethnicity and kinship ties, Georgia as the ‘adoptive homeland’ by virtue of long-term residence—in public statements and speeches runs counter to the spirit of certain other policies (e.g. the selection of national symbols in Georgia and/or restrictive immigration policies in Azerbaijan).

The latter two articles of this dissertation address the secondary questions regarding the ways locals encounter, perceive, and respond to Georgian and Azerbaijani nation-building endeavors. Furthermore, these articles examine how these perceptions/responses color and facilitate feelings of fellowship among Georgian Azeri-Turks. Official Georgian measures to ‘nationalize’ Kvemo Kartli’s minority-populated landscapes are often viewed by local Georgian Azeri-Turks as discriminatory attempts to erase evidence of their historical presence in the region. In these cases, perceptions of discrimination and relative deprivation serve only to heighten distinctions between ‘Us’ (the ‘disadvantaged ethnic minority group’) and the ‘Them’ (the titular, ‘ethnic Georgians’) and exacerbate feelings of mutual suspicion between members of the ‘Us’ and ‘Them’. Irrespective of feelings of differential or discriminatory treatment, however, the vast majority of the Georgian Azeri-Turks surveyed have positive perceptions of Georgians and the Georgian state and associate their pasts, presents, and futures with the territorial state of Georgia. We see that, although the
individuals surveyed differentiate themselves and members of their felt community from titular Georgians by virtue of mother tongue, religion, and socio-cultural norms and values, Georgian Azeri-Turks’ territorial identity serves to link them to their Georgian compatriots. While the Georgian national identity narratives highlighted in this study often exacerbate perceived differences between titular Georgians and Georgian Azeri-Turks, this does not connote an absence of potential for change (i.e. gradual changes to the symbolic boundaries of membership in the Georgian ‘nation’).

Azerbaijani national identity narratives regarding the ‘worldwide Azerbaijani Diaspora’ do indeed appear to be internalized by a number of participants, at least with regard self-ascribed ethno-nationality and recognition of key symbolic boundary markers (language, religion, socio-cultural norms and values, etc.). Georgian national identity narratives often serve to distance titular Georgians from representatives of other socio-cultural groupings, including from the Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli; the national identity narratives propagated by Azerbaijan, however, are articulated to bring Georgian Azeri-Turks closer to the views and interests of the Azerbaijani state. These ‘views and interests’ are not accompanied by open-ended invitations to Azerbaijan. Georgian Azeri-Turks are encouraged to internalize ‘Azerbaijani realities’ from within the territorial confines of their adoptive homeland. The identity narratives of both states encourage mixed, ambivalent perceptions of felt community among Georgian Azeri-Turks in Kvemo Kartli—territorial and inter-generational affinity to the Georgian territorial state alongside perceptions of ethnic- and patrimonial affiliations to the people, state, and territory of Azerbaijan. Resultant indications of collective identity among Georgian Azeri-Turks contain elements and influences from both sides’ official identity narratives, yet coincide completely with neither. Furthermore, the resultant fields of collective identification are and have been undergoing periods of relative continuity and change before the advent of post-Soviet Georgian and Azerbaijani independence. The bases for collective identification will continue to shift and change as individuals exercise their subjectivities vis-à-vis geopolitical, socio-cultural, and systemic ebbs and flows.

As the articles in this dissertation demonstrate, ambivalence and ambiguity abound when it comes to Georgian Azeri-Turks and official narratives of national identity in Georgia and Azerbaijan. There is a tendency on the part of officials to include Georgian Azeri-Turks in official conceptions of national identity in both states, yet this tendency is more pronounced in political rhetoric rather than at the grassroots level in Kvemo Kartli. What one sees, instead, is the continued tendency of both states to market themselves both internally and externally as guarantors of the rights and interests of members of their respective ‘titular nations’ within their respective ‘historical homelands’. In Georgia, for example, state authorities safeguard and promote the status of the Georgian language and Orthodox Church within Georgia alongside narratives that legitimize and perpetuate titular-non-titular distinctions. These narratives include the identification of foes, historical and contemporary, whose actions have stymied/continue to stymie the development of an independent Georgian nation-state in the past, present, and/or future. The Georgian homeland is framed as the historical legacy and birthright of the Georgian people, people who are seen to have maintained their socio-cultural, linguistic, and religious autonomy from other groups by virtue of historicity and marked uniqueness from others in the region.

Officials’ efforts to align the Georgian state more closely with the economic and political institutions of ‘the West’ have contributed to greater dialogue in Georgian political and academic circles concerning Georgian national identity and the inclusive/exclusive parameters of this identity. Yet, beyond political discourses touting the protection of minority groups and their respective cultures in Georgia, official conceptions of ‘Georgian-ness’ all too often reify existing symbolic inter-group boundaries between the titular Georgian ‘Us’ and the non-titular ‘Them’. Representatives of these non-titular groups such as the Georgian Azeri-Turks are then framed as ‘newcomers’ to Georgia who, thanks to the virtues of ‘Georgian tolerance and hospitality’, have graciously been adopted by and allowed to remain within the Georgian ‘motherland’. Georgian Azeri-Turks are continually reminded that they are but stepbrothers and sisters to titular Georgians and that, only so long as their loyalty to the Georgian territorial state is unwavering, will they continue to be welcomed by their adoptive siblings. This relationship is further complicated by the presence of the self-styled ‘biological parent’ next door (i.e. the Azerbaijani mother/fatherland) with whom Georgian Azeri-Turks continue to have contact.

Continuing with familial metaphors, the Azerbaijani state frames Georgian Azeri-Turks as though they are the estranged or long-lost children of the Azerbaijani mother/fatherland. This estrangement is seen as the result of centuries of externally imposed separation rather than conscious political and/or popular choice and has created distance between individuals where it is not surmised to have existed previously. That said, while Georgian Azeri-Turks and titular Azerbaijanis are framed as being from the same genetic stock, the geographical and political distance placed between them over the centuries is seen to have gradually resulted in a certain amount of mental distance as well. Azerbaijani officials seek to decrease this mental distance by reminding Georgian Azeri-Turks of their collective historical, linguistic, spiritual, and normative affinities to the titular people of Azerbaijan. This is certainly not to say that Georgian Azeri-
Turks on the ground in Kvemo Kartli are all equally predisposed to accepting Azerbaijani tutelage. The debate concerning Georgian Azeri-Turks’ collective namesake is but one example of the different positions prevailing among members of this collective regarding their relationship to the people, state, and territory of Azerbaijan.

5.1 A ‘GEORGIAN AZERI-TURKIC IDENTITY’? COLLECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS, CONTESTED AIMS AND ORIENTATIONS

There is most certainly a basis for collective identity among the individuals popularly known as ‘Azerbaijanis’ or ‘Azeris’, known here as ‘Georgian Azeri-Turks’, yet a number of its parameters remain undetermined and open for negotiation. If one is to include aspects such as felt community, territorial affiliation, and shared collective traits, norms, and values as central to the existence of a collective identity, then one can indeed make justifiable claims as to the existence of collective identity among members of this grouping. Yet considerable variation exists regarding the collective’s most desirable political aims and orientations.

Although the individuals in question share a common language and spiritual affiliation and recognize what are perceived to be commonly held values, norms, and traditions, the fields of commonality are littered with differing perceptions of official and unofficial relationships between the Azerbaijani and Georgian states and societies. Whereas the territories of today’s Georgia are commonly considered by Georgian Azeri-Turks as their ancestral homelands, such a view is problematic among elites in key Georgian and Azerbaijani political, academic, and social circles. The dominant view among Georgian officials and Georgian society as a whole is that Georgian Azeri-Turks are ‘newcomers’ who are not native to Georgia. For Azerbaijani officials and many segments of Azerbaijani society, Georgian Azeri-Turks are part of a worldwide ‘Diaspora’ for whom the territory of Azerbaijan is the historical homeland. Despite commonplace rhetoric and narratives of ‘famous Georgian tolerance and multiculturalism’, the Georgian state iconography propagates narratives that continue to draw popular and political legitimacy from exclusive conceptions of national identity.

Irrespective of claims pertaining to the inclusiveness of ‘Azerbaijanism’ as the official ideology of the post-Soviet Azerbaijani state, one is left to question how inclusive this ideology really is given the emphasis placed upon the Azerbaijani language as the mother tongue, Islam as the spiritual anchor, and Armenian-imposed victimhood as cornerstones of Azerbaijani national identity. Emphasis upon these attributes and narratives as key constituent parts of Azerbaijani national identity represents obvious obstacles for individuals with neither knowledge of the Azerbaijani language, affiliation with Islam, nor enmity towards Armenians. Furthermore, the importance of the cult of personality surrounding the Aliyev dynasty in official narratives leaves little room for critics of the ruling family within this conceptualization of Azerbaijani national identity. Even if one were to ascribe to the tenets of Azerbaijanism as a self-proclaimed member of the ‘Azerbaijani Diaspora’, this does not mean that one would be welcomed to Azerbaijan with open arms. Rather, one could visit one’s ‘historical homeland’, but only while observing the same rules and regulations applicable to all other ‘foreign’ visitors. Being a member of this particular ‘Diaspora’ has its benefits, no doubt, including the ability to take advantage of charitable contributions, educational, cultural, and sports courses/facilities and the like, but the benefits are meant to be enjoyed in the adoptive territorial state rather than in the ‘homeland’. What of those individuals popularly known as ‘Azerbaijanis’, however, who have very different ideas as to what is or should be the ‘homeland’?

An important attribute fueling perceptions of an ‘imagined community’ among Georgian Azeri-Turks is their collective, historical association with Georgian territories. Although certain online communities and social media posts refer to Borchali as ‘ancient Azerbaijani territory’, the participants of this study largely accept that, irrespective of under whose control Borchali might have fallen at particular points in time, the Borchali of their ancestors is, for better or for worse, now part of the Georgian territorial state. Interviewees in particular assert that important attributes of their identity/ies have been formed over the course of centuries-long interactions with titular Georgians in the region. Although Georgian Azeri-Turks and their ancestors have largely lived in physical and social isolation from the so-called ‘ethnic Georgians’, interview participants commonly reference the ‘coming together’ of the two groups over the centuries in times of warfare—to work alongside rather than against one another—as well to engage in trade. Although the geographic, political, and economic distance between titular Georgians and Georgian Azeri-Turks has decreased in the post-Soviet period, particularly due to the infrastructural and educational reforms initiated during Saakashvili’s first term, considerable distance has yet to be traversed and integration remains elusive.

Whereas interview participants were often much more explicit and descriptive in their responses to questions regarding relations between the Georgian state and society and members of their felt community, questionnaire participants were often much more guarded in their responses. With the exception of local MPs...
and representatives of Azerbaijan-sponsored diaspora organizations operating in Tbilisi and the locales of Kvemo Kartli, the majority of interviewees intimated in more or less explicit terms that integration processes are stymied by underlying feelings of suspicion, fear, and entitlement/disempowerment among titular Georgians as well as Georgian Azeri-Turks. In other words, interviewees alleged that both the Georgian state and society view Georgian Azeri-Turks with suspicion and fear due to the latter’s demographic strength and geographic concentration along Georgia’s political borders. Georgian officials and laypeople harbor fears of separatism and/or calls for greater autonomy on the part of geographically concentrated minority groups, including Georgian Armenians and Georgian Azeri-Turks. Georgian Azeri-Turks, in turn, are suspicious and fearful of a resurgence of Georgian ethno-nationalism. These suspicions and fears are rooted in the late Soviet/early post-Soviet period and the polarizing, ethno-nationalist rhetoric promoted by Gamsakhurdia and his supporters. Furthermore, the Georgian government has proven itself susceptible to the whims of the Azerbaijani government by denying entry and/or residence to known critics of the Aliyev regime as well as allegedly allowing Azerbaijani security forces to operate on Georgian territory (e.g., pertaining to the kidnapping and arrest of Azerbaijani citizen and journalist, Egfan Mukhtarli, from Tbilisi in May 2017. See Baumgartner, 2017 and IPHR/Freedom Now/EMC, 2017). Speaking openly against both Azerbaijani and Georgian state officials has proven on occasion to be detrimental to critics’ health and livelihood. The enmity between ruling and opposition parties in Georgia, however, has proven to be similarly likely to result in violence among Georgian Azeri-Turks of different political persuasions as between members of different socio-cultural groupings. This enmity causes many Georgian Azeri-Turks to fear speaking openly against either government—Azerbaijani or Georgian—and to be suspicious of the motives underlying officials’ involvement in local affairs. Local Georgian Azeri-Turks’ perceptions of relative deprivation and discrimination at the official and grassroots levels in turn reinforce feelings of collective suffering and fellow feeling within a Georgian Azeri-Turk ‘imagined community’. Such feelings typically do little to decrease perceptions of socio-cultural distance between groups or to increase potential fields for positive contact, interaction, and commiseration between/among their members.

Georgian Azeri-Turks are a people ‘in-between’—in between the nation-building endeavors of the Azerbaijani and Georgian states, and in-between conflicting approaches to conceptualizations of collective identity (Storm, 2019). Georgian Azeri-Turks are claimed by both states as fulfilling particular domestic and foreign policy aims; for Georgian state authorities, the presence of Georgian Azeri-Turks in historically ‘Georgian lands’ is referenced as a testament to narratives of multiculturalism and tolerance alongside the indomitable, historic uniqueness of titular Georgians as a distinct ethno-nation. In Georgian political and academic circles, the tendency is to emphasize that the various constituent groups of Georgia’s diverse demographic are ‘separate, but equal’ in terms of socio-cultural characteristics and allocation of cultural rights and protections. In practice, however, it is clear that the hierarchy of power relations in the Georgian state and society tends to promote the collective traits, shared historical memories, and narratives of one group—titular Georgians—above those of ‘ethnic’/national minorities’ (i.e. a ‘separate and hierarchical’ approach). This means that the official symbols used to denote the existence of the independent territorial state of Georgia tend to reflect commonly-recognizable and exclusive attributes and narratives by and for titular Georgians (native Georgian speaking Orthodox Christians) rather than those of the country’s other socio-cultural, linguistic, and/or religious groupings. What the ‘separate but equal’ and ‘separate and hierarchical’ approaches toward majority-minority relations in Georgia have in common is this: representatives of different nations are seen as being separate and distinguishable from one another by virtue of ethnicity. Ethnicity is, however, a spurious category commonly associated in the popular imagination with assumed genetic and racial undertones, where, in reality, there are often few to no such striking biological distinctions between members of different ‘ethnic groups’.

The differences, rather, are often engrained in spatially and temporally embedded forms of social relations, such as patterns of communication, economic relations, and other normative characteristics developed over time through repeat inter-personal and inter-group contact.

Georgian Azeri-Turks are a valuable tool and asset for the developing Azerbaijani state and the interests of its leading officials. Including Georgian Azeri-Turks within the official conception of the ‘worldwide Azerbaijan Diaspora’ provides governing officials with additional leverage in the spheres of domestic and bi-lateral (Georgian-Azerbaijani) relations. Domestically, references to such a large diaspora and the government’s support of Azerbaijaniis abroad’ shore up the image and legitimacy of the ruling elite in Baku, and Azerbaijani investments in projects and organizations in Georgian Azeri-Turk communities are viewed as evidence of Azerbaijan’s goodwill towards the Georgian government and the Georgia-based ‘diaspora community’. In many cases, Azerbaijan provides opportunities and resources for Georgian Azeri-Turks that the Georgian state lacks the political will and/or financial resources to provide. Either way, both states are benefitting from the arrangement. For Georgia, Azerbaijani investments in Georgian Azeri-Turk communities ease Georgia’s financial burden, whereas Azerbaijan gains additional arenas (Georgian Azeri-Turk populated locales) and instruments (diaspora organizations and sympathetic elites) through which
the state can (potentially) attain its goals and interests. Georgian Azeri-Turks benefit from this arrangement in many ways, too, as it is doubtful that they would otherwise have access to the same material and/or symbolic resources and opportunities without the patronage of the Azerbaijani government. Yet, if the Georgian state, and eventually, society, is ever to move beyond traditional and exclusive understandings of nationhood and national identity, then it must consider the potential gains versus costs of continuing to allow the Azerbaijani state to operate as it currently does vis-à-vis Georgia’s Azeri-Turk population. The Georgian state and society must eventually decide to what extent the ‘majority/minority’, ‘titular/non-titular’, and ‘Georgian/Azerbaijani’ distinction is to remain intact or shift, facilitating new, perhaps more inclusive understandings of what it means to be ‘Georgian’. For example, shifting boundaries of membership in the Georgian nation could come to include non-native Georgian speakers and non-Orthodox Christians and/or individuals hailing from different socio-cultural and geographic backgrounds. Important fields of similarity, then, would include citizenship as well as coinciding linguistic repertoires (knowledge of a number of common languages, including Georgian) and a spatial affinity to Georgia and its constituent territories.

Identity is self- and other-defined, situational, and subject to change over time. This study has demonstrated a number of contradictions and coincidences, fields of difference and of similarity, between members of the collective known here as ‘Georgian Azeri-Turks’ and the Georgian and Azerbaijani ‘ethno-nations’. Both ethnicity and nationality are social constructs that gradually take on different meanings in different contexts. Whereas nation means one thing in Switzerland, for example, it tends to mean quite another in countries such as Georgia and Azerbaijan. Although the states of North America and Western Europe have gradually begun to distance official understandings of nationhood and national identity from conceptions of race and/or ethnicity, the contextually embedded nature of power relations in these countries has created a disconnect between rhetoric, policy, and affairs on the ground in their respective societies. Power attracts power and those in influential and/or lucrative positions—be they individuals or groups of like-minded individuals with shared interests—are often loathe to relinquish the ideologies and positions that have brought them such power in the first place. This is true in the countries of ‘the West’, and it is true of many of the post-Soviet states as well.

The institutionalization of the link between ethno-nationality and territory that took place within the first twenty years of Soviet rule had far-reaching implications and reverberations for the newly independent post-Soviet states. For elites in Georgia and Azerbaijan in 1991, brief experiences with independence at the beginning of the 20th century were coupled with early Soviet blueprints for ethno-territorial nation-building to establish and legitimize independent nation-states by and for titular (i.e. ‘native’, autochthonous) peoples in their ‘historical homelands’. Conversations regarding the histories, collective attributes, and developmental paths of ‘Georgians’ and ‘Azerbaijans’ were soon debated with renewed vigor. Yet, after being coopted into yet another quasi-empire for nearly a century, elites claimed that time had come for the Georgian and Azerbaijani ‘ethno-nations’ to reclaim their rights to govern themselves and engage in inter-national affairs as sovereign actors. Yet there is no such thing as a completely homogenous nation-state when ‘nation’ is construed in primarily exclusive terms based upon perceived ‘ethnic’ categories of membership and belonging.

Despite increased references to ‘civic’, citizenship-based approaches to national identity in Georgia and Azerbaijan over the past fifteen to twenty years, the original research presented in this study demonstrates that the symbols and narratives propagated inwardly and externally by both states remain stubbornly fixated upon exclusive and limited conceptions of the nation and national identity. In such exclusivist understandings of what and whom exists as ‘Georgian’ and ‘Azerbaijani’, it becomes all too easy to confine similarly limiting and constrictive labels upon ‘non-titular’, ‘ethnic/national minority’ individuals and groupings of individuals. Seldom are these individuals queried as to their own preferred labels. The labels conferred upon individuals and groups by state actors will inevitably influence the ways that individuals as social actors will come to view themselves, others, and the relationship between these individual selves and others. Yet this does not mean that individuals falling under the designation of ethnic/national/non-titular minority will accept such arbitrary categories—and the social relations that underlie and reaffirm these categories—blindly and/or without contestation. Individuals respond in various ways to these dominant categories, worldviews, and structures of social relations, ranging from acceptance or ambivalence to disillusionment and resistance—outwardly and/or inwardly, peacefully or violently. The ways that individuals perceive and respond to top-down initiatives to shape society and structure political and economic affairs will indeed condition as well as evoke such responses at the grassroots level. These responses do not always take the shape of protests and/or flag burning or waving; rather, the responses are often obscured by their appearance of sheer mundanity.

The research generated from fieldwork in Kvemo Kartli demonstrates that, while the majority of participants appear to have internalized exclusive, state-propagated understandings of nation and national identity (i.e. in ethno-centric terms), not all participants agree with the labels assigned them by
5.2 PROSPECTS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A cadre of young, educated Georgian Azeri-Turks is currently emerging and becoming more active in local affairs both online and on the ground in Kvemo Kartli. These individuals tend to possess impressive Georgian language skills, often due at least in part to participation in the ‘1+4’ Program. This group of individuals has become increasing vocal and visible over the past few years, attracting a considerable following on social and news media outlets (including Facebook and local radio/news stations, such as MarneuliFM). These young activists tend to be critical of local officials and are prepared to call attention to the corrupt nature of party politics in the region and country as a whole. Furthermore, they are wont to point out to the public that the most effective path toward toward real integration and real change in Georgia is through a closer relationship to the Georgian state and society, which is attainable primarily through education and inter-cultural contact. Yet their encouragement of their compatriots to move more closely to the Georgian state does not automatically translate to blind acceptance of the status quo; rather, they encourage others to learn the Georgian language so as to better know their own rights and responsibilities as fully-fledged citizens of Georgia. By becoming better acquainted with their rights, it is argued that individuals will be better equipped to demand and/or safeguard said rights. The idea, as a whole, is to be active and to peacefully, openly, and patiently press for changes to their collective situation. For the most part, these young activists believe that the best way to do this is to turn away from official Azerbaijani attempts to indoctrinate Georgian Azeri-Turks into the political views of Azerbaijan, which ought to be treated purely as a neighboring state rather than familial figure or protector.

The young activists are based both within and outside of Kvemo Kartli, in Marseuili, Tbilisi, or even in other foreign countries where they have temporarily relocated for what are typically educational purposes. The social and political commentary stemming from young Georgian Azeri-Turk activists in European or North American countries, for example, carries particular status and prestige due to the fact that they have left the region and country and are perceived to be bettering their lives in ‘developed’ and/or ‘civilized’ countries. Posts comparing life in Germany, Denmark, and/or the United States to Georgia, for example, pique the curiosity and collective imagination of the Georgian Azeri-Turks reading the comments in Kvemo Kartli. Community leaders and aspiring politicians have taken care to engage with these young activists as well in order to cultivate a more favorable public image, given that information from joint interviews and discussions is likely to appear on local social and/or news media pages.

It is important to note that, despite the young activists’ desire to bring the community closer to the Georgian rather than Azerbaijan state and society, there remains a strong desire to integrate rather than to assimilate. This places significant responsibility on the Georgian state and society to take mutual steps toward the acceptance and inclusion of Georgian Azeri-Turks into political, economic, and social spheres rather than to continually uphold the ‘majority-minority, ‘titular-non-titular’ distinction. There is a palpable desire among these activists as well as average citizens to be perceived politically and popularly...
as rightfully belonging in Georgia, where ‘Georgia’ refers to the rightful, historical homeland of Georgian Azeri-Turks as well as titular Georgians. Yet the young activists in question harbor no misconceptions that the current state of Georgian political and social affairs is conducive to the far-reaching and profound changes necessary to affect such shifts in Georgia’s collective national identity. These activists appear poised and ready to work toward this goal, nevertheless.

Much work remains to be done regarding the potential impact of these young activists within various segments of the Georgian Azeri-Turk population—among members of the older generation having come of age in the Georgian S.S.R., young people with little to no memory of Georgia prior to its attainment of independence in 1991, city-dwellers, villagers, members of Parliament, unemployed individuals, and the like. Will the current influence of these young activists, due in large part to their outspoken presence on popular social media channels, wane over time, or will these very same individuals find their ways into positions from whence they will be better poised to affect change within their own communities and/or at the state-wide level? At the moment, local politicians and community leaders are beginning to take notice of these social activists, and, in the case of the former, beginning to care about cultivating a positive image among members of the young, socially-active and politically-cognizant youth. As young Georgian Azeri-Turks become more outspoken regarding issues such as party politics and political pronouncements, corruption, discrimination, and the like, the question remains: Will this newfound outspokenness impact others’ ways of thinking about their own rights and responsibilities as both Georgian citizens and representatives of a particular ‘imagined community’ (cf. Anderson, 1983)? And, if so, then will this ‘imagined community’ come to distance itself from the politically motivated imaginings of the Azerbaijani elite in favor of aligning itself more closely with those of Georgian state and/or influential socio-cultural actors?

As new elites and governments come to power and new ways of thinking gradually come to take root among certain segments of the population, new opportunities will arise for alternative understandings of collective identity and of the means and modes utilized in the negotiation of these identities. Identity is always in flux, meaning that there is always more to study and learn on the subject, and individuals remain creative in their expressions of solidarity and resistance toward official attempts to cultivate ‘ideal’ citizens and members of the ‘nation’. Continued analysis of political, societal, and grassroots attitudes and perceptions of intra- and inter-group relations in Georgia is best implemented through the use of multi-scalar and interdisciplinary approaches toward the study of identity negotiation. This is because, as demonstrated in this case study, identity is a processual phenomenon that is scripted, performed, and negotiated at a multitude of scales and involves a multitude of actors and mediums. It is for this same reason that such a study ought not be undertaken in a one-sided manner—that is, from the perspective of merely one actor or group of actors. Identity is both self- and other-ascribed, so efforts must be taken to uncover developments from the perspectives of the ‘I’/‘We’ as well as the ‘S/he’/‘They’ subject-positions. Any future study of identity-related issues among the Georgian Azeri-Turks should also provide insight as to the attitudes and motivations of the other key actors present on the scene (i.e. prevailing attitudes among titular Georgians regarding perceptions of intra- and inter-group sameness and difference). If Georgian Azeri-Turk community leaders and/or laypeople were to step up to the national podium and declare their desire to see themselves and be seen by others in the country as belonging rightfully in to the Georgian territorial state rather than that of Azerbaijan, then how would representatives of the country’s various political and societal factions respond? Integration is indeed a two-way street, and studies evaluating the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of integration initiatives should include analyses of the reception of these initiatives and their proponents among titular Georgian politicians and laypeople as well as among members of Georgia’s Azeri-Turk population. Much more work remains to be done in this direction, especially pertaining to the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of average titular Georgians regarding their fellow compatriots with diverse linguistic, religious, and socio-cultural backgrounds.

A key aim of this research project has been to problematize and de-essentialize concepts and categories that we as both researchers and private citizens all too frequently take for granted in our professional and private lives—national identity, majority, and minority, to name but a few. I consider the problematization of such taken-for-granted schemas to be a necessary intervention in studies of identity (re)construction, particularly within the realms of History, Geography and Political Science, where the nation-state-territory truism continues to hold sway. Whereas the eternal optimist is said to have the propensity to view the world through rose-colored glasses, the historically minded, politically inclined geographer might be said to view the world through state-centric, ‘mapping’ lenses, complete with latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates. Yet, while elites might have the benefit of the stage and microphone (real or metaphoric) in discussions facilitating and influencing norms of political and social organization, agency is a powerful thing, indeed. There is no one meaning of territory to all people, for example, nor is there but one kind of relationship between the human being and his or her material and symbolic surroundings. Government elites have vested interests in promoting highly oversimplified, problematic vehicles for collective identification. More often than not, as a result of the socio-cultural,
political, and professional norms that guide our existence as social beings in the world, we find ourselves 'on board' these vehicles out of insecurity, naivety, or sheer complacency. Yet there is seldom just one way to arrive at a desired destination, and, as humans, we are adept at uncovering alternate pathways. Simply because the Georgian and Azerbaijani states currently frame Georgian Azeri Turks as a minority 'diaspora' population, somehow 'from Azerbaijan' irrespective of personal or inter-generational ties to the state and its official territories, this does not mean that locals readily accept these categorizations or accompanying implications. The key intervention that this work makes in studies of 'Diasporas', 'nations', and 'national identities' is its insistence upon thinking with the individuals being thusly labeled in order to take into consideration individuals' own attitudes, perceptions, and subject positions. Efforts in this direction many well uncover alternate ways of imagining social existence and relationships to value-laden spaces beyond the 'nation-state' and its constituent territories. Average individuals consistently and frequently challenge nation-state-homeland doctrines by migrating (legally or illegally), participating or abstaining from participation in political processes, building up or tearing down landmarks, or engaging in alternate, 'against-the-grain' modes of self- and other-representation. While more and more research concerning migration and hybridized identities recognizes the above behaviors, still other research focusing on macro-level phenomena continues to either disregard or downplay the 'thorn in the state's side' that is human agency, thereby obscuring the existence of complex, multi-scalar processes of self- and other-ascription and inadvertently reifying problematic, power-laden categorizations. Rene Descartes' infamous epistemology of 'I think, therefore I am' soon morphs with suspicious ease into something along the lines of 'I think, therefore you are.' Perhaps a more accurate description of the epistemology represented in this work is 'We think, individually and in conjunction with one another, therefore we are', wherein the setting of the 'thinking' is informed by formal, informal, and hierarchical structures of contextually-imbedded power relations. Whereas scholarship in Cultural, Human, and Political Geography and related literature in Border Studies has begun to make important inroads in this direction (see section 2.4, pp. 30-31, this work), more theoretical and methodological work remains to be done to identify and unpack existing categories of social relations as well as the 'pushes' and 'pulls' through which these categories are made available to (or forced upon) others. This is not merely a tale of discrimination or relative deprivation where there are easily distinguishable protagonists and antagonists. Rather, this is an exposition of the status quo in a world wherein people are divided up into arbitrary categories on the basis of what are, in fact, highly subjective experiences of membership and belonging within territorially-based collectivities. This is not just the norm in the South Caucasus or in the post-Soviet space in general; rather, it is a state of being that has emerged and become adapted to local contexts since the powers of mid- to late-17th century Europe introduced the concept of the 'nation-state' to the world. As the purview and surveillance of state bodies has gradually expanded to include the peoples and territories falling under the auspices of state leadership, individuals have been increasingly classified and categorized, similarly to the ways in which books are placed in libraries, items and exhibits are catalogued in museums, and/or items are organized, shelved, and priced in grocery stores. Some labels bring pride, prestige, and value to those labeled and/or doing the labeling, and other labels bring with them negative or lesser statuses, decreased feelings of self-worth and esteem, and/or problematic or intermittent access to resources. It has long since been commonplace to associate particular bounded territories on maps as belonging to, for example, 'Americans', 'Germans', 'Russians', 'Georgians', and/or 'Azerbaijanis'. Over time, as exchanges of people, knowledge, goods, and services have occurred at greater and greater speeds, challenging the capacity of states to control such flows within and across territorial borders, the heterogeneity of peoples and their worldviews has become ever more apparent. Conflicting conceptions of historical events and claims by neighboring states, political rivals, and sub-state irredentist or separatist movements to a state's national territories further complicate the territory-nation-state platitude. It has become even more difficult to speak about membership in a given 'nation' whilst maintaining a neutral expression, while, in most parts of the world, the 'nation' as a civic, inclusive entity exists only in political rhetoric and on the pages of political documents targeted primarily for readership among elite audiences. If I were to be so bold as to presume the findings of this doctoral dissertation to be impactful within studies of nation-building and collective identity formation, then I would hope that this work demonstrates by example the necessity that we, as researchers and average individuals, critically unpack and analyze the categories and labels that are utilized and applied in our daily lives. More than this, however, we need to analyze to what extents these categories and labels are useful and/or meaningful for others—especially for those individuals placing themselves and being placed by other people into these categories, christening themselves and being christened with particular collective namesakes. Such critical thinking regarding commonplace categories and labels continues to be elusive in studies of nation-building and national identity in the South Caucasus. It is my humble hope that this doctoral dissertation will help bring about the gradual decline of this elusiveness.
Additionally, I hope that the findings and themes emerging from this research will serve as a springboard for future discussions and debates concerning the role that members of Georgia’s non-titular groups serve or may hope to serve in the development of the country’s future. The way forward in this respect necessitates that Georgian and Georgian Azeri-Turk officials and laypeople take steps toward one another to increase the range and scope of inter-personal, inter-group interaction. These steps should seek to improve the nature of these interactions as chances to learn, grow, and adapt to changing domestic and global circumstances together—that is, by emphasizing shared interests in processes of political democratization and economic growth in Georgia, irrespective of individual differences based on gender, sexual orientation, mother tongue, religion, and the like. It is through emphasizing fields of similarity rather than arbitrary categories of difference that the Georgian state can benefit from the diverse sources of human capital at its fingertips and that all Georgian citizens, too, can better realize their own individual and collective potential.
Marneuli has proven itself a fascinating place, as has Kvemo Kartli as a whole. Waving in the entryways of most Azerbaijani language schools are the Azerbaijani and Georgian state flags, and portraits of Heydar and/or Ilham Aliyev typically hang in both the corridors and rectors’ offices, occasionally accompanied by similar portraits of either Saakashvili or Margvelashvili. The walls of the Azerbaijani Cultural Center in Marneuli are similarly decorated, and the common-use library is full of literature and pamphlets on the life, words, and deeds of Heydar Aliyev as well as literature detailing the horrors of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict and the events surrounding it. The building of the SOCAR-funded Tea House looks somewhat out of place in this otherwise grey and dusty city with its structures in various states of disrepair or completion. The floors of the Tea House gleam, and the windows at the entrance cast light upon the large portrait of Heydar Aliyev and the decorative quote below it, regarding the famous fraternal relations of the Georgian and Azerbaijani states. It is here as well as at the Azerbaijani Cultural Center and Dmanisi-based Heydar Aliyev Computer Center that students can come to take classes and spend their time learning various skills. These locations also serve as prime locations for official visits of Georgian and Azerbaijani official delegations to Kvemo Kartli. These are also the locations where locals are invited to attend events commemorating solemn dates as well as celebrations of cultural and other official holidays, all of which are promoted by the Azerbaijani state.

If one were to enter the Marneuli-Tbilisi marshrutka at the pick-up point nearby the local bazaar, one could gaze out the window as the buildings, roads, shop and street signs, and sparse greenery passes by. Of course, this entry point does not occasion views of the local gangsteka building, the local branch of the Zhurab Zhvania School of Public Administration, the Culture House previously named for Neriman Nerimanov, or the parks and monuments surrounding each. These monuments include a bust of Nerimanov in the park outside of the Culture House as well as a cross and stone bearing the names of local victims in the Georgian-Russian conflict in 2008 conflict over the status of South Ossetia. The marshrutkas from Marneuli to villages such as Algeti or Sadakhlo will indeed pass these structures, whereas the Marneuli-Tbilisi marshrutka traverses the city in the opposite direction. Perhaps the primarily Georgian Azeri-Turk employees of Azerbaijani state-sponsored enterprises will sit beside you in the marshrutka, as well as the predominantly native Georgian-speaking employees of the local government offices. It is unlikely that these individuals would be high-ranking employees or officials of the respective organizations, as such high-ranking individuals would likely be able to afford their own vehicles and/or drivers. Young college students make the nearly 45 kilometer commute from Marneuli to Tbilisi and back on an almost daily basis to attend their courses at various Tbilisi-based universities. There is little doubt that a good number of these students are recipients of SOCAR and/or ‘1+4’ Program awards. Still other individuals on the marshrutka might be traveling with their wares to or from sales in Tbilisi’s marketplaces.

As I sit, pressed up against the window of the cramped marshrutka, rubbing legs and elbows with other passengers, I reflect on what this journey has taught me. I take it all in….the earthy or pungent smells of the passengers’ produce, the second-hand smoke wafting from the driver’s seat, and the sounds of the Georgian and Russian-language music playing on the radio amid passengers’ conversations in Azerbaijani, Georgian, and/or Russian. I see the curious mixture of shop and street signs in their varying alphabets and in promotion of their various products, both material and cultural, symbolic and material. This place and its people are so far geographically and socio-culturally from the place and people of my childhood and adolescence, and yet, somehow, they strike within me a resonant chord of similarity. I, too, am a byproduct of the state and society in which I was/am socialized, and my own personality and worldview, too, has been affected by state-centric processes of nation-building. At various stages of my life, I have known what it is like to ‘fit in’ in one setting and to ‘stand out’ uncomfortably in another, within the country in which I was born and raised as well as in other countries. Yet my identification with my fellow passengers goes only so far, as my upbringing in a predominantly white, rural, and middle-class community in the American Midwest did not entail the level of hardship endured by many of the individuals next to whom I now sit. I have seldom been made to feel ‘less than’ others on the basis of my skin color, mother tongue, religious affiliation, or socio-economic status, and only on occasion have I experienced open discrimination on the basis of my gender. I have, by and large, lived a privileged life. Not everyone in this marshrutka, however, has been so fortunate.

The marshrutka eventually reaches its destination and I depart from its final stop at Tbilisi’s Didube train station, feeling slightly weary from my journey. As I make my way to my hotel in the center of the city, I feel as though the journey between Marneuli and Tbilisi was somehow much longer than the hour-long marshrutka ride. The young female questionnaire participant who had stated, “If a foreigner comes
to Kvemo Kartli (Borchali), you might think by your surroundings that you are not in Georgia, but that you have stumbled into some region of Azerbaijan” (Participant N. 10, Spring 2016) was, to my mind, only partially correct in her assumption of my thought processes. The idiosyncrasies of Kvemo Kartli’s material, symbolic, and social landscape bear the marks of both the Georgian and Azerbaijani states.

Kvemo Kartli is a place ‘in-between’, and the Georgian Azeri-Turks living here, too, exist along the borderlines of two political states and symbolic states of being. The territorial boundaries of these two states (as well as between Georgia and Armenia) remain indefinite, as is evidenced by recent diplomatic faux pas over the delimitation of the Georgian-Azerbaijani borderline (cf. Lomsadze, 2019), and so, too, are the symbolic boundaries between their titular peoples—indefinite, yet emotionally-charged. On the fringes of these symbolic boundaries, dominant, state-centric identities become blurred. Furthermore, irrespective of the forces at work in attempting to stem changes to the status quo and the symbols and narratives constitutive and representative of national identities, these identities exist in a perpetual state of becoming.

It is for this reason that, while I listen to the hotel owner’s explanation of Georgian Azeri-Turks as ‘not seeking to integrate’, ‘not quite belonging’, or ‘living in isolation’ in Kvemo Kartli, I am confident that, elsewhere in this city and in this country, there are others who think otherwise and are actively working toward changing these stereotypes. These same individuals and their actions prove that, while the state’s influence over symbolic boundaries and narratives of membership in the nation is formidable, indeed, it is not complete. After all, as beings with the ability to think and feel both independently and in conjunction with others, we humans are capable of making our own decisions concerning the extent to which we relate or depart from official and/or popular understandings of membership and belonging in various ‘groups’.

Although there is indeed a basis for feelings of community, shared fate, and collective identification among the Georgian Azeri-Turks referenced in this study, the emergent collective identity is both informed and convoluted by the interplay of Georgian and Azerbaijani nation-building initiatives. Georgian Azeri-Turks are implicated in key narratives of nationhood at the levels of the Georgian and Azerbaijani states, but are kept at a distance by both states and, to a certain extent, their respective titular societies as well. Georgian Azeri-Turks are adopted by both territorial states while never fully ‘belonging’ in either. I remain hopeful and cognizant of the fact, however, that this need not always be the case.
REFERENCES


Berglund, Christofer (2016a). “‘Forward to David the Builder!’ Georgia’s (Re)turn to Language-centered Nationalism”. Nationalities Papers, 44 (4): 522-42.


APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. AZERBAIJANI-LANGUAGE QUESTIONNAIRE,
IN USE JANUARY-MARCH 2016

Xahiş edirik, göstarın:

1.) Doğum iliniz: ________________________

2.) Cinsiyetiniz: Kişi / Qadin

3.) Doğum yeriniz: ________________________

3 a.) Öğar Gürçüstanda anadan olmamışınızsa, Gürçüstana va vaxtın? ________________________

4.) Hal-hazırda yaşağınız kənd/ şəhər/ va ya təyyar: ________________________

5.) Kiminla yaşayırınız? ________________________

6.) Hal-hazırda hârada çalşırsınız? ________________________

7.) Gürçüllərənən çalşırsınız? Balı / Xeyr

8.) Təhsil səviyyəsiniz? İlçəyə / orta / orta xəritəsə / ali

9.) Vətandaşlıqınız: ________________________

10.) İkili vətandaşlıqınız varm? Balı / Xeyr

10 a.) Varsa, hansı ölkələr üçün? ________________________

10 b.) Na vaxt ikili vətandaşlıq aldınız? ________________________

11.) Millyetiniz: ________________________

12.) Vəlâeqəriniz hansı ölkəda/respublikada anadan olmuşdur? ________________________

13.) Nənə/ədədəriniz hansı ölkəda/respublikada anadan olmuşdur? ________________________

14.) Ulu nənə/ədədəriniz hansı ölkəda/respublikada anadan olmuşdur? ________________________

15.) Siz hansı dili özünüzə ana dili hesab edirsiniz? ________________________

16.) Azərbaycan dilindən öyrənilmişiniz? Balı / Xeyr

16 a.) Hârada öyrənilmişiniz? Məktəbə / Əlavə dərsə / Ali məktəbə

17.) Azərbaycan dilindən bəlli məni nəçə dəqiqələndirirəsiniz?

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<tr>
<th>Xəyr</th>
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18.) Gürçü dilindən öyrənilmişiniz? Balı / Xeyr

18 a.) Hârada öyrənilmişiniz? Məktəbə / Əlavə dərsə / Ali məktəbə
19.) Gürçü dilinizi necə qıymətlandırdınız?

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20.) Başqa dillən öyrənilsiniz? **Bali** / Xeyr - ögər öyrənilsinizsa, hansıları? **______**

| 20 a.) Dilli: Harada öyrənilsiniz? Məktəbdə / Blava dars / Ali məktəbdə |
|-------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 20 b.) Neça ildir öyrənilirsiniz? | | | |
| 20 c.) Bu dildəki biliyinizi necə qıymətlandırdınız? |

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| 20 d.) Dilli: Harada öyrənilsiniz? Məktəbdə / Blava dars / Ali məktəbdə |
|-------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 20 e.) Neça ildir öyrənilirsiniz? | | | |
| 20 f.) Bu dildəki biliyinizi necə qıymətlandırdınız? |

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<td>Anlayırəm</td>
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21.) Azərbaycan dilində adətən harada danışırısınız? **______**

22.) Kimində adətən Azərbaycan dilində danışırısınız? **______**

23.) Gürçü dilində adətən harada danışırısınız? **______**

24.) Kimində adətən Gürçü dilində danışırısınız? **______**

25.) Başqa dillərdə adətən harada danışırısınız? **______**
26. Başqa dillərdə adatan kimşə dənəşəriniz?

27. Bazan Azərbaycana köç etmək həqda heç dəstənəzinişməz? 
   27 a.) Niya yaxud niya yox?

28. Gərcildən tərk etmək istəyirsiniz? 
   28 a.) Qərar istəyirsinizsa, haraça gedərdiniz?
   28 b.) Niya?

28 c.) Na qədər vaxt müddətində?

29. Necə hesab edirsiniz, vatanınız harədar?
   29 a.) Nəyə göro məhz ora?

30. Azərbaycanda olubunuzzu? 
   30 a.) Niya yaxud niya yox?

**(Qərər Nəs suala "Bali" cavab verdinizə, xahiş edirik, Nəs 31-43 sualərə keçin. Qərər "Xeyr" cavabını verdinizə, Nəs 31-43 sualları cavablamayıb, və Nəs44 suala keçin.)

31. Azərbaycanadə necə dafə olmusunuz?

32. Azərbaycana ilk dafə na vaxt getmişiniz?

33. Azərbaycana sonuncu dafə na vaxt getmişiniz?

34. Azərbaycana getmək asanmı oldu? 
   34 a.) Niya yaxud niya yox?

35. Sizə bunun üçün xüsusi sənədlər lazımlı? 
   36. Sərhədi keçmək asandırma?
37.) Sarhadi keçmək ilə bağlı problemləriniz olmuşdurmu? **Bəli / Xeyr**

37 a.) Oluşdurdu, na kimli problemlər? ________________________________
______________________________

38.) Azərbaycan adətən nə ilə sayahət edirsiniz?

b.) Taxsi ilə
d.) Təyyarə ilə

39.) Azərbaycanda adətən hərəkət edirsiniz? (Bakıya, yoxsa başqa kanda, şəhərə?)

39 a.) Na üçün gedirsiniz? ________________________________
______________________________

40.) Sizin fikrinizdə, Azərbaycanda yaşayılan azərbaycanlılarla Gürcüstan azərbaycanlılarının arasındakı fərq nədir? _________

41.) Azərbaycanda qohum/dostlarınız varmı? **Bəli / Xeyr**

42.) Bir-birinizə adətən nəca alaça saxlayırısınız?

b.) Poçt ilə məktub gəndərmək vasitəsilə
c.) Səxsi görüş
ç.) Sosial şəbəkə (Facebook, Twitter, Vkontakte, və s.)

43.) Azərbaycanda yaşayılan azərbaycanlılar Şərqdən Azərbaycanlıların haqqda stereotiplər mövcuddurdu? **Bəli / Xeyr**

43 a.) Oğar mövcuddurdu, na kimli stereotiplər? ________________________________
______________________________

44.) Nəcə fikirləşirsiniz, Gürcüstənın kənd və şəhərləri arasında yaşayılan azərbaycanlılar arasında fərqlər varmı? **Bəli / Xeyr**

Əğər varsa, na kimli fərqlər? ________________________________
______________________________
45.) Gürçülər arasında Gürçüstanda yaşayın azərələr həqda har-hənsi stresotiplər məvcuddurmu? **Bəlli / Xeyr**
Gərək məvcuddursa, nə kimli stresotiplər? ________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

46.) Gürçülər həqqa və fikirləşirsiniz? ________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

47.) Gürçü dostlarınız varmı? **Bəlli / Xeyr**
47 a.) Varsa, onlarla tez-tezni görüşürünüz? ________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

47 b.) Onlarla hansı dildə ünsəyyət saxlayırız? ________________________________
__________________________________________________________

47 c.) Onlarla birlikdə nə edirsiniz? ________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

48.) Azərbaycanlı dostlarınızıla birlikdə nə edirsiniz? ________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

49.) Gürçüstan Azərbaycanlıları gurçulardan nə qərəzanız? ________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

50.) Neça fikirləşirsiniz, Gürçüstan Azərbaycanlıları və gürçülər har-hənsi cahatdan bir-birlərini bənəyiriz? **Bəlli / Xeyr**
50 a.) Gərək bənəyirərə, hansı cahatdan? ________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

51.) Siz dindərsiniz? **Bəlli / Xeyr**
51 a.) Gərək dindərsiniz, özünüzü məsus müsəlman mı hesab edirsiniz? **Bəlli / Xeyr**
Özünüzü müsəlman hesab edirsiniz?... ________________________________________________

51 b.) Məscidə gedirsinizmi? **Bəlli / Xeyr**
51 c.) Tez-tezni? ________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

51 d.) Nəfəz gilərinizmi? **Bəlli / Xeyr**

52.) Sizin üçün Gürçüstanda müsəlman olmaq necədir? ________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

53.) Neça hesab edirsiniz, Gürçüstanda yaşayın müsəlmanların problemlərini varmı? **Bəlli / Xeyr**
53 a.) Gərək varsa, nə kimli problemlər? ________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
54.) Sizin yaşınızı araşdırın, müsəlmanlar və provalavlar neca yola gedirlər? **Xeyr / Pıq / Normal / Yoxu**

55.) Sizin yaşınızı araşdırın, müsəlmanlar və provalavlar arasında hər hansı problemlər varmı? **Xəli / Xeyr**

55 a.) Oğar varsa, nə kimi problemlər? ____________________________________________

56.) Keçən aylar, öz yaşınızı araşdırın dan kanara çıxır mız mı? **Xəli / Xeyr**

56 a.) Oğar kanara çıxırırsa, hərəkət, tex-tezmi, və nə üçün? ____________________________________________

57.) Hesab edirsinizmi ki, azarı oldunuzda göra insanlar sizi qarşı ayrı-şəxəllik edirlər? **Xəli / Xeyr**

57 a.) Oğar ayrı-şəxəllik edirlərə, xahiş edirik, bunun haqda daha atraflu danışın. (hansi hallarda, kim tərəfindən, və tex-tezmi)

58.) Etibar etdiyiniz hər hansı dövlət rəsmiləri varmı? **Xəli / Xeyr**

58 a.) Oğar varsa, kima etibar edirsiniz? ____________________________________________

59.) Neça düşüncəsizsiniz, Gürçüstan hökmətini azərbaycanlıların problemlərini barada qayıb göstərirmə? **Xəli / Xeyr**

59 a.) Niya yaxşid niya yox? ____________________________________________

60.) Neça fikirləşirsiniz, sizin övladlarınız Gürçüstandan özlərinə yaxşı gələcək qura birlərərə? **Xəli / Xeyr**

60 a.) Niya yaxşid niya yox? ____________________________________________

61.) Internet(televiziya/gazetlər/radio-dan istifadə edirsinizmi? **Xəli / Xeyr**

61 a.) Oğar istifadə edirsinizsa, hansılardan? ____________________________________________

61 b.) Hana dilda? ____________________________________________
APPENDIX 2. RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE QUESTIONNAIRE, IN USE JANUARY-MARCH 2016

Укажите, пожалуйста, Ваш:
1.) Год рождения: ______________________________________________________________
2.) Пол: Муж. / Жен.
3.) Место рождения: ____________________________________________________________

3 а.) Если Вы родились не в Грузии, то когда вы переехали в Грузию? _________________

4.) Населенный пункт (где Вы живете): ____________________________________________

5.) С кем живёте? ______________________________________________________________

6.) Кем Вы работаете? __________________________________________________________

7.) Работаете ли Вы с грузинами? Да / нет
8.) Уровень образования? Начальное / среднее / среднее профессиональное / высшее
9.) Гражданство: _______________________________________________________________

10.) Есть у Вас двойное гражданство? Да / нет
10 а.) Если да, то каких стран? _____________________________________________
10 б.) И когда Вы получили двойное гражданство? ___________________________

11.) Национальность: __________________________________________________________

12.) В какой стране/республике родились Ваши родители? _________________________

13.) В какой стране/республике родились Ваши бабушки-дедушки? ___________________

14.) В какой стране/республике родились Ваши пра-бабушки-дедушки? ________________

15.) Какой язык является для Вас родным? ______________________________________

16.) Изучали ли Вы азербайджанский язык? Да / нет
16 а.) Если да, то где? В школе / в ВУЗе / В других уроках (вне школы)

17.) Самооценка уровня владения отдельными компонентами азербайджанского языка?

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<th>плохо</th>
<th>посредств.</th>
<th>хорошо</th>
<th>свободно</th>
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<td>Говорю</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Читаю</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Пишу</td>
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<tr>
<td>Понимаю</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18.) Изучали ли Вы грузинский язык? Да / нет
18 а.) Если да, то где? В школе / в ВУЗе / В других уроках (вне школы)
19.) Самооценка уровня владения отдельными компонентами грузинского языка?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Нет</th>
<th>плохо</th>
<th>посредств.</th>
<th>хорошо</th>
<th>свободно</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

20.) Изучали ли Вы другие языки? Да / нет Если да, то какие? ____________________

*Если Вы ответили «да» на вопрос №20, то укажите, пожалуйста, информацию по каждому из этих языков ниже*

20 а.) ______________ язык: Где? В школе / в ВУЗе / В других уроках (вне школы)

20 б.) Сколько лет? ______________

20 в.) Самооценка уровня владения отдельными компонентами ________________

скольского языка?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

20 г.) ______________ язык: Где? В школе / в ВУЗе / В других уроках (вне школы)

20 д.) Сколько лет? ______________

20 е.) Самооценка уровня владения отдельными компонентами ________________

скольского языка?

<table>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21.) Где Вы обычно говорите по-азербайджански? ____________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

22.) С кем Вы обычно говорите по-азербайджански? ____________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

23.) Где Вы обычно говорите по-грузински? ________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

24.) С кем Вы обычно говорите по-грузински? ________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________
25.) Где Вы обычно говорите на других языках? ______________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

26.) С кем Вы обычно говорите на других языках? ___________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

27.) Думаете ли Вы иногда о переезде в Азербайджан? Да / нет
27 а.) Почему да или нет? ______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

28.) Хотите ли Вы уехать из Грузии? Да / нет
   28 а.) Если да, то куда? ______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

28 б.) Почему? ______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

28 в.) На какой срок хотели бы уехать? __________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

29.) Как вы считаете, где ваша родина? __________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

29 а.) Почему именно там? ______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

30.) Ездили ли Вы в Азербайджан? Да / нет **
30 а.) Почему да или нет? ______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
*Если ответили «да» на вопрос № 30, пожалуйста, переходите к вопросу № 31-43. Если ответили «нет», пожалуйста, пропустите вопросы № 31-43 и переходите к вопросу №44.*

**31.) Сколько раз Вы ездили в Азербайджан? _____________________________________

32.) Когда Вы ездили туда в первый раз? _______________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

33.) А когда ездили последний раз?_______________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

34.) Было ли легко ездить в Азербайджан?          Да   /   нет
   34 а.) Почему да или нет? ______________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

35.) Нужны ли Вам особые документы для этого?                Да   /   нет

36.) Легко ли пересечь границу?                                                Да   /   нет

37.) Были ли у Вас проблемы с пересечением границы?    Да   /   нет
   37 а.) Если да, то какие? ______________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

38.) Как Вы обычно добираетесь до Азербайджана?
   a.) На маршрутке     c.) На поезде         e.) На собственной машине
   b.) На такси         d.) На самолете

39.) Куда в Азербайджан Вы обычно ездите? (В Баку, в другую деревню, город?)________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

39 a.) Для чего? ______________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

40.) Как по Вашему, какая разница между азербайджанцами в Азербайджане и в Грузии?
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

41.) Есть ли у Вас родственники/друзья в Азербайджане?             Да   /   нет

42.) Как Вы обычно общаетесь друг с другом?
   a.) По электронной почте    g.) По Скайпу       ж.) Через социальные сети
   (Фейсбук, Твиттер и т.д.)
   b.) Письма по почте         е.) По телефону       з.) Через Vatsapp/Whatsapp
   v.) При личной встрече     ё.) По смс

43.) Есть ли у азербайджанцев стереотипы о азербайджанцах в Грузии?      Да   /   нет

82
43 а.) Если да, то какие? _______________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

**44.) Как Вы думаете, есть ли различие между азербайджанцами, живущими в городах и в деревнях в Грузии?   Да / нет
Если да, то какие? ____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

45.) Есть ли у грузин какие-то стереотипы об азербайджанцах в Грузии?    Да / нет
Если да, то какие? ____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

46.) Как Вы относитесь к грузинам? _____________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

47.) Есть ли у Вас грузинские друзья?       Да / нет
47 а.) Если да, то как часто вы проводите время с ними? __________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

47 б.) На каком языке Вы с ними общаетесь? _____________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

47 в.) Чем Вы занимаетесь вместе с ними? ________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

48.) А чем занимаетесь с азербайджанскими друзьями? _____________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

49.) Чем отличаются азербайджанцы в Грузии от грузинов? _________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

50.) Имеют ли азербайджанцы Грузии и грузины что-то общее?   Да / нет
50 а.) Если да, то что? __________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

51.) Вы верующий(ая)? Да / нет
51. а) Если да, то считаете себя мусульманином? Да / нет
Если Вы считаете себя мусульманином, то
51 б.) Ходите ли вы в мечеть? Да / нет
51 в.) А как часто? _________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
51 г.) Делаете ли Вы намаз? Да / нет

52.) Каково Вам быть мусульманом в Грузии? ______________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

53.) Считаете ли Вы, что у мусульман есть проблемы в Грузии? Да / нет
53 а.) Если да, то какие? _______________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

54.) Как ладят мусульмане и православные в вашем месте жительства?
плохо / средне / хорошо
55.) Есть ли какие-то проблемы между мусульманами и православными в Вашем месте
жительства? Да / нет
55 а.) Если да, то какие? _______________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

56.) Выезжали ли Вы за пределы своего места жительства в последний месяц? Да / нет
56 а.) Если да, то куда, как часто и зачем? ______________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

57.) Ощущаете ли Вы иногда, что люди дискриминируют вас за то, что Вы азербайджанец/
азербайджанка? Да / нет
57 а.) Если да, то расскажите, пожалуйста, побольше об этом (в каких случаях, кем, и как
часто?) ________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
58.) Есть ли общественные деятели, которым Вы доверяете?     Да / нет
58 а.) Если да, то кому? ________________________________________________

59.) Думаете ли Вы, что правительство Грузии заботится о своем азербайджанском населении?     Да / нет
59 а.) Почему да или нет? ________________________________________________

60.) Как Вы думаете, могут ли Ваши дети иметь хорошее будущее в Грузии?     Да / нет
60 а.) Почему да или нет? ________________________________________________

61.) Пользуетесь ли Вы СМИ (интернет, телевидение, газеты, радио)?     Да / нет
61 а.) Если да, то какими? ________________________________________________

61 б.) На каком языке? ________________________________________________
APPENDIX 3. ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TRANSLATION OF AZERBAIJANI/RUSSIAN QUESTIONNAIRES (JANUARY-MARCH 2016)

Please provide your:

1.) Date of Birth: __________________________________________

2.) Gender: Male / Female

3.) Place of Birth: __________________________________________
   3a.) If you were not born in Georgia, then when did you move to Georgia? ______________________________________

4.) Place of residence (where you currently live): _____________________________________________________________

5.) With whom do you live? _________________________________

6.) What is your profession? _________________________________

7.) Do you work with Georgians: Yes / No

8.) What is your level of education? Primary / Secondary / Vocational / Higher

9.) Citizenship: ___________________________________________

10.) Do you have dual citizenship? Yes / No

10a.) If so, then of which countries? _______________________________________

10b.) If so, then when did you receive dual citizenship? _______________________________________

11.) Nationality: ___________________________________________

12.) In which country/repubic(s) were your parents born? ___________________________________________

13.) In which country/repubic(s) were your grandparents born? ___________________________________________

14.) In which country/repubic(s) were your great-grandparents born? ___________________________________________

15.) What language do you consider to be your native tongue? ___________________________________________

16.) Have you studied the Azerbaijani language? Yes / No

16a.) If so, then where? School / Higher education / Other lessons (outside of school)

17.) How do you rate your Azerbaijani language skills in each of the following spheres:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Badly</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Freely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I speak</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I read</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I write</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18.) Have you studied the Georgian language? Yes / No

18a.) If so, then where? School / Higher education / Other lessons (outside of school)

19.) How do you rate your Georgian language skills in each of the following spheres:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I write</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

20.) Have you studied other languages? Yes / No  If so, then which languages? ___________________________
*If you answered "Yes" to question n. 20, then provide information about these languages below*

20a.) _____________ language: Where? School / Higher education / Other lessons (outside of school)

20b.) For how many years? ___________________________________________________________________

20c.) How do you rate your skills in the ___________ language in each of the following spheres:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Well</th>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I write</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand</td>
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</tbody>
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20d.) _____________ language: Where? School / Higher education / Other lessons (outside of school)

20e.) For how many years? ___________________________________________________________________

20f.) How do you rate your ___________ language skills in each of the following spheres:

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</tbody>
</table>

21.) Where do you usually speak Azerbaijani? ______________________________________________________

22.) With whom do you usually speak Azerbaijani? __________________________________________________

23.) Where do you usually speak Georgian? _________________________________________________________

24.) With whom do you usually speak Georgian? _____________________________________________________

25.) Where do you usually speak other languages? ____________________________________________________

26.) With whom do you usually speak other languages? ________________________________________________

27.) Have you ever considered moving to Azerbaijan? Yes / No

27a.) Why or why not? _____________________________________________________________________________

28.) Do you want to leave Georgia? Yes / No

28a.) If so, then to where? _____________________________________________________________________

28b.) Why? __________________________________________________________________________________@

28c.) For how long would you leave? __________________________________________________________________

29.) What do you consider to be your homeland? ______________________________________________________

29a.) Why there in particular? _____________________________________________________________________
30.) Have you ever been to Azerbaijan? Yes / No*

30a.) Why or why not?

*If you answered "Yes" to question n. 30, then please continue on to questions N. 31-43. If you answered "No", then please skip questions N. 31-43 and proceed to question N. 44.*

**31.) How many times have you been to Azerbaijan? ____________________________________________________

32.) When was the first time that you traveled there? _____________________________________________________

33.) When was the last time that you traveled there? _____________________________________________________

34.) Was it easy to travel to Azerbaijan? Yes / No

34a.) Why or why not? _________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

35.) Did you need special documents for this? Yes / No

36.) Was it easy to cross the border? Yes / No

37.) Have you ever had problems crossing the border? Yes / No

37a.) If so, then what kinds of problems? ___________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

38.) How do you usually travel to Azerbaijan?

a.) Marshrutka  c.) Train  e.) In own car
b.) Taxi   d.) Airplane

39.) Where in Azerbaijan do you usually go? (To Baku, to other village, city?)

39a.) Why? __________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

40.) In your opinion, what is the difference between Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis in Georgia? _________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

41.) Do you have relatives/friends in Azerbaijan? Yes / No

42.) How do you usually keep in touch?

a.) Email   d.) Skype   g.) Social networks (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
b.) Post   e.) Phone calls   h.) WhatsApp
c.) Face-to-face meetings   f.) SMS/Texts

43.) Do Azerbaijanis have stereotypes about Azerbaijanis in Georgia? Yes / No

43a.) If so, then what kinds? _____________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________

**44.) Do you think that there is a difference between Georgian Azerbaijanis who live in cities and those who live in villages? Yes / No
44a.) If so, then what kinds of differences?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

45.) Do Georgians have any stereotypes about Georgian Azerbaijanis? Yes / No
   
45a.) If so, then what kinds of stereotypes?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

46.) How do you relate to Georgians?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

47.) Do you have Georgian friends? Yes / No
   
47a.) If so, then how often do you spend time with them?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

47b.) In which language do you usually communicate?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

47c.) What do you usually do together?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

48.) What do you usually do with your Azerbaijani friends?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

49.) How do Georgian Azerbaijanis differ from Georgians?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

50.) Do Georgian Azerbaijanis and Georgians have anything in common? Yes / No
   
50a.) If so, then what?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

51.) Are you a believer? Yes / No
   
51a.) If so, then do you consider yourself to be Muslim? Yes / No

If you consider yourself to be Muslim, then…

51b.) Do you go to mosque? Yes / No

51c.) How often?

51d.) Do you do namaz (daily prayers)? Yes / No

52.) What is it like to be Muslim in Georgia?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

53.) Do you feel that Muslims have problems in Georgia? Yes / No
   
53a.) If so, then what kinds of problems?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

54.) How do Muslims and Orthodox Christians get along in your place of residence? Badly / Average / Well

55.) Are there any problems between Muslims and Orthodox Christians in your place of residence? Yes / No

55a.) If so, then what kinds of problems?
56.) Have you traveled outside of your place of residence in the last month? Yes / No
   56a.) If so, then where, how often, and why? ______________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________

57.) Do you ever feel as though you are discriminated against because you are Azerbaijani? Yes / No
   57a.) If so, then please tell more about this (in which situations, by whom, and how often?):
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________

58.) Are there any public figures in whom you trust? Yes / No
   58a.) If so, then whom? ________________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________

59.) Do you think that the Georgian government cares about its Azerbaijani population? Yes / No
   59a.) Why or why not? _________________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________

60.) Do you think that your children could have a good future in Georgia? Yes / No
   60a.) Why or why not?
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________

61.) Do you make use of mass media sources (internet, television, newspapers, radio)? Yes / No
   61a.) If so, then which sources? __________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________
   61b.) In which language? ____________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX 4. AZERBAIJANI-LANGUAGE QUESTIONNAIRE,
IN USE AUGUST-OCTOBER 2016

Xahiş edirik, cavablayın:

1.) Doğum tarihiniz: ____________________________

2.) Cinsiyətiniz: Kişi / Qadın.

3.) Doğum yeriniz: ________________________________________________________________

3 a.) Doğum yeriniz Gərgüstan dəyişə, Gərgüstan nə vacib gələrsiniz?

4.) Hal-hazırda yaşayəniz kiçik/şəhər: _______________________________________________________

5.) Kiminla yaşayərsiniz? _____________________________________________________________

6.) Hal-hazırda çalışırısınız? Bəzi / Xeyr

6 a.) Peşə/ixtisasınız: _______________________________________________________________________

6 b.) Gərgüllərə mi oxuyurunuz/çələrsiniz? Bəzi / Xeyr

6 c.) Çalışmasınız, nə ilə məşğülsünüz? (Müəyyən cavabı işarələyin.)

_ Oşuyurm(nə, harada) ____________________________________ Evdar qadin

_Müəqqəti olanız işizən ______________________________ Başq: _____________________________

7.) Təhsil seviyyəniz? İtibərə / Orta / Orta əclisişə / Ali

8.) Vətəndaşlıqləriniz: ______________________________________________________________

9.) Milliyyətiniz: _______________________________________________________________________

10.) Valideyininiz hansı ölkədə/republikada anadan olmuşdurlar?

11.) Nənə-dədələriniz hansı ölkədə/republikada anadan olmuşdurlar?

12.) Ulu nənə-dədələriniz hansı ölkədə/republikada anadan olmuşdurlar?

13.) Siz hansı dili özününə an dili hesab edirsiniz?

14.) Təhsil aldılışınüz məktəbə asas talimat dili (əksər dərslərin keçdiriyi dili) (Cavabınızı İşarələyin):

14 a.) İtibər məktəbədə: azərbaycan dili / gərcü dili / rus dili / ______ dili

14 b.) Orta məktəbədə: azərbaycan dili / gərcü dili / rus dili / ______ dili

14 c.) All məktəbədə: azərbaycan dili / gərcü dili / rus dili / ______ dili

15.) Öləndiyiniz başqa dillər (Cavabınızı İşarələyin):

15 a.) İtibər məktəbədə: ________________________________________________________________

15 b.) Orta məktəbədə: ________________________________________________________________

15 c.) All məktəbədə: ________________________________________________________________

15 d.) bos/asude vaxtnızda: ___________________________________________________________

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16. Azərbaycan dilinizi necə qiymətləndirərdiniz?

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17. Gərgü dilinizi necə qiymətləndirərdiniz?

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18. Rus dilinizi necə qiymətləndirərdiniz?

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<td>Anlayram</td>
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19. Azərbaycan dilində adətən harada danışırsınız?

- a.) evdə
- b.) küçədə
- c.) məktəbdə/universitetdə
- d.) məşəzələrdə
- e.) ofislerdə
- f.) dövlət ofislərinə
- g.) turizmə
də
e.)

20. Kiminə adətən Azərbaycan dilində danışırsınız?

- a.) dostlara
- b.) ailə/qohumlarla
- c.) iş yoldaşlarından/sınıf yoldaşlarla
- d.) müəllimlər/proessorla
- e.) ofis işçiləri
- f.) dövlət işçilərə
- g.) məşəzələrə
- h.) turizmə
də
e.) ofis işçiləri

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21.) Görcü dillində adətən harada danışırsınız?
   a.) evdə                          d.) məşəzələrdə
   b.) küçədə                          e.) ofislərdə
   c.) məktəbədə/universitetdə          f.) dövlət ofislərində

22.) Klinikdə adətən Görcü dillində danışırsınız?
   a.) dostlarla                        e.) ofis işçiləri ilə
   b.) ali/şəhumİlərİ                             v.) dövlət işçiləri ilə
c.) iş yol drain/sınıf yol drainlərİ       f.) məşəzəda sətıcılər
   d.) müəllİflər/professorİ                 q.) turistlər

23.) Bəziən Azərbaycana köç etmək haqqında həc düşününİr nümarı, yaxamaq və ya çalışmaq üçün?  **Bəli / Xeyr**
   23 a.) Niyə yaxud niya yox?

24.) Görcüstən tərk etmək istəyirsinizmi?  **Bəli / Xeyr**
   24 a.) Əgər istəyirsinizsa, onda: məvlud / həmişəlik
   24 b.) Haraya və niya?

   24 c.) Əgər istəmirsinizsa, nəya gərə?

25.) Necə hesab edirsiniz, vətəniniz harədar?   
   25 a.) Nəya gərə məhz ora?

26.) Azərbaycanda olubsonuzmu?  **Bəli / Xeyr**  Əgər olubsonuzsa, hansı səbəbə gərə?
   a.) dost və şəhumİləri yiyət etmək üçün          e.) Pulum/vaxtın olmayıb
   b.) iş üçün                                      v.) Oraya getmək üçün səbəbli olmayıb
   c.) təhsil almaq üçün                            f.) Oraya getmək istəmirəm
   d.) alı-Veriş / ticarət üçün                    q.) dincələnmək / gəzinti üçün

**[ Özgər N. 28 suala "Bəli" cavabını verdiriniz, xahis etdik, N. 27-34 suallara keçin. Özgər "xeyr" cavabını verdiriniz, N. 27-34 cavablarının, və N. 35 suala keçin.]

**[Özgər N. 27 suala "Bəli" cavabını verdiriniz, xahis etdik, N. 27-34 suallara keçin. Özgər "xeyr" cavabını verdiriniz, N. 27-34 cavablarının, və N. 35 suala keçin.]

**27.) Azərbaycanda cəmi necə dafə olmusunuz? (Cavabınızı işarələyin;):
28.) Azərbaycanla ilk dəfə nəçənci ilə getmisiniz? Sonuncu dəfə?

29.) Şəhərdə keçmiş ilə bağlı problemləriniz olmuşdurmu? Bəlli / Xeyr
   29 a.) Öğər olmuşdursa, nə kimi? (Cavabınızı işarələyin.) Şəxsi tənzimlərə, əmənliyə, müqəddəsə və baxışın, uzun cərəょう, başqa problemlər, ____________________________________________

30.) Azərbaycan adətən nə ilə sayahət etdiniz?
   a.) marşrutka ilə  c.) qatar ilə  d.) şəxsi avtomobil ilə
   b.) taksı ilə  e.) təyyarə ilə

31.) Azərbaycanda adətən harəya gedirəniz, və hansı müddətə?

32.) Sizin fikrinizcə, Azərbaycanda yaşayan azərbaycanlılarla Gəncəstən azərbaycanlıları arasında fərq varmır? Bəlli / Xeyr
   32 a.) Öğər vərsərsə, nə kimi fərqlər? (Cavabınızı işarələyin.) Mənaliyyət/dünya görüşləri, təhsil səviyyəsi, həyat tərzi, davamış/rəftar adət-ənənə, dil, əyləm tərzi, başqa:

33.) Azərbaycanda dostlarınız və qohumlarınız varmı, varsa, necə əlaqə saxlaysınız?
   a.) E-poçt vasitəsilə  d.) Skype vasitəsilə  e.) Çat vasitəsilə
   b.) Poçt ilə məktub göndərmək vasitəsilə  v.) Telefon vasitəsilə
   c.) Şəxsi görüş  f.) SMS vasitəsilə

34.) Azərbaycan azərbaycanlılarının arasında Gəncəstən azərbaycanlıları haqqda stereotiplər mövcuddurmu? Bəlli/Xeyr
   34 a.) Varıa, nə kimi stereotiplər? (Cavabınızı işarələyin.) Təhsil səviyyəsi, adət-ənənə, mənaliyyət, və həyat tərzi ilə bağlı, başqa:
   Xahiş edirik, əzah edin:

35.) Necə fikirləşərsiniz, Gəncəstənin kənd və şəhərlərində yaşayan azərbaycanlılar arasında fərq varmır? Bəlli / Xeyr
   35 a.) Varıa, nə kimi fərqlər? (Cavabınızı işarələyin.) Təhsil səviyyəsi, adət-ənənə, mənaliyyət, və həyat tərzi ilə bağlı, başqa:
   Xahiş edirik, əzah edin:

36.) Gəncəstən adətən Gəncəstənda yaşayan azərbaycanlılar haqqda hər hansı stereotiplər mövcuddurmu? Bəlli / Xeyr
   36 a.) Varıa, nə kimi stereotiplər? (Cavabınızı işarələyin.) Təhsil səviyyəsi, adət-ənənə, mənaliyyət, və həyat tərzi ilə bağlı, başqa:

37.) Aşağıda sadalanan bayanatlarla razıszınız? (Cavabınızı işaretleyin.):

"Man Gürçülərini aksərlikdə həqənda müsbət fikirləşəm."

| Tamamilə rəzəyim / raz unanim / neytral / rəzi deyiləm | tamamilə rəzi deyiləm |

Xahiş edirik, izah edin.

38.) Aşağıda sadalanan bayanatlarla razıszınız? (Cavabınızı işaretleyin.):

*Yerli Azərbaycanlılar və Gürçülər arasında bazı problemlər yaranır.*

| Tamamilə rəzəyim / raz unanim / neytral / rəzi deyiləm | tamamilə rəzi deyiləm |

Xahiş edirik, izah edin.

39.) Siz heç öz asuda vaxtını Gürçülərə keçirəniz? *Bəli / Xeyr*

39 a.) Öğər keçirənizsə, (cavabınızı işaretleyin) tez-tez/ nadir hallarda?

39 b.) Onlarla birlikdə ne edirsiniz?

39 c.) Onlarla hansı dildə vəziyyət saxlayırsınız?

40.) Ele bir şeylər/məşğulliyətə vədirdir mi, hansıni ki siz Gürçülə dostlarınızda edə bilərsiniz, ancak Azərbaycanlı dostlarınızda yox? *Bəli / Xeyr*

Xahiş edirik, izah edin.

41.) Gürçülərə hansıda ortaq/oxşar cəhətləriniz varmı (məsəl üzən, axtar-ənənələr, yeməklər, bayramlar, önəm dəyişən yerlər və s.?) *Bəli / Xeyr*

41 a.) Yarışa, nə kimi oxşarlıqlar?

42.) Siz dindarınız? *Bəli / Xeyr*

42 a.) Öğər dindarınızsa, özünüz müəllənməni hesab edirsiniz? *Bəli / Xeyr*

42 b.) Mesidə gedirsiniz? *Bəli / Xeyr*

42 c.) Öğər gedirsinizsə, tez-tez/ nadir hallarda?

42 d.) Namaz qəhrənsiniz? *Bəli / Xeyr*

43.) Sizin yaşadığınız yerde Müəllənmələr və Provasəvlər arasında hər hansı problemlər varmı? *Bəli / Xeyr*
43 a.) Varsa, nə kimi problemli r?

44.) Aşağıda sadalanan bəyanatlarla razınızımı? (Cavabınızı işaretleyin.):

"Gərçəkəndə insanlar müsəlman olduğuma görə manə qarşı ayrı-şəkllilik (discriminasiya) edirər."  
Tamamı razıyam / razıyam / neytrəl / razı deyiləm / tamamı razı deyiləm
Xahiş edirik, izah edin.

45.) "Gərçəkəndə insanlar gürçü dillini bilmədiyimə/ pis bildiyimə görə manə qarşı ayrı-şəkllilik (discriminasiya) edirər."  
Tamamı razıyam / razıyam / neytrəl / razı deyiləm / tamamı razı deyiləm
Xahiş edirik, izah edin.

46.) "Gərçəkəndə insanlar azərbaycanlı olduğuma görə manə qarşı ayrı-şəkllilik (discriminasiya) edirər."  
Tamamı razıyam / razıyam / neytrəl / razı deyiləm / tamamı razı deyiləm
Xahiş edirik, izah edin.

47.) "Gərçəkən dövləti öz azərbaycanlı ohalisi barada qazə göstərir."  
Tamamı razıyam / razıyam / neytrəl / razı deyiləm / tamamı razı deyiləm
Xahiş edirik, izah edin.

48.) "Mən hesab edirəm ki, mənim övəldərimin Gərçəkənda üzərində yaxşı gələcək qura bıləcəklər."  
Tamamı razıyam / razıyam / neytrəl / razı deyiləm / tamamı razı deyiləm
Xahiş edirik, izah edin.

49.) "Etibar etdiyim istənilən xadcrər var."  
Tamamı razıyam / razıyam / neytrəl / razı deyiləm / tamamı razı deyiləm

Kim?

50.) Kütləvi informasiya vasitələrinindən istifadə edirsinizmi? (Internet, televizor, qazetlər, radio)?  
Bəli / Xeyr

50 a.) Qərər istifadə edirsiniz, xüsusi olaraq hansı veb sayt/ kanal/ qəzerlərdən?
APPENDIX 5. RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE QUESTIONNAIRE, IN USE AUGUST-OCTOBER 2016

Укажите, пожалуйста, Ваш:

1.) Год рождения: ___________________ 
2.) Пол: Муж. / Жен.  
3.) Место рождения: ___________________ 

3 а.) Если Вы родились не в Грузии, то когда Вы переехали в Грузию? __________________________ 

4.) Населенный пункт (село, город где Вы живете): ________________________________ 
5.) С кем Вы живёте? ______________________________ 

6.) Вы работаете? Да / нет  
   6 а.) Если да, то кем? ______________________________ 
   6 б.) Работаете/ учитесь ли Вы с грузинами? Да / нет  
   6 в.) Если не работаете, то чем занимаетесь? (Поставьте галочку на Ваш ответ.)  
   ___Учусь (на кого, где) ________________________________ 
   ___Временно безработный 
   ___Домохозяйка 
   ___Другой: ________________________________ 

7.) Уровень образования? Начальное / среднее / среднее профессиональное / высшее 

8.) Гражданство: ________________________________ 

9.) Есть у Вас двойное гражданство? Да / нет  
   9 а.) Если да, то каких стран? ________________________________ 
   9 б.) И когда Вы его получили? ________________________________ 

10.) Национальность: ________________________________ 

11.) В какой стране/республике родились Ваши родители? ________________________________ 

12.) В какой стране/республике родились Ваши бабушки-дедушки? ________________________________ 

13.) В какой стране/республике родились Ваши пра-бабушки-дедушки? ________________________________ 

14.) Какой язык является для Вас родным? ________________________________ 

15.) Основной язык обучения (Подчеркните Ваш ответ):  
   15 а.) в начальной школе: азербайджанский язык / грузинский язык / русский язык / ___________________ язык 
   15 б.) в средней школе: азербайджанский язык / грузинский язык / русский язык / ___________________ язык 
   15 в.) в системе высшего образования: азер. язык / грузинский язык / русский язык / ___________________ язык 

16.) Другие языки, которые Вы изучали в качестве вторичных предметов (Подчеркните Ваш ответ):  
   16 а.) в начальной школе: ________________________________ 
   16 б.) в средней школе: ________________________________ 
   16 в.) в системе высшего образования: ________________________________ 
   16 г.) в вашем свободном времени: ________________________________
17. Самооценка уровня владения отдельными компонентами азербайджанского языка?

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18.) Самооценка уровня владения отдельными компонентами грузинского языка?

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19.) Самооценка уровня владения отдельными компонентами русского языка?

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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Понимаю</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20.) Где Вы обычно говорите по-азербайджански?

- а.) дома
- б.) на улице
- в.) в школе / университете
- г.) в магазинах
- д.) в офисах
- е.) в государственных учреждениях

21.) С кем Вы обычно говорите по-азербайджански?

- а.) с друзьями
- б.) с семьей / родственниками
- в.) с коллегами / одноклассниками
- г.) с учителями / преподавателями
- д.) с офиными работниками
- е.) с государственными служащими
- ж.) с кассирами в магазинах
- з.) с туристами

22.) Где Вы обычно говорите по-грузински?

- а.) дома
- б.) на улице
- в.) в школе / университете
- г.) в магазинах
- д.) в офисах
- е.) в государственных учреждениях
23.) С кем Вы обычно говорите по-грузински?
а.) с друзьями
б.) с семьей / родственниками
в.) с коллегами / одноклассниками
г.) с учителями / преподавателями
д.) с офисными работниками
е.) с государственными служащими
ж.) с кассирами в магазинах
з.) с кассирами в магазинах
и.) с учителями / преподавателями
24.) Где Вы обычно говорите на ____________ языке?
а.) дома
б.) на улице
в.) в школе / университете
г.) в магазинах
д.) в офисах
е.) в государственных учреждениях
25.) С кем Вы обычно говорите на другом языке (____________)?
а.) с друзьями
б.) с семьей / родственниками
в.) с коллегами / одноклассниками
г.) с учителями / преподавателями
д.) с офисными работниками
е.) с государственными служащими
ж.) с кассирами в магазинах
з.) с учителями / преподавателями
26.) Думаете ли Вы иногда о переезде в Азербайджан, чтобы жить или работать? Да / нет

27 a.) Почему да или нет? __________________________________________

27 b.) Куда и почему? __________________________________________

27 в.) Если нет, то почему?

28.) Как Вы считаете, где Ваша родина? ____________________________

28 a.) Почему именно там? __________________________________________

29.) Ездили ли Вы в Азербайджан? Да / нет **

а.) посетить родственников и друзей

б.) на работу

в.) для образования / учебы

г.) на торговле

д.) Не было времени / денег

е.) Не было причин, чтобы пойти туда

ё.) Не хочу туда

ж.) отдыхать / осмотреть достопримечательности
** Если ответили «да» на вопрос № 29, пожалуйста, переходите к вопросу № 30-38. Если ответили «нет», пожалуйста, пропустите вопросы № 30-38 и переходите к вопросу № 39.)

**30.) Сколько раз Вы ездили в Азербайджан? (Подчеркните Ваш ответ): 1-4 раза, 5-10 раз, 10-20 раз, Более чем в 20 раз
31.) В каком году Вы ездили туда в первый раз? __________________ В последний раз? __________________
32.) Были ли у Вас проблемы с пересечением границы? Да / нет
   32 а.) Если да, то какие? (Подчеркните Ваш ответ): с пограничными службами, с выплатами, с товарами, с длинными очередями, другие:
33.) Как Вы обычно добираетесь до Азербайджана?
   a.) На маршрутке в.) На поезде д.) На собственной машине
   б.) На такси г.) На самолете
34.) Куда в Азербайджан Вы обычно ездите и на какой срок? ____________________________
35.) Как по Вашему, есть ли различия между азербайджанцами в Азербайджане и в Грузии? Да / нет
   35 а.) Если да, то какие? (Подчеркните Ваш ответ): Менталитета/ мировоззрения, уровень образования, образ жизни, поведение, обычая/традиции, язык, стиль одежды, другие:
36.) Если у Вас есть друзья и родственники в Азербайджане, то как Вы обычно общаетесь друг с другом?
   а.) По электронной почте г.) По Скайпу е.) Через чат
   б.) Письма по почте д.) По телефону
   в.) При личной встрече е.) По смс
37.) Есть ли у азербайджанцев стереотипы о азербайджанцах в Грузии?
   37 а.) Если да, то какие? (Подчеркните Ваш ответ): Связанные с уровнем образования, подключены к обычаям или традициям, связанным с менталитетом или образом жизни, другие:
38.) Знакомы ли Вы с термином "Граз"? Да / Нет
   38 а.) Если да, то что это значит?
   ______________________________________________________
38 б.) От этого термина какие эмоции вызывается?
   ______________________________________________________
39.) Как Вы думаете, есть ли различие между азербайджанцами, живущих в городах и в деревнях в Грузии (например, связанные с уровнем образования, подключены к обычаям или традициям, связанным с менталитетом или образом жизни и т.д.)? Да / нет
40.) Есть ли у Грузинов какие-то стереотипы об азербайджанцах в Грузии (например, связанные с уровнем образования, подключены к обычаям или традициям, связанным с менталитетом или образом жизни и т.д.)? Да / нет

Если да, то какие? ____________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

41.) Согласны ли Вы с этим утверждением (подчеркните Ваш ответ):

"У меня есть положительное мнение большинства грузин."
Полностью согласен / согласен / нейтральные / не согласен / полностью не согласен

Объясните пожалуйста. ________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

42.) Согласны ли Вы с этим утверждением?

"Иногда возникают проблемы между местными грузинами и азербайджанцами."
Полностью согласен / согласен / нейтральные / не согласен / полностью не согласен

Объясните пожалуйста. ________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

43.) Проводите ли Вы ваше свободное время с Грузинами? Да / Нет

43 а.) Если да, то часто / редко?

43 б.) Чем Вы занимаетесь с ними?

43 в.) На каком языке с ними общаетесь?

44.) Занимаетесь ли Вы вещами с Вашими грузинскими друзьями, чем Вы не могли заниматься с Азербайджанцами? Да / Нет

Объясните пожалуйста. ________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

45.) Имеете ли Вы что-то общее с грузинами (например, традиции, обычай, блюда, праздники, важные места и т.д.)? Да / нет

45 а.) Если да, то что?

__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

46.) Вы верующий(ая)? Да / нет
46 а.) Если да, то считаете себя мусульманином? Да / нет
Если Вы считаете себя мусульманином, то:
46 б.) Ходите ли Вы в мечеть? Да / нет
46 в.) Если да, то часто / редко?
46 г.) Делаете ли Вы намаз? Да / нет
47.) Есть ли какие-то проблемы между мусульманами и православными в Вашем месте жительства? Да / нет
47 а.) Если да, то какие?

48.) Согласны ли Вы с этими утверждениями (подчеркните Ваш ответ):
"В Грузии люди меня дискриминируют из-за того, что я мусульманин/мусульманка." Полностью согласен / согласен / нейтральные / не согласен / полностью не согласен
Объясните пожалуйста.

49.) "В Грузии люди меня дискриминируют из-за того, что я не говорю/плохо говорю по-грузински."
Полностью согласен / согласен / нейтральные / не согласен / полностью не согласен
Объясните пожалуйста.

50.) "В Грузии люди меня дискриминируют из-за того, что я азербайджанец/азербайджанка."
Полностью согласен / согласен / нейтральные / не согласен / полностью не согласен
Объясните пожалуйста.

51.) "Грузинское правительство заботится о своем Азербайджане населении."
Полностью согласен / согласен / нейтральные / не согласен / полностью не согласен
Объясните пожалуйста.

52.) "Я считаю, что мои дети будут иметь хорошее будущее в Грузии."
Полностью согласен / согласен / нейтральные / не согласен / полностью не согласен
Объясните пожалуйста.

53.) "Есть общественные делеги, которыми я доверяю."
Полностью согласен / согласен / нейтральные / не согласен / полностью не согласен
К кому?
54.) Пользуетесь ли Вы СМИ (интернет, телевидение, газеты, радио)? ДА / НЕТ

54 а.) Если да, то какими специфическими веб-сайтами/каналами/газетами?

______________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________

54 б.) На каком языке? азербайджанский, русский, грузинский, другой: ____________________________
APPENDIX 6. ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TRANSLATION OF QUESTIONNAIRES
(AUGUST-OCTOBER 2016)

Please fill in your:

1.) Date of Birth: __________________________________________________________________________
2.) Gender: Male / Female
3.) Place of Birth: ___________________________________________________________________________
   3a.) If you were not born in Georgia, then when did you come to Georgia? ___________________________________________________________________
4.) Current village/city of residence: ___________________________________________________________________
5.) With whom do you live? ____________________________________________________________________
6.) Do you currently work? Yes / No
   6a.) Profession/Occupation: ___________________________________________________________________
   6b.) Do you work/study with Georgians? Yes / No
   6c.) If you do not work, then are you: (Please choose the answer that suits you)
       ___I study (what, where?)_________________________________                 ____I am a house wife
       ___Temporarily unemployed__________________________                   ____Other: __________________
7.) Level of education: Primary / Secondary / Vocational / Higher
8.) Citizenship: _____________________________________________________________________________
9.) Nationality: _____________________________________________________________________________
10.) In which country/republic(s) were your parents born? _______________________________________
11.) In which country/republic(s) were your grandparents born? ___________________________________
12.) In which country/republic(s) were your great-grandparents born? ______________________________
13.) Which language do you consider to be your mother tongue? _________________________________
14.) The main language of instruction at the schools you attended (please underline your answer):
   14a.) Primary school: Azerbaijani / Georgian / Russian / ______________________ language
   14b.) Middle school: Azerbaijani / Georgian / Russian / ________________________ language
   14c.) High school: Azerbaijani / Georgian / Russian / _________________________ language
15.) Other languages of study (please underline your answer):
   15a.) Primary school: ________________________________________________________________
   15b.) Middle school: _________________________________________________________________
   15c.) High school: _____________________________
   15d.) Free time: _______________________________________________________________________
16.) How do you rate your Azerbaijani language skills in each of the following spheres?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Badly</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Freely</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I speak</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I read</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I write</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17.) How do you rate your Georgian language skills in each of the following spheres?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Badly</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Freely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I speak</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I read</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I write</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

18.) How do you rate your Russian language skills in each of the following spheres?

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<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Badly</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Freely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I speak</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I read</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I write</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19.) Where do you usually speak Azerbaijani?

a.) Home
b.) Streets
c.) School/university
d.) Shops
e.) Offices
f.) Government offices

20.) With whom do you usually speak Azerbaijani?

a.) With friends
b.) With family/relatives
c.) Colleagues/classmates
d.) Teachers/professors
e.) Office workers
f.) Government workers
g.) Shop clerks
h.) Tourists

21.) Where do you usually speak Georgian?

a.) Home
b.) Streets
c.) School/university
d.) Shops
e.) Offices
f.) Government office

22.) With whom do you usually speak Georgian?

a.) With friends
b.) With family/relatives
c.) Colleagues/classmates
d.) Teachers/professors
e.) Office workers
f.) Government workers
g.) Shop clerks
h.) Tourists

23.) Do you ever think about moving to Azerbaijan to live or work? Yes / No

23a.) Why or why not?

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
24.) Do you want to leave Georgia? Yes / No
   
24a.) If so, then: Temporarily / Permanently
   
24b.) Where and why?
   
24c.) If you don't want to leave Georgia, then why not?

25.) What do you consider to be your homeland?
   
25a.) Why there in particular?

26.) Have you been to Azerbaijan? Yes / No If so, then for what reason?
   
   a.) to visit friends and relatives
   b.) for work
   c.) for education
   d.) for buying/selling
   e.) no time/money to go
   f.) no reason to go there
   g.) I don't want to go there
   h.) for leisure/travel

   **If you answered "yes" to question N. 26, then please continue to questions N. 27-34. If you answered "No", then do not answer questions N. 27-34 and skip to question N. 35.

27.) Approximately how many times have you been to Azerbaijan? (Please underline your answer.)
   
   1-4 times / 5-10 times / 10-20 times / More than 20 times

28.) In which year did you travel to Azerbaijan for the first time? __________ And the last time? ___________

29.) Have you ever had problems crossing the border? Yes / No
   
   29a.) If you have had problems, then what kind? (Underline your answer.) Problems with customs' officials, bribes, goods/products, long lines, other problems: ______________________________________________________

30.) How do you usually travel to Azerbaijan?
   
   a.) marshrutka  c.) train  e.) private car
   b.) taxi  d.) plane

31.) Where in Azerbaijan do you usually go, and for how long? __________________, __________________

32.) In your opinion, are there differences between Azerbaijanis living in Azerbaijan and Georgian Azerbaijanis?
   
   Yes / No
   
   32a.) If so, then what kinds of differences? (Underline your answer.): mentality/worldview, level of education, lifestyle, behavior/attitudes, cultural traditions, language, style of dress, other: ______________________

33.) If you have friends and relatives in Azerbaijan, then how do you keep in touch with them?
   
   a.) Email  d.) Skype  g.) Telephone calls
   b.) Post/letters  e.) SMS/texts
   c.) Face-to-face meetings  f.) Chat
34.) Do Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijan have stereotypes about Georgian Azerbaijanis? Yes / No

34a.) If so, then what kinds of stereotypes? (Underline your answer.): Level of education, cultural traditions, mentality, lifestyle, other:

Please explain:

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

35.) Do you think that there are differences between Georgian Azerbaijanis living in villages and cities? Yes / No

35a.) If so, then what kinds of differences? (Underline your answer.): Level of education, cultural traditions, mentality, lifestyle, other:

Please explain:

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

36.) Do Georgians have any stereotypes about Azerbaijanis who live in Georgia? Yes / No

36a.) If so, then what kinds of stereotypes? (Underline your answer.): Level of education, cultural traditions, mentality, way of life, other:

Please explain:

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

37.) Do you agree with the statements below? (Underline your answer.):

"I think positively about most Georgians."

Completely agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Disagree completely

Please explain:

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

38.) "There are problems between local Azerbaijanis and Georgians."

Completely agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Disagree completely

Please explain:

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

39.) Do you ever spend your free time with Georgians? Yes / No

39a.) If you do, then (underline your answer): Often / Rarely

39b.) What do you do together? __________________________________________________________________

39c.) In which language do you communicate? ______________________________________________________

40.) Are there any things/activities that you can do with your Georgian friends that you cannot do with your Azerbaijani friends? Yes / No

Please explain:

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

41.) Do you have anything in common with Georgians (for example, cultural traditions, foods, holidays, important places, etc.)? Yes / No

41a.) If so, then what kinds of things? _____________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________
42.) Are you a believer? Yes / No
   42a.) If so, then do you consider yourself to be Muslim? Yes / No
   If you consider yourself to be Muslim, then:
   42b.) Do you go to mosque? Yes / No
   42c.) If you go, then: Often / Rarely
   42d.) Do you pray namaz? Yes / No
43.) Do Muslims and Orthodox Christians have any problems in your place of residence? Yes / No
   43a.) If so, then what kinds of problems?
44.) Do you agree with the statements below? (Underline your answer.)
   "People in Georgia discriminate against me because I am Muslim."
   Completely agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Completely disagree
   Please explain:
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
45.) "People in Georgia discriminate against me because I don't know Georgian/know Georgian badly."
   Completely agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Completely disagree
   Please explain:
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
46.) "People in Georgia discriminate against me because I am Azerbaijani."
   Completely agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Completely disagree
   Please explain:
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
47.) "The Georgian government cares about its Azerbaijani population."
   Completely agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Completely disagree
   Please explain:
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
48.) "I believe that my children could build good futures for themselves in Georgia."
   Completely agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Completely disagree
   Please explain:
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
49.) "There are public figures in whom I trust."
   Completely agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Completely disagree
   Please explain:
   __________________________________________________________________________
50.) Do you use mass media (internet, television, newspapers, radio)? Yes / No
   50a.) If so, then which specific websites / channels / newspapers?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   50b.) In which language? Azerbaijani, Russian, Georgian, other: ________________
ARTICLES

ARTICLE I

ARTICLE II

ARTICLE III

ARTICLE IV

ARTICLE V

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ARTICLE II

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Flexible Memory Narratives in the Physical Landscape: A Case Study of Tbilisi, Georgia

Karli Storm
University of Eastern Finland

Abstract: Although the state and its constituent bodies have expended greater effort to make room for Georgia’s national minorities in official identity narratives since the Rose Revolution of 2003, subsequent changes to Tbilisi’s built environment embody an incoherent conception of “Georgian-ness”—one that, despite evidencing certain civic elements, is still predominantly primordialist in nature. This article identifies the dominant national identity narratives propagated by Georgian state leaders since independence and examines the ways in which leaders have imprinted these narratives upon the physical landscape of Tbilisi. More so than his predecessors, Mikheil Saakashvili rigorously began transforming the country’s built environment following the Rose Revolution of 2003. The subsequent changes both reflected and propagated particular narratives of national identity and focused primarily upon Tbilisi. Paying particular attention to the post-Rose Revolution development of Tbilisi, the author identifies three particular flexible memory narratives as having been influential since independence: 1.) foreign aggression and oppression, 2.) uniqueness through antiquity, and 3.) Georgia’s “return to the West”. These narratives, alongside those of common descent, language, and faith, are selectively applied by top state leaders in Georgia.
in ways that solidify and legitimate the position of the titular Georgian nation within the territorial state.

This article examines the various ways in which the Georgian leadership has sought to imprint particular narratives of collective memory upon the physical landscape of Georgia’s capital city, Tbilisi, since independence. The brief, conflict-stricken period of Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s presidency (1991-1992) and the economic and political crisis inherited by Eduard Shevardnadze (1992-2003) meant that the majority of state-led alterations to Tbilisi’s physical landscape occurred following the Rose Revolution of 2003. The period of Mikheil Saakashvili’s presidency (2004-2013) led to a great many changes in Tbilisi’s appearance and it is for this reason that this particular period is emphasized henceforth. Although the Georgian state and its constituent bodies have expended greater effort to make room for national minorities in official identity narratives since the Rose Revolution, subsequent changes to Tbilisi’s built environment embody an incoherent conception of “Georgian-ness”—one that, despite evidencing certain civic elements, is still predominantly exclusive in nature. This article asks the following question: which national identity narratives have the top echelons of the Georgian government sought to imprint upon the physical landscape of Tbilisi since independence and for what purpose? Special attention is paid to the efforts of then-President Saakashvili to propagate a Georgian national identity that is both inclusive and exclusive, ancient and modern, among audiences domestically and internationally. The final section of the paper briefly examines Tbilisi-based urban development projects under Saakashvili as well as under the current government and its ruling party, Georgian Dream, demonstrating the ways in which modernizing forces interact with narratives of national antiquity in Tbilisi’s built environment.

The theoretical underpinnings of this article stem from the multifaceted discipline of Geography—Cultural, Human, and Political Geography in particular. The idea is to identify the political and socio-cultural processes involved in imbuing spaces with collective, national meaning—that is, converting neutral spaces into meaningful places—and to highlight the ways in which memory is mobilized to create, reify, and reproduce national identities. The state is the key actor in processes of memory mobilization and identity (re)production at the so-called nation-wide and international levels. Both physical and abstract processes of bordering and bounding lead to the designation of territorial states as well as the

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1 Although officially elected President of Georgia in 1995, Shevardnadze, a former Soviet apparatchik, returned to power in Georgia in 1992, in the midst of the violent aftermath of Gamsakhurdia’s deposal.
titular “peoples” behind these states. This is the point at which territory, collective identity, and memory become intertwined. All three elements are essential to the creation of a nation and serve as a type of “glue” that holds the society together. In this way, the nation becomes, as Benedict Anderson famously asserted, an “imagined community.”

Territoriality (attachment to the Georgian “homeland”), language (Georgian as the mother tongue of the titular majority), and religiosity (affiliation with the Georgian Orthodox Church) are prominent symbolic boundaries of membership in the Georgian nation. These symbolic boundaries facilitate mutual recognition among members of the titular Georgian nation as well as the delimitation of their national collectivity from other groups. It is important to note, however, that while these individual components or symbolic boundaries of membership have thus far proven to be enduring aspects of “Georgian-ness,” this does not mean that they are impervious to differentiations in interpretation and/or valuation at both the individual and collective levels, especially over time.

Since Halbwachs (1877-1945), scholars from various disciplines—ranging from Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology to Cultural, Political, and/or Human Geography—have increasingly come to emphasize the intrinsically flexible, malleable, processual, and contested nature of memory. While some focus more on the pragmatic and politicized (i.e. “instrumental”) nature of memory, others expand upon this understanding of memory to emphasize its spatio-temporal, socially-embedded nature as


grounds for the continual contestation and/or endurance of certain constituent narratives. For Thaler,

memory is a political, cultural and social phenomenon produced by dynamics in the present—political pragmatism—as well as selective memory constructs from the past(s). They carry both constraints and enablers, and are deeply tied to the processes, unfolding differentially, dependent on time, place and political/cultural context.

In the interdisciplinary field of Memory Studies as a whole and in studies of memory in the post-Soviet space in particular, less emphasis has thus far been placed on explicating the relationship between individual narratives, “national” memories, and collective identities than on conceptualizations of the concept of memory and its complex relationship/s to history. By identifying and analyzing individual narratives and the roles that they play in the negotiation, contestation, and reification of collective (“national”) memory and identity, I have found that, in many ways, these narratives serve as sites of identity/memory (re)negotiation and contestation in and of themselves. In other words, if memory and identity are to be understood as malleable, flexible, and processual concepts, then their constituent narratives must be, too.

I use the term flexible memory narratives in order to shed light upon the ways in which elites in Georgia make selective and flexible use of popular meta-narratives of collective memory. These meta-narratives, in turn, serve to reproduce and disseminate official conceptions of collective (“national”) identity among Georgia’s citizenry.

The large, multi-disciplinary body of research on collective memory and related sites of memory highlights the role that collective memory plays in the formation of both individual and collective identity. Where


9 cf. Halbwachs, On Collective Memory; Nora, “Between Memory and History”; Olick,
national identity is concerned, scholars note the ways in which particular historical narratives are selected and employed by those in power to mold the national body into a seemingly coherent whole. Despite the inherently reflexive and contested nature of both collective memory and identity, the Georgian case shows us that certain narratives have proven to be simultaneously flexible and enduring—serving to both reify popular, state-sanctioned forms of national identity (which both emanates from and contributes to popular discourses of memory) while paying considerable attention to positionality, agency, and audience. The adaptability of the selected narratives—given their (re)interpretation from one regime to the next—and the flexible manner in which these narratives are applied to achieve particular aims has led me to develop the concept of flexible memory narratives. The formation of any national identity requires a keen use of flexible remembrance and forgetting of particular narratives for specific aims; as a theoretical concept, flexible memory narratives calls attention to the adaptive, changeable nature of the narratives and processes involved in identity (re)production at, in this particular case, the national scale.

Flexible memory processes and their integral narratives interact in ways that (re)constitute, contest, and disseminate national identity among members of the Georgian population. National identity, in its ever-changing variants and constituent narratives, is much like a rubber band; depending upon the context at hand (embedded historicity, actors and agency, desired outcomes, audience, etc.), the rubber band is pulled in one direction, the other, or both directions simultaneously. Framing discussion of flexible memory narratives as being embedded in ongoing processes of memory/identity negotiation allows for a clearer understanding of the ways in which primordialist and civic conceptions of national identity are oftentimes invoked simultaneously in various ways—concrete or abstract—at the official level. Despite the contradictions inherent in simultaneously invoking both blood-based, exclusive forms of national identity and those emphasizing inter-group inclusivity (stretching the rubber band in both directions), the rubber band does not break. It merely stretches to accommodate the strain.

The environment is an integral component of the construction of individual and collective identity, and states often look to the physical environment as a canvas upon which to paint their dominant identity narratives. Spanning from the environs of Eastern Europe to those of Central Asia, physical environments and landscapes—and those of capital cities in particular—have been popular avenues of and for identity (re)negotiation.

and contestation at multiple scales and involving multiple parties. Scholars like Diener and Hagen, Denison, Forest and Johnson, Kaiser, and Ter-Ghazarayan have shown that, while the specific content and manifestations of various post-Soviet identity narratives vary widely from one so-called “national” context to another, the physical environs of post-Soviet capital cities have proven to be symbolic and visual hotbeds of and for national identity negotiation and contestation.10

The officially sanctioned use of particular designs and adornments in the physical landscape is one way in which the state spatially socializes its constituents and creates and disseminates particular forms of identity through the use of national iconography (flags, coats of arms, statues of national heroes, monuments to particular historical events, use of place names, etc.).11 Restoration of the old, replacement or destruction of the profane or obsolete, the construction of the new—what, why, and how the state and its administrative organs choose to paint the canvas of the “homeland” is telling. It demonstrates an individual/group’s power/lack of power in a given society, as well as the interests of the dominant individuals/groups and their intended audiences. In this way, then, the case of Tbilisi does not represent an entirely isolated phenomenon; the specific content and context of representative identity narratives, the physical manifestations of these narratives in the built landscape, and their subsequent “reading” by specific audiences is what both connects the case of Tbilisi to and differentiates it from other capital cities in the post-Soviet space.

**Tbilisi as a Canvas: Flexible Memory Narratives in the Georgian Context**

Official identity narratives in Georgia are contradictory, oftentimes invoking a national identity that is both exclusive and inclusive. In 1860, the


prominent Georgian intellectual and nationalist Ilia Chavchavadze wrote these famous words: “From our ancestors we inherited three sacred treasures: fatherland (mamuli), language (ena), and faith (sartsmunoeba).”\textsuperscript{12} Despite the fact that Chavchavadze never elaborated on the idea expressed in this statement, the sacred treasures of “fatherland,” “language,” and “faith” have become key elements in the formula of Georgian national identity in late Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia.\textsuperscript{13}

Influential though the Fatherland-Language-Faith triad is at both the state and grassroots levels, it is inadequate to explain the interplay between the exclusive narratives of national identity represented by Chavchavadze’s triad and those of a much more inclusive, civic nature. As Chkhartishvili notes:

"Like any nationalist discourse, it [the idea of the nation] may lack inner coherence. Sometimes it may accommodate diametrically opposite assertions; however, this fact does not create any problem for the whole story. The actualization of separate themes has a situational character. Some of the nationalist appeals are topical at one time, others at another time."\textsuperscript{14}

The oftentimes ambiguous relationship between the coexisting exclusive and inclusive narrations of Georgian identity at the statewide level has led me to propose an alternative framework for the discussion of official identity narratives in contemporary Georgia. Alongside the elements of Chavchavadze’s Fatherland-Language-Faith triad, I identify three narratives that are central to memory and identity discourse in contemporary Georgia: 1.) foreign aggression and oppression, 2.) uniqueness through antiquity, and 3.) Georgia’s “return to the West.” I identified these narratives through conducting an extensive review of the existing material regarding Georgia’s national and political development from approximately 1989 to the present day. The materials surveyed include local and international news media publications such as Agenda.ge, Civil.ge, DFWatch, Georgia Today, OC Media, openDemocracy, Tabula, etc.; official speeches and statements published on government websites (such as those of Tbilisi City Hall, Parliament of Georgia, President of Georgia, etc.;

Prime Minister of Georgia, Saakashvili Presidential Archives, etc.); and relevant pieces of domestic and international agreements and legislation. In surveying these materials through the methodological lenses of discourse and content analysis, my aim has been to identify, extract, and analyze both explicit and implicit references to Georgian national identity and its constituent components. The primary language of the above sources has tended to be English, although sources in Azerbaijani, Georgian, and Russian have been utilized as well.

Where applicable, the data obtained from the above sources was compared to data from my interviews with state officials and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as from online and paper-based surveys from two fieldwork periods in 2016. The language of the interviews alternated between English, Azerbaijani, Georgian, and Russian, while the survey languages were Azerbaijani and Russian. Participant observation and landscape analysis during these periods of fieldwork (January-March and August-October 2016) have also proven to be particularly fruitful methods of data collection in the context of this case study. What I have found is that, alongside territorially based notions of common descent, language, and faith, the three flexible memory narratives mentioned above are selectively applied and/or discarded in manners that paint a particular picture of the titular Georgian nation and its position within the territorial state.

Tbilisi is a prime example of the interplay between official narratives of Georgian identity and the built environment. The city plays a crucial role in narratives concerning Georgian national identity. These narratives are not only visible in official rhetoric concerning the city’s history, but also take physical form as one surveys Tbilisi’s landscape. The official website of Tbilisi City Hall provides a description of the city’s history and its role in the development of a uniquely Georgian nation:

[Tbilisi’s] history spans sixteen centuries. From the fourth century to the present, Tbilisi has been the center of Georgian identity like Jerusalem is for the Jews, and our cities have suffered much over the centuries, having been repeatedly threatened by enemies and yet, thanks to many heroes, they are independent. Long occupied, [Tbilisi] remains unbroken. Persians, Ottomans, Byzantines, and Russians all came as enemies and in the end remained as friends. Because our capital city has gained every type of blood and race, every language and religion, it has absorbed a different culture and has been enriched by this diversity. [All of] Georgia has absorbed and been enriched by this diversity as well.
It is a truly rare city on Earth that has so painlessly and peacefully embraced and absorbed remaining enemy tribes, their laws and religions, leading to their peaceful coexistence in one confined place—denominations of the synagogue, the mosque, the Catholic church or the Orthodox temple. Mother Tbilisi was, is, and forever will be the protector of each.\textsuperscript{15}

This passage asserts Tbilisi’s importance as the historical epicenter of Georgian identity, an identity greatly impacted by external forces and their long struggle for primacy in the region. Invaders allegedly became friends and the nurturing, mothering figure of Tbilisi took the residents of the city under her wing. Peaceful coexistence purportedly achieved, multiculturalism became interwoven into the very fabric of the city of Tbilisi and the country of Georgia. Still, this legacy of multiculturalism has not managed to displace the primacy of “ethno”-cultural characteristics of “Georgian-ness”—such as the Georgian language and Georgian Orthodox Christianity—in officially and popularly conceived narratives of Georgian national identity. What follows is a brief survey of the historical stages of Tbilisi’s development, as well as an examination of the dominant narratives presently visible within Tbilisi’s built environment. Some general remarks pertaining to the city’s development since the beginning of the 19th century provide a useful backdrop to discussions of Tbilisi’s current physical landscape.

The Historical Development of Tbilisi: A Brief Overview

The region’s tumultuous history and its role in the tug-of-war between foreign powers for regional dominance has shaped Tbilisi’s demographic and physical development since the 5th century. The Persians, Ottomans, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and Mongols each sought regional preeminence and left their mark upon the socio-cultural fabric of Tbilisi and the region as a whole. Ethnic quarters came into existence over time, some of which continue to exist today—the Azeri-Turkic neighborhood of Ortachala or the Armenian neighborhood of Avlabari, for example.

Imperial Russian leadership oversaw the reconstruction of Tbilisi after its devastation by the Persians at the end of the 18th century. After Georgia lost its post-1783 status as a protectorate of the Russian Empire and was fully incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1801, the city continued to develop dramatically. The second half of the 19th century saw the emergence and development of a Georgian national intelligentsia with anti-Tsarist attitudes and aspirations of national independence. When this independence was briefly gained (1918-1921) following the Bolshevik

revolutions of 1917, however, it was achieved by *fait accompli*. Georgia’s brief period of independence was instrumental to the development of a coherent Georgian nation-state. Under Soviet leadership, Tbilisi became more demographically homogeneous (i.e. more “Georgian”) and expanded geographically. Architectural styles shifted from Stalinist monumentalism with some national elements to those that were more uniform and cost-effective, albeit poorer quality.\(^\text{16}\) In the central parts of the city, architectural styles that predate the Persian invasion of 1795 are visible alongside Imperial, European-style architecture and Stalinist monumentalism (see Figure 1). More recently, history has continued to leave its mark upon Tbilisi’s physical landscape, albeit in ways palatable to top Georgian officials and their desired identity narratives.

Old Tbilisi is and has long been a source of pride for Georgians, symbolizing an ancient and glorious—albeit tumultuous—past, a past that has been vital to the formulation of a uniquely Georgian nation-state.

Attempts to bring Old Tbilisi into the modern era, however, have been a source of contention between state officials and Tbilisi’s residents. Since Georgia gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the often-contradictory flexible memory narratives have reemerged to the political and socio-cultural forefront of Georgian society, imprinting themselves upon Georgian society in both abstract and concrete ways. Discussion and analysis of Tbilisi’s built environment since independence demonstrates “concrete” manifestations of these identity narratives.

Flexible Memory Narrative #1: Foreign Aggression and Oppression

The flexible memory narrative of foreign aggression and oppression, in which Imperial, Soviet, and now-independent Russia all play the role of the villain, simmered beneath the surface of Soviet Georgian society. The protests of 1956, 1978, and 1989 all demonstrated the propensity of these underlying tensions to erupt under particularly volatile conditions. As the first president of newly independent Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1991-1992) had relatively free rein to propagate narratives of national identity during his brief tenure. His impact upon Tbilisi’s built environment consisted of the erasure of several prominent Soviet symbols, in terms of names of streets and squares as well as the physical destruction or alteration of buildings and monuments. The most obvious representations of this erasure were the removal of the Lenin statue from Lenin Square, the subsequent renaming of the square as “Freedom Square” (see Figure 2), and the purging of Communist officials’ graves from the necropolis of the Pantheon of Mtatsminda. Gamsakhurdia ordered the reburial of Merab Kostava (1939-1989), the leader of the national liberation movement in Georgia who was a friend of Gamsakhurdia, and Alexander Sulkhanishvili (1900-1990), a key figure in the anti-Bolshevik uprisings of 1924, at Mtatsminda.17

The Georgian civil war of 1991-1993 and the severity of its post-war, post-Soviet economic collapse meant that Gamsakhurdia’s successor, Eduard Shevardnadze, had to field the underlying social tensions both within and between the various “national groups, including Georgians, Armenians, Azeri-Turks,18 and Russians, as well as the Abkhaz and Osse-

17 The necropolis of the Pantheon has been in existence since the 19th century, when it was used as the resting place of Georgian dignitaries of Imperial Russia. In 1930, the necropolis was purged of the graves of Imperial officials and the graves of Georgian writers and distinguished Bolsheviks were placed there instead. See Shatirishvili, “National Narratives and New Politics,” 394-96.

18 Although Azeri-Turks have traditionally been known as “Azerbaijanis” since the late 1930s, current debates among members of this community concerning their collective namesake have led me to make use of the alternate label of “Georgian Azeri-Turks” instead. For more on
tians. Political, economic, and social tensions resulted in a handful of notable, state-led alterations to the built environment of Tbilisi, as well as other population centers throughout the country. When Mikheil Saakashvili rode the wave of the Rose Revolution into power in 2003, however, he began to rigorously transform the country’s built environment to reflect and propagate his preferred official national identity narratives, paying special attention to the capital city, Tbilisi.

A number of symbolic events affecting Tbilisi’s built landscape and reflecting the flexible memory narrative of foreign aggression and oppression took place during this time. In 2004, for example, an updated monument in honor of the victims of the violent Soviet crackdown of protests on April 1989 was officially unveiled in front of Tbilisi’s Parliament. The Soviet-era podium and arches known as “Andropov’s Ears,” which once occupied a prominent place in Tbilisi’s former Republic Square, was dismantled in 2005 and the square renamed “Rose Revolution

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Figure 2. Freedom Square, decorated for the 2016 New Year and Christmas celebrations.

Source: Author’s photo, January 2016.

this issue, see the author’s 2018 works, “A People In-Between: A Study of Collective Identity (Re-)Formation and the Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli” and “Who and Where are We? Landscapes as Sites of Identity Negotiation for Georgian Azeri-Turks” (manuscripts submitted for publication).

Square." The body of Kaikhosro Cholokashvili (1888-1930), a famous leader in the anti-Bolshevik resistance of the early 20th century, was reburied at Mtatsminda in 2005, and a year later a new wing of the Georgian National Museum in central Tbilisi was opened and named the Museum of Soviet Occupation. In 2007, another reburial took place at Mtatsminda: Gamsakhurdia, who remains a controversial figure in Georgia to this day, was officially rehabilitated and reburied alongside famous Georgian cultural figures of the 19th and 20th centuries.20

Following the Russo-Georgian War of August 2008 over the status of South Ossetia, Saakashvili’s enmity toward Russian President Vladimir Putin, as well as his distaste for the remaining Soviet symbols, increased. This distaste culminated in the unannounced and controversial removal of the Stalin monument in the center of Gori, Stalin’s hometown, and the continuation of attempts to erase symbols of Georgia’s Soviet past from the physical landscape in Tbilisi and throughout the country, such as in Kutaisi.21 In 2009, Tbilisi’s municipal government voted to rename Vladimir Jikia Street in the popular, upscale district of Vake after Anna Politkovskaya, the journalist and outspoken Putin critic who was murdered in 2006. Buildings were demolished, oftentimes resulting in a public outcry such as that which surrounded the reconstruction of the building that once housed the Soviet-era Russian-language newspaper, Zaria Vostoka (Eastern Dawn), on Rustaveli Avenue in 2010 and 2011.22 When faced with the protests of locals as well as art and architecture specialists regarding the destruction of these buildings in central Tbilisi, the local government typically attempted to placate protestors, claiming that the buildings were to be restored and not demolished.

On Georgia’s Independence Day in 2010, Saakashvili unveiled the “Tower of Heroes” on Tbilisi’s Heroes Square in honor of those who died at the hands of the Bolsheviks and Russians while fighting for Georgia’s independence. The passage of the Freedom Charter in May 2011 provided further impetus to the ruling administration’s efforts to rid Georgia of “distasteful” reminders of the Soviet past. The Charter, sponsored by Giorgi Tortladze of Strong Georgia and supported by the ruling party, outlawed the display of Soviet and/or Fascist artifacts and called for the removal of any such displays from public life, be they in the form of street names, buildings, monuments, inscriptions, or otherwise.23

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20 Interestingly, the remains of Stalin’s mother remain at Mtatsminda to this day.
attempts to erase Georgia’s Soviet past from the physical landscape did not go unnoticed nor pass without controversy. Mixed attitudes toward Georgia’s Soviet past often culminated in public protests such as those that surrounded the removal of the Stalin statue from Gori or criticisms of Saakashvili’s stance regarding Georgia’s role in the Great Patriotic War.24

Flexible Memory Narrative #2: Uniqueness through Antiquity

Georgian leaders often look to the historical presence of the Georgian language and Georgian Orthodox Christianity on contemporary Georgian lands—and the role each played in the formation and persistence of a uniquely Georgian nation—to strengthen and encourage popular perception of a Georgian nation that is as ancient as it is distinct from its neighbors. Gamsakhurdia clung to this particular narrative in his bid to rid Georgia from “foreign” influences—including Soviet/Russian influences as well as those emanating from Georgia’s other ethno-linguistic or religious minority groups—through open promotion of ethno-nationalism and calls for a return to a “Georgia for Georgians.” In this sense, “Georgian” referred to the collectivity of people who spoke Georgian as their native tongue, professed Georgian Orthodoxy as their religion, and shared a belief in the territorial state of Georgia as their ancestral homeland.25

The vast majority of changes made to Tbilisi’s built environment that reflect the antiquity of the Georgian nation and its uniqueness took place after Saakashvili came to power in 2003. Saakashvili continued and expanded Shevardnadze’s balancing act between Georgian ethno-nationalism and minority appeasement by stressing Georgia’s historical legacy of multiculturalism and tolerance. While physical representations of the foreign aggression and oppression narrative in the landscape tended to focus upon the erasure of certain symbols from the streets, the uniqueness through antiquity narrative is demonstrated in terms of what remained or was newly constructed in Tbilisi’s built environment. Did these newly restored or constructed elements demonstrate: a.) a traditional, exclusivist


understanding of Georgian identity, or b.) a more inclusive understanding of Georgian identity based upon values of multiculturalism and tolerance? The answer, in short, is “both.”

Outside of Old Tbilisi, it is rather difficult to find official, physical representations of the role played by Georgia’s minority groups—including the country’s largest minority groups, the Armenians, Azeri-Turks, and Russians—in the development of the Georgian nation and contemporary nation-state. This is because the post-independent Georgian leadership engaged in efforts to erase from the city’s built environment the evidence of particular historical periods that do not fit comfortably with dominant narratives of identity. The flexible memory narrative of Georgian uniqueness through antiquity is particularly useful in analyzing and examining the ways that Georgian identity is oftentimes considered simultaneously exclusive and inclusive, depending upon the context in which identity narratives are referenced.

The uniqueness through antiquity narrative often follows one of two trajectories in Georgia. The first trajectory bases the legitimacy of the Georgian state upon the existence of a historical group of people with a common descent, language, and faith—that is, the historical presence of a uniquely Georgian “nation” or people for whom the territorial state is the “homeland.” The second trajectory, by contrast, makes room for the involvement of outsiders—those who do not share the characteristics of common descent, language, and faith with members of the titular nation—by referencing the gradual absorption of these outsiders and their various cultural traditions into the socio-cultural fabric of the host state. Although enriched in many ways by the state’s absorption of foreign peoples and their cultures, the Georgian nation is seen to have maintained its historical uniqueness, eventually developing what are perceived to be qualities of benevolence and tolerance toward other groups.

The role of minority groups in the historical development of the Georgian nation-state, then, is coopted through notions of the historic multiculturalism of the region and a famous Georgian tolerance of diversity. While the first trajectory of the uniqueness through antiquity narrative represents the ideology of traditional ethno-nationalism as it was represented by Gamsakhurdia, with the “Georgia for Georgians!” slogan remaining prominent in certain circles even today, the second trajectory is much more in line with current official and popular narratives concerning Georgian identity, representing a more inclusive understanding of Georgian national identity that lies somewhere between ethno- and civic nationalism.26

The National Policy of the Cultural Heritage Sector of Georgia, issued by the Georgian National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (or ICOMOS Georgia) in 2014, states that the “heritage of ethnic minorities is mainly represented by religious buildings (Armenian apostolic churches and mosques, medreses).”27 The report affirms that the vast majority of officially registered cultural heritage sites are located in Tbilisi. The report states that the vast majority of the total number of cultural heritage sites are categorized as Tbilisi-based memorial dwellings or religious and fortification complexes.28 It is evident that there are far fewer officially recognized sites representing minority groups’ cultural heritage in Tbilisi or elsewhere than there are sites representing the cultural heritage of a rather exclusive Georgian “nation” sharing particular characteristics such as common descent, language, and faith. A brief discussion of Tbilisi-based places of worship, museums, drama theatres, street names, and monuments further illustrates this point.

In November 2014, then-Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili publicly opened the new “Tolerance Garden Square” near Europe Square and Old Tbilisi. Garibashvili stated:

Georgia and Tbilisi have been known as centers of tolerance across the Caucasus. Tbilisi has always been guided by values that reject religious or ethnic intolerance. Respect for minorities has always been Tbilisi’s inherent characteristic. A synagogue, a mosque, an Armenian Apostolic church, and an Orthodox church have stood side by side in a tiny Tbilisi neighborhood for centuries. Here, in our city, on one urban block, Jews, Armenians, Yazidis, Assyrians, Russians, Ukrainians, and others have lived together with Georgians, maintaining friendship and standing by one another in times of joy and tribulation. And this continues today. And we can truly pride ourselves on this.29

This legacy of tolerance is reflected only intermittently in official practice. Due to increasing societal friction between the Georgian Orthodox Church and the country’s minority religions, a decision was

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28 Ibid., 10.

Flexible Memory Narratives in Tbilisi

made in 2014 to provide state funding to particular religious institutions. The minority religions recognized by the Georgian government as having a historical presence in Georgia and therefore being entitled to at least a minimum of financial recompense for damage done during Soviet times include Islam, Judaism, the Armenian Orthodox Church, and the Catholic Church.30

There are currently two functioning Armenian Orthodox churches (the Cathedral of St. George and Etchmiadzin Cathedral), two Russian Orthodox churches (Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and St. Mikheil Tvereli Church), and two Catholic churches (St. Peter and Paul Church and the Cathedral of Our Lady) functioning in Tbilisi, compared to just one functioning mosque (Juma Mosque) and one synagogue (the Great Synagogue). The relationship between the Georgian state and its two largest minority groups, Armenians and Azeri-Turks, is somewhat tense in the realm of religion, as the powerful and influential Georgian Orthodox Church has tended to look upon minority religions in Georgia with suspicion and derision. A number of Georgian Azeri-Turks, who are predominantly Shia Muslim, have expressed their dissatisfaction with the fact that there is only one functioning mosque in Tbilisi. Furthermore, the difficulties faced in attempting to construct mosques or prayer houses in Georgia are well known.31

Additionally, the National Congress of Armenians in Georgia (NCAG) has accused both the Georgian government and the Georgian Orthodox Church of appropriating four traditionally Armenian churches in Tbilisi. The great Sameba Cathedral (which opened in 2004) was allegedly built atop the ruins of an Armenian church and its cemetery, known as Khojivank, much to the dismay of Georgia’s Armenian community. The NCAG website states that,

The adjacent Armenian cemetery [Khojivank] was taken over by the Georgian Church and their new national cathedral was built upon it... The remaining space in between the Pantheon and the new Georgian cathedral is now the construction site of what appears to be a Georgian Seminary. Again, the Armenian tombs here are being ignored, and human bones are being moved


31 Author’s unpublished interviews with Alibala Askerov of “Geyrat” People’s Movement (Marneuli, March 2016) and Zaur Khalilov of Civic Integration Foundation (Tbilisi, September 2016). This viewpoint was also expressed in a number of anonymous online and paper-based surveys of Georgian Azeri-Turks carried out by the author in January-October 2016.
Although the Georgian government often utilizes narratives of religious tolerance in Georgia when addressing both domestic and foreign audiences, the close-knit relationship of the Georgian state with the Georgian Orthodox Church produces dramatic and disproportionate outcomes in terms of the involvement of the Georgian Orthodox Church in statewide politics and decision-making. The influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church in shaping and disseminating narratives of national identity has grown since independence, and current discussions between the government and the Church concerning opening a second pantheon on the grounds of the Sameba Cathedral, the seat of the Georgian Patriarch, foretell a potential increase in this influence in the coming years. The Mtatsminda Pantheon is arguably the city’s most prominent memory site, serving as the resting place for the most honored Georgian artists, intellectuals, fighters, and other individuals recognized as having played a significant role in the development or protection of the titular Georgian nation (see Figure 3). The importance of the Pantheon to official identity narratives is demonstrated by the tendency of both Soviet and post-Soviet regimes to bury or remove particular individuals from the site. With the exception of the tomb of 19th-century diplomat and playwright Aleksander Griboedov (who was married to Nino Chavchavadze, the daughter of a Georgian prince), the Pantheon is devoid of gravesites entombing non-“ethnic Georgians.”

Similarly, place names in Tbilisi tend to represent flexible memory narratives, in that the naming and renaming of streets reflects officials’ preferences vis-à-vis national identity narratives. The imperial, Soviet, and independent Georgian leadership have all seen fit to alter place names in ways that reflected positively upon their chosen narratives. Independent Georgia has seen a dramatic decrease in street names reflecting the country’s imperial and Soviet past, largely doing away with Russian place names as well as those referencing Soviet rhetoric and prominent Georgian Bolsheviks. In their place, the governments of post-Soviet Georgia have tended to preference street names highlighting Georgian antiquity, the Georgian people’s historical quest for self-determination, and leading Georgian cultural and intellectual figures, all of which demonstrate—and legitimate in the eyes of the people—the inextricable link between the titular Georgian nation and its “homeland.” Consider, for example,

Figure 3. Ilia Chavchavadze’s (1837-1907) gravesite at the Mtatsminda Pantheon.

the names of several important and popular streets in Tbilisi: Gorgasali Street,\textsuperscript{34} Queen Tamar Avenue,\textsuperscript{35} Aghmashenebeli Avenue (named after David the Builder),\textsuperscript{36} Rustaveli Avenue,\textsuperscript{37} Chavchavadze Avenue,\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{34} Vakhtang Gorgali was the 5\textsuperscript{th}-century King of Iberia and founder of Tbilisi.
\textsuperscript{35} Queen Tamar reigned from the late 12\textsuperscript{th} to early 13\textsuperscript{th} century. She is a key symbol of the Golden Age in Georgia.
\textsuperscript{36} Davit Aghmashenebeli (“David the Builder”) ruled from the late 11\textsuperscript{th} century to the early 12\textsuperscript{th} century. He is a key figure of the Golden Age in Georgia.
\textsuperscript{37} Shota Rustaveli is a leading figure of Georgian literature who lived during the Golden Age, from the mid-12\textsuperscript{th} century to the early 13\textsuperscript{th} century. He is the author of Georgia’s national epic, \textit{The Knight in Panther’s Skin}.
\textsuperscript{38} Ilia Chavchavadze, popularly considered to be the father of the Georgian nation, did much to develop Georgian nationalism in the mid-to-late 19\textsuperscript{th} century.
Additionally, after long deliberations concerning the renaming of Tbilisi’s international airport, Tbilisi City Hall decided in 2015 to rename it after Shota Rustaveli.42

This is certainly not to say that one cannot find place names referencing non-Georgians in Tbilisi; indeed, the Heydar Aliyev Embankment43 is located opposite the Nikoloz Baratishvili Embankment alongside the Mtkvari River, Alexander Griboedov Street44 is located near Rustaveli Avenue, and Pushkin Square45 is a stone’s throw from Freedom Square. These individuals have been folded into official identity narratives in a way that does not challenge the legitimacy of an independent Georgian nation-state. The same can be said of street monuments that are located along popular streets or that ornament the green areas of the city; they serve as reminders of the historical development of the titular Georgian nation and the key figures that contributed to its development, be they artists, intellectuals, politicians, or soldiers. A few key examples include: the larger-than-life statue of Mother Georgia overlooking the Old City,46 that of St. George in Freedom Square,47 that of Vakhtang Gorgasali48 by the Metekhi Church, and that of Nikoloz Pirosmani in Old Tbilisi,49 as well as

39 Kote Marjanishvili was a prominent Georgian theatre director of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
40 Vazha Pshavela was the pen name of a highly regarded late 19th- and early 20th-century Georgian literary figure.
41 Merab Kostava (1939-1989) was a poet, musician, Georgian dissident, and key figure in Georgia’s national liberation movement in the second half of the 20th century.
43 Heydar Aliyev was the third and most influential president of Azerbaijan who ruled from 1993 until his death in 2003. Georgian leaders credit Aliyev for his support of Georgian statehood.
44 Alexander Griboedov was a late 18th and early 19th-century Russian diplomat, playwright, and composer. He became part of one of Georgia’s most influential and aristocratic families, the Chavchavadze family, through his marriage to Nino Chavchavadze in 1828.
45 Alexander Pushkin was an 18th-century writer of the era of Romanticism. Pushkin is arguably the most famous Russian poet and remains a key figure in Russian literature.
46 The “Mother Georgia” statue (or “kartlis deda”) was installed atop Mount Sololaki in Tbilisi in 1958. She symbolizes the Georgian nation as a nurturing woman offering wine in a bowl to guests while holding a sword in her other hand to protect the country against enemies.
47 The large monument to St. George has filled the empty space left by the removal of the statue of Lenin from what is now Freedom Square since 2006.
48 The statue of Vakhtang Gorgasali was erected next to the famous Metekhi Church in Old Tbilisi in 1961.
49 The statue of the famous Georgian primitivism painter Nikoloz Pirosmani (1862-1918) was erected in Old Tbilisi in 1975.
Flexible Memory Narratives in Tbilisi

the statue of Saint Abo of Tiflis on Gorgasali Street and that of Nikoloz Baratishvili in Baratishvili Square. At the same time, a bust of Heydar Aliyev is located in Heydar Aliyev Park, a statue of Sayat Nova stands in the heart of Old Tbilisi, a statue of Sergei Farajanov can be found off Chardin Street, a monument to Hungarian painter Mihaly Zichy is located in Leonidze Park, and a statue of Oliver and Marjory Wardrop stands behind Tbilisi’s Parliament Building.

In addition to observing innumerable monuments and statues located along carefully named streets and avenues, a visitor to Tbilisi will find a plethora of museums and galleries to satisfy his or her cravings for art and local culture. The majority of these museums and galleries’ permanent exhibits highlight the development of various artistic disciplines over time throughout Georgia through the work of their titular Georgian creators. Of the sixty officially registered museums operating in Tbilisi, the namesakes of only three are directly reminiscent of the role played by particular minority groups in the socio-cultural development of the contemporary Georgian nation-state at present—the museum of the Alexander Griboedov Russian State Drama Theatre, the David Baazov Georgian-Jewish Relations History Museum, and the Mirza Phatali Akhundov Museum of Azerbaijani Culture. The vast majority of these sixty functional museums consist of house museums in honor of prominent Georgian artistic-cultural figures, as well as national museums displaying particular branches of arts and culture developed by Georgian individuals over time. In addition to the Russian State Drama Theatre, there are the Petros Adamian Tbilisi State Armenian Drama Theatre and the Heydar Aliyev Azerbaijani State Drama Theatre.

While the Russian and Armenian drama theatres are both in good condition and are currently in operation in Tbilisi, the Azerbaijani State Drama Theatre is in such poor condition that it is unfit for operation.

50 Saint Abo of Tiflis, a Christian martyr from the 8th century, is the patron saint of Tbilisi. His statue is located on Gorgasali Street.
51 Nikoloz Baratashvili was a prominent 19th-century Georgian poet typically compared to Byron. The statue of him was placed in Baratashvili Square in 1975.
52 The park named in honor of Heydar Aliyev was opened in 2004 in the Abanotubani area of Old Tbilisi.
53 Sayat Nova was a Tbilisi-based 18th-century bard of Armenian background. His statue, which is located in the heart of Old Tbilisi, was opened in 2009.
54 The statue of Sergei Farajanov, an Armenian Soviet-era film director who made important contributions to Georgian cinema in the 20th century, was unveiled in 2004.
55 Mihaly Zichy (1827-1906), a Hungarian artist, is famous in Georgia for his depictions of scenes from Rustaveli’s Knight in Panther’s Skin.
56 The statue of Oliver and Marjory Wardrop is located behind the Parliament Building in Tbilisi and was unveiled in 2015.
57 Temporary exhibits pertaining to so-called “indigenous outsiders,” however, represent a break with the norm (see, for example, the traveling exhibit featuring elements of ancient wooden mosques of Adjara at https://www.indigenousoutsiders.com/home).
58 For more information on museums in Tbilisi, see georgianmuseums.ge.
Flexible Memory Narrative #3: Georgia’s “Return to the West”

In contrast to the poor condition of a number of historical buildings, including the Azerbaijani State Drama Theatre, various ultra-modern buildings have sprung up in Tbilisi’s most central and popular areas over the past decade. A lack of coherent plans for spatial development, coupled with a headfirst rush into market capitalism following independence, have led to significant changes on Tbilisi’s landscape. The Rose Revolution that swept Mikheil Saakashvili into power in 2003 kickstarted a widespread campaign to connect Georgia historically, culturally, economically, and politically to the countries of Western Europe and North America. The flexible identity narrative of Georgia’s “return to the West” was imprinted just as much upon the built environment in Tbilisi as it was upon Georgia’s economic and political bodies and policies. The results of these changes to the built environment were controversial at the time and continue to be so in both Georgian political and academic circles, as well as among some of Tbilisi’s residents.

The narrative of Georgia’s “return to the West,” which began mildly and measuredly under Shevardnadze and intensified under Saakashvili, situates independent Georgia within the desired socio-cultural and historical parameters of Georgian leadership. The general idea is that the Georgian nation-state is linked to Europe through the sheer antiquity of the nation and certain elements that have come to be considered attributes of “Georgian-ness.” For example, in his annual address to the Georgian Parliament in March 2007, then-President Saakashvili stated:

Georgia is returning to its historical European family. We are not simply Europeans, we are the oldest Europeans. Europe is coming back to Georgia just the way Georgia is returning to Europe. However, Europe first came to Georgia through its myths, in search of the Golden Fleece… Europe came here when Georgia became one of the first Christian states and it was from here that Europe went to many European countries. This is very important because Europe is our most important political vector. Europe above all—this is the main slogan of our foreign policy and it is the main landmark.59

Saakashvili links Georgia through Europe via genealogy as well as Christianity; for example, he alludes to recent archeological excavations

suggesting that the first Europeans descended from hominids native to the territory of Georgia and refers to the deep-seated roots of Georgian Christianity. In his analysis of Saakashvili’s various speeches from 2003-12, De Leonardis identifies Saakashvili’s tendency to point to continuous Russian interference as the reason Georgia was forced to break from what was seen as its rightful trajectory to Europe. According to De Leonardis,

Saakashvili presented Georgia as a European country which would have followed the same path of Western Europe, had it not been for its systematic harassment by Russia: “We are Europeans and this is both our choice and our fate and I am sure that we will succeed and reintegrate a joint family that Georgia never should have been separated from.” ... In this vision, the lost “golden age” is identified with the medieval epoch of King David the Builder and Queen Tamar (Jones 2013:226), whereas the so-called Rose Revolution is seen as the moment of its rebirth, the “return to Europe” that ended the country’s painful “transition.”

Georgia’s political and economic ambitions with regard to both Europe and the United States were framed through what Saakashvili considered shared values of modernity, including adherence to democratic principles, multiculturalism, and tolerance. In this way, the flexible memory narrative of Georgia’s “return to the West” consists of socio-cultural and historical links between Georgia and Western Europe, as well as political and economic links between North America (primarily the United States) and the European Union (primarily the states of Western Europe). These linkages came to be visible in Tbilisi’s built environment as well as in domestic legislation and international agreements.

During his time in office, Saakashvili was Tbilisi’s leading spatial developer. Soviet norms of spatial development were perceived as illegitimate and therefore largely became defunct, meaning that Saakashvili was able to take charge of the capital city’s development. A central theme of this development is represented by the flexible memory of Georgia’s “return to the West” following what Saakashvili considered the dark ages of Soviet socialism. Saakashvili ordered the construction of many new pieces of infrastructure, most of which were designed by European architects to symbolize Georgia’s “return to the West” and the associated path to modernity. Steel and glass structures were to present the face of a mod-

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61 cf. Salukvadze & Golubchikov, City as Geopolitics.
ern Georgia with a transparent system of governance to domestic and international audiences alike. The majority of these structures were built between 2008-12, and they include the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the White House-esque Presidential Palace, the Peace Bridge, the still unfinished “tubes” of Rike Park (envisioned to house a theatre as well as an exhibition hall), the Ministry of Justice, the Prosecutor’s Office, the Public Service Hall, the Vault of the National Bank of Georgia, and a plethora of glass police stations in Tbilisi and throughout the country. Many of these buildings, including the Presidential Palace, the Peace Bridge, the Rike Park “tubes,” and the Public Service Hall, stand in sharp contrast to the historical backdrop of 19th century Old Tbilisi (see Figures 4-6). These structures symbolize Saakashvili’s “Grands Travaux,” or “Large-Scale Construction” campaign.

Speaking of Saakashvili’s architectural campaign in Tbilisi, Bergfors states that Saakashvili’s plan “was to change the image of Georgia, to attract investors as well as tourists by showing that the former Soviet republic was transforming itself into a modern and Western-oriented
Furthermore, according to Salukvadze and Golubchikov, Saakashvili regarded extravagant post-modernist structures designed by world-renown architects as a quick fix in achieving a modernized and globalized image for the capital and, by implication, in linking the whole nation to the “European civilization.” Dozens of such geopolitical projects were inserted in the fabric of the old town or its vicinity, at a considerable public cost. While the projects such as the Bridge of Peace (designed by Michele de Lucchi), Public Service Hall and Rike Park Theatre (both by Massimiliano Fuksas) are certainly nothing short of masterpiece, many find them distorting the scale and flavor of historic Tbilisi.

In addition to condemning Saakashvili’s placement of “ultra-modern” glass and steel structures in close proximity to Tbilisi’s historical center, critics liken Saakashvili’s architectural projects to the cold, impersonal, and imposing designs of the Soviet period that he so often vilified. Visitors to these new glass-fronted or other governmental buildings—such as the Parliament on Rustaveli Avenue or Tbilisi City Hall on Freedom Square—will notice that the flag of the Council of Europe/European Union flies alongside the official flag of Georgia. Europe Square is located directly next to Rike Park in Old Tbilisi, and visitors strolling through the park can see the monument of Ronald Reagan that was unveiled in 2011. Anyone traveling into the city from Tbilisi’s international airport will likely traverse the George W. Bush Highway. Outside Tbilisi, glass-walled police stations and public service halls, complete with Council of Europe/European Union flags, portray the image of a Western-oriented Georgia that operates transparently and in accordance with its citizens’ needs. Still, although Saakashvili did much during his first term to curtail corruption, especially among the police, some question whether the transparency symbolized by Saakashvili’s police stations and other such administrative buildings actually exists. Since coming to power following the parliamentary elections of 2012, the leadership of the ruling party, Georgian Dream, has continually demonized Saakashvili and his party as

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63 Salukvadze & Golubchikov, *City as Geopolitics*, 48-49.
being antidemocratic and corrupt.65

The gradual erasure of Soviet symbols from the landscape and the addition of larger-than-life glass and steel structures to the Tbilisi skyline were not the only controversial projects involving the interplay of flexible memory identity narratives. Officials’ aspirations with regard to the development of Tbilisi’s historic center have tended to be at odds with narratives of uniqueness through antiquity; the question of how to maintain this historicity and uniqueness in the face of modernization has proven to be a divisive issue for locals and state officials. The debate around the New Life for Old Tbilisi and Panorama Tbilisi projects has highlighted the disconnect between respect for and preservation of the past and the so-called “modernizing forces” of market capitalism in Old Tbilisi.

Flexible Memory Narratives in Tbilisi

When “Antiquity” and “Modernity” Clash: Development Projects in Old Tbilisi

When the New Life for Old Tbilisi project went into effect in 2009, the aim was to reduce the number of dilapidated dwellings that marred the city’s landscape. The general goal of the project was to move inhabitants of these areas to dwellings outside of the city’s historic center. The government would provide capital to developers to finish the projects interrupted by the financial crisis and the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, and people would be moved out of their run-down dwellings in Old Tbilisi to newly finished residential blocks. The government would then sell the plots in question to property developers and use the profits of these sales to repay the loans that initially facilitated the completion of the pre-2008 projects. In theory, the derelict structures of Old Tbilisi were to be restored and brought back to their former glory. Yet instead of careful and respectful restoration of these historical structures, what tended to follow was their demolition and reconstruction in the buildings’ “original style.”

66 For more information concerning New Life for Old Tbilisi, see: Bergfors, “Tbilisi Destroys...
An arguably even more controversial project for the future development of Tbilisi, the Panorama Tbilisi project, is looking more and more likely to move forward, despite locals’ protests. Panorama Tbilisi is the pet project of billionaire-turned-politician Bidzina Ivanishvili, who helped lead the Georgian Dream party to power in 2012 and served as the country’s Prime Minister from 2012 to 2013. Following his departure from the public eye in 2013, many opined that, although Ivanishvili was no longer in the official spotlight, he continued to pull the strings of key Georgian Dream officials and controlled the party’s agenda from behind the scenes.\(^6\) Ivanishvili’s official return to the Georgian political scene in April 2018 as Chairman of the Georgian Dream party did not, therefore, come as a great surprise.

The public learned of Ivanishvili’s Panorama project after he resigned as Prime Minister in 2013. Panorama Tbilisi envisions the construction of an elite business and tourism complex, consisting of luxury hotels and apartments, business centers and conference halls, sports arenas, and health and leisure centers that would overlook Old Tbilisi from above the Sololaki area.\(^6\) Ivanishvili’s own glass and steel palace also overlooks Old Tbilisi (see Figure 7),\(^6\) although there are allegations that it was built illegally.\(^7\) The project’s structure would consist of eight floors and would sit on the hill behind that on which Ivanishvili’s space-age palace is located. The Georgian Co-Investment Fund manages the project, of which Ivanishvili appears to have been sole investor since the Fund’s 2013 establishment. Ivanishvili reportedly hopes to connect Panorama Tbilisi to the rest of the city via cable car, adding cable car stops to sites owned by the Fund in Freedom and Erekile Squares. According to Irakli Zhvania,\(^7\) Ivanishvili’s wealth and political connections have allowed him to maneuver around

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complicated and restrictive procedures pertaining to the development of land in the historic Old Tbilisi area, acquiring a type of building permit that is normally only awarded to those developing crucial elements of state infrastructure.

The New Life for Old Tbilisi project has been criticized as officially promoting the gentrification of Old Tbilisi, thereby altering the historical center of the city’s socio-cultural and socio-economic fabric. Opponents of Panorama Tbilisi assert that the project will only serve to intensify this gentrification as well as the destruction of Tbilisi’s historical center.72 Despite protests that Panorama Tbilisi will finally kill all that is unique and charming about Old Tbilisi, the project is likely to meet little resistance from officials in either Tbilisi’s City Hall or the Ministry of the Economy as it moves forward. In fact, the end of September and beginning of October 2017 saw the Tbilisi City Assembly hastily rezone and sell 1,900 square meters of land behind Pushkin Square—located next to central Freedom Square—for development within the Panorama Tbilisi project. This centrally located piece of land was sold to Tbilisi City Ltd.,

an allegedly Ivanishvili-owned subcontractor of the Co-Investment Fund, for the symbolic price of one lari (the equivalent of $0.39, or EUR 0.34 at the time of writing). Protests followed concerning the rezoning and sale of this and other centrally and/or historically located lands, with opposition politicians and environmental activists as well as a number of laypeople arguing that the process was neither transparent nor ecologically or geologically well-advised.73

The New Life for Old Tbilisi and Panorama Tbilisi projects demonstrate the contradictory nature and application of official flexible memory identity narratives to shape Old Tbilisi into a space that successfully marries historicity with modernity. These projects, along with the erasure of prominent Soviet-era buildings and symbols from Tbilisi’s landscape, have revealed both the difficulties and the inherent contradictions in attempting to balance pride in the nation’s past with hope for the nation’s future position in an ever-changing, globalizing world. Development trends in this direction have showed that, thus far, Georgia’s official leadership is willing to sacrifice Tbilisi’s architectural historicity for what it considers “modernization.” The divide between official and public opinion concerning modernizing trends in Tbilisi’s physical landscape highlights dramatic differences in power relations: decisions regarding which narratives are to be represented in Tbilisi and how are made at the top echelons of government, while average citizens are left with little recourse but to protest questionable development projects.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated the ways in which narratives of foreign aggression and oppression, uniqueness through antiquity, and Georgia’s “return to the West” are visible in the symbolically imbued landscape of Tbilisi. Furthermore, my intention has been to shed light upon the ways in which elements of these flexible memory narratives are selectively and contradictorily applied by particular administrations, oriented toward particular audiences, and popularly received by the city’s residents. Subsequent generations of ordinary people and state officials will no doubt continue the long-running tradition of projecting narratives of national identity onto the built environment and, as a result, onto the hearts and minds of the members of the “nation” in question. What remains uncertain, however, is how the mixed messages sent by the Georgian state with regard

to national identity as both *exclusive* and *inclusive* in nature are received across the various segments of the population—titular and non-titular, Tbilisi- and non-Tbilisi-based. Protests concerning the removal of Soviet symbols, the appropriation of particular religious grounds and structures by the state, and spatial development projects targeting Old Tbilisi all provide some insight into popular perceptions of these measures, but not nearly enough is known about the backgrounds of the protestors or their individual motivations to make any concrete assertions. Further research concerning popular perception of official identity narratives and their applications among various segments of the population, including among members of the titular and non-titular groups, is necessary in order to carry out a more balanced, nuanced, and multi-scalar study of national identity in Georgia. This article is, I hope, but the first step toward further research concerning processes of national identity (re)production and the relationship between these processes and the physical—yet symbolic—environment in Georgia.
ARTICLE IV


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"WHO AND WHERE ARE WE?"
LANDSCAPES AS MEDIUMS OF IDENTITY NEGOTIATION FOR GEORGIA’S AZERI-TURKS

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Abstract: When searching for some reflection of themselves in Georgia’s official narratives, policies, and symbolic landscapes, members of the country’s minority groups are often left to ask, “Who and where are we?” The existence of a territorial state by the name of Azerbaijan next door complicates matters for Georgia’s largest minority group, the Georgian Azeri-Turks, in that members of this group are widely considered “Azerbaijanis,” or as belonging historically to the territorial state of Azerbaijan rather than to Georgia. In this article, symbolically imbued landscapes are framed as sites wherein narratives of identity are articulated, negotiated, and, at times, contested by members of the Georgian Azeri-Turkic community in the border region of Kvemo Kartli. By highlighting the ways in which community leaders problematize official control over symbolic landscapes in the region, I seek to answer the following question: How do encounters with national identity narratives in the landscape affect or reflect understandings of collective identity among the Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli?

Exclusive conceptions of (ethno-)national identity remain influential at the political and grassroots levels in Georgia, leaving members of

some of the country’s minority groups to ask, “Who and where are we?” as they seek to see themselves reflected in the country’s official narratives, policies, and symbolic landscapes. In this paper, symbolically imbued material landscapes are framed as sites wherein meta-narratives of identity are encountered and/or contested at a variety of scales, from that of the so-called “nation-state” to the grassroots level. By highlighting discussions concerning official interventions in local landscapes of the Kvemo Kartli region, I seek to answer the following question: How do encounters with national identity narratives in the landscape affect or reflect understandings of collective identity among the Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli? The cases illustrated in this paper demonstrate that, for Georgian Azeri-Turk interviewees as well as authors of posts on local Facebook pages, perceptions of exclusionary practices taking place within local landscapes serve as powerful sites of collective identity negotiation.

After briefly discussing the bases of post-Soviet nation-building in Georgia and Azerbaijan (and underlining the importance of the Soviet period to the (re)formation of contemporary identity narratives in both states), the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this case study are offered up for the reader’s consideration. The relationship between national identity and territory is explicated as the basis for discussion of landscapes, both symbolic and physical, as arenas for identity dissemination, contestation, and negotiation. Data obtained through interviews and participant observation in addition to content, discourse, and social media analysis are presented with the aim of highlighting lesser-heard voices and lesser-studied issues within local Georgian Azeri-Turkic communities. Four discursive categories are identified in interview and other research materials—1) Physical presence/residence, 2) Place names, 3) Religious symbolism in the built environment, and 4) Collective utilization—and are presented here as frames through which local responses to official interventions in local landscapes in Kvemo Kartli can be better analyzed and understood. Each of the aforementioned discursive categories is examined in turn, with local voices featuring prominently in these discussions. Analysis of these discursive categories, as well as the circumstances upon which they are built, demonstrates that, for many Georgian Azeri-Turks, the negotiation of collective identity occurs in no small part in relation to perceptions of peripheralization and relative deprivation. The landscapes within and through which individuals carry out their daily lives in Kvemo Kartli are poignant sites of identity encounter and contestation, arenas within which subjective collective identities take shape and adapt to changing socio-cultural and geopolitical circumstances.

Background

In Georgia and in many other post-Soviet states, the 19th and 20th centuries saw the emergence of national intelligentsias and official projects to awaken national consciousness in the hearts and minds of titular peoples as well as to embed related ideologies within state structures and institutions.\(^2\) The early Soviet period was particularly important to the dissemination of narratives linking so-called “titular peoples” and their languages to particular territories and the fusion of these narratives within governing structures at the level of the republics and semi-autonomous republics within the Soviet Union.\(^3\) In the South Caucasus, brief periods of democratic and independent statehood—from 1918-21 in Georgia and from 1918-20 in both Azerbaijan and Armenia—provided the impetus for nation-building initiatives in the region following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Georgian Azeri-Turks have officially been designated as “Azerbaijanis” since 1937, in line with the policies put into place to distinguish the titular people of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic from those in neighboring Turkey. In seeking to distance the Turkic/Persian peoples of the Soviet Union from the nationalizing states of neighboring Turkey and Iran, Soviet officials recognized the power of descriptive labels in dividing as well as consolidating collectivities.\(^4\) Quickly succeeding the official establishment and delimitation of the Georgian, Azerbaijani, and Armenian Soviet Socialist Republics in 1936, the territorial Azerbaijani SSR was officially deemed the “homeland” for members of the “Azerbaijani nation.” The Turkic peoples who had resided for centuries in the south and eastern territories of the then-Georgian SSR, along the political borders of Soviet Armenia and Azerbaijan, came to be known by the same designation—“Azerbaijanis.” This trend continues to this day, albeit not without contestation.

Interviews with community leaders (see Appendix 1) and analysis of Facebook posts demonstrate a lack of consensus concerning which label/s ought to be applied to the group in question.\(^5\) I have chosen to use the label


\(^5\) The majority of such posts have been posted on the *Gundelik* Facebook page, an Azerbaijani-language page that discusses local issues taking place within Kvemo Kartli as well as issues of national importance in Georgia. At the time of writing, the page boasts a following...
of “Georgian Azeri-Turks” for the time being in an effort to reflect current debates among the socially and politically active members of this community regarding their collective namesake. “Georgian” here represents the legal relationship of the vast majority of the collective in question to the Georgian territorial state by virtue of citizenship and long historical presence on Georgian territories; “Azeri-” reflects the existence of shared socio-cultural characteristics between members of this grouping and the titular people of Azerbaijan and yet distinguishes between them on a spatial and legal basis; “Turk” emphasizes the historical and socio-cultural linkages between members of the collective and the Turkic tribes from which they are believed to have descended (the “Ag Koyunlu,” “Qara Koyunlu,” “Borchalu,” and/or “Qarapapaq/Terekeme” Turks, for example). In short, “Georgian Azeri-Turk” here is meant to serve as middle ground between contested labels and the ideals that they represent.

Despite the decreasing numbers of Georgian Azeri-Turks in official census materials since the late 1980s, the majority of this group’s representatives (some 76%) continue to be concentrated in the region of Kvemo Kartli, where they make up approximately 42% of the region’s overall population of approximately 215,500 individuals. Georgian Azeri-Turks comprise the majority of the population in the districts of Marneuli (over 83% of the population of 104,300), Bolnisi (over 63% of 53,590), and Dmanisi (65.5% of 191,141), and 43.5% of Gardabani’s population of 81,876 individuals. Additionally, sizable communities of Georgian Azeri-Turks are located in the regions of Kakheti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, and Shida Kartli, as well as in the capital city of Tbilisi. At present, Georgian Azeri-Turks are the most numerous minority group in Georgia, at 233,024 individuals, or 6.3% of the country’s overall population of nearly 3.7 million, although this number is contested by community leaders, who place the unofficial number of Georgian Azeri-Turks in the country between 320,000 and 400,000 individuals. Indeed, higher-than-average instances of unregistered births in the Kvemo Kartli region, coupled with

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7 Author’s email communication with Donora Rukhadze of Georgia’s Office of National Statistics (GEOSTAT), January 17, 2017.


9 Civic Integration Foundation’s (CIF’s) Zaur Khalilov estimates the total number of the population to be 320,000, while Alibala Askerov of Geyrat Public Movement (GPM) alleges that the number of Georgian Azeri-Turks is more than 400,000. (AUIs 2016, see Appendix 1)
trends of intermittent economic migration among Georgian-Azeri Turkic males, contribute to difficulties in calculating the population’s exact numbers.  

Theoretical Framework

When we speak about the “national” variant of collective identity, we are really speaking about the myriad inter-related processes occurring at various scales—from the state to the individual—that go into the imagining of the “nation” and facilitate processes of collective recognition as well as distinction.  

When the abstract, imagined concept of the “nation” is combined with the political project of independent statehood, the “nation-state” is made visible, bounded by political boundaries on the map and embodied by checkpoints controlling the flow of “legal” and “illegal” persons to and from the national territory.  

Yet these processes obscure far more than they reveal; as a social agent, the individual may attribute different meanings and values to particular narratives of identity, and homogeneity is by far the exception of societies today—not the rule. Thus, although the state and its constituent organs expend considerable time, effort, and resources to spatially socialize constituents as loyal members of the nation within the territorial state, no amount of legislating, educating, celebrating, or commemorating can produce equal valuation of official narratives by individual members of the body politic.

The landscape—physical, man-made, and socially constituted—has come to be acknowledged by geographers and non-geographers alike as crucial to projects of identity (re)production and negotiation at the levels of the individual and collectivity.  

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that give them meaning—our childhood homes, the streets upon which we used to play, the educational institutions we attended, etc.—act as the backdrops of our lives, shaping who we are as individuals and members of collectivities, and are similarly shaped by us as social actors. Public education, media, national iconography, monuments, street names, and celebrations/commemorations of official dates perform the function of “flagging” the nation and reminding us of our roles within it on an almost daily basis, meaning that official narratives of memory and identity are not confined to the scale of the nation-state alone.

Following the work of Alderman & Inwood (2013), Foote & Azaryahu (2007), Hoelscher & Alderman (2004), Johnson (1995), Mitchell (2003), and Olwig (2005), landscape here refers to the material, socially constructed, symbolic, and contested nature of physical spaces. The landscape is a sensory experience, a physical location, and a symbolic site within and through which collective memories and identities are communicated, legitimated, negotiated and contested at a variety of scales, from that of the state to that of the individual. The landscape plays a crucial role in state and nation-building initiatives and, although elites tend to play a central role in the (re)construction of the symbolic landscape, the landscape is a site wherein official narratives of collective memory and identity are encountered and (re)interpreted at the grassroots level as well.

It is through the articulation and dissemination of national memories/myths and other such “narrations of nationhood” and identity that bounded territories become “homelands” for particular peoples, configurations of brick and mortar become “homes” to individuals and families, and landscapes become intertwined with individual and collective identities. Yet in a world wherein states jealously guard their territories from attempts from within and/or without to divide or coopt said territories, certain groups come to be viewed as more “native” and more deserving of power.


and national resources than others. In this way, geography is intimately and inextricably linked to collective identity and its constituent components; the landscape, both natural and man-made, is both a source and a receptacle of the myths and memories of the nation and its constituent population. As the events presented in this article demonstrate, however, the relationship between “non-titulars” and the landscape is fraught with ambiguity and contestation. The hierarchies of power relations that structure this relationship also facilitate and mediate its surveillance.

As a theoretical concept, landscape is used here to contextualize and unpack the relationship between perceptions of discrimination, marginalization, and identity negotiation. Furthermore, using landscape as frame for analysis affords the opportunity to better understand the ways in which official endeavors peripheralize members of minority groups within their own localities and, further, examine how such peripheralization influences identity negotiation within minority communities. Although works emphasizing the relationship between discrimination and collective identity have proliferated since the 1980s, particularly in the fields of Sociology and Social Psychology, the role played by the physical and symbolic landscape in these processes is rarely, if ever, acknowledged. With regard to the post-Soviet space, significant attention has been paid to the role of monuments and spectacle in nation-building processes, but far less

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attention has thus far been paid to the ways that national narratives and their material manifestations impact members of minority communities.

The Georgian state is not unique in its propensity to select titular majority-centric narratives for material and symbolic manifestation in the public realm, as most of the aforementioned authors demonstrate, nor is Georgia the only state, post-Soviet or otherwise, to engage in such practices in areas where minorities are concentrated. The paucity of available research pertaining to the interplay of majority-minority relations in the built environment and the effect such interplay has on minority identities, however, means that this case study is merely a first foray into little-explored territory. Furthermore, previous research pertaining to Georgian Azeri-Turks has tended to employ a top-down, state-centric approach, typically providing an overview of the chief obstacles to minority integration in the educational, economic, political, and/or social spheres, and/or the policy concerns that touch upon majority-minority relations in Georgia.

In most of these studies, the stories and viewpoints of individual Georgian Azeri-Turks do not play a central role, and little to no attention has thus far been paid to the role of symbolic landscape in processes of identity negotiation among members of this minority group. In addition to offering up landscape as an analytical tool for future studies of identity-related issues with applicability for anthropologists, geographers, political scientists, sociologists, etc., this study contributes to scholarship on national identity and majority-minority relations in Georgia by bringing little-heard minority voices into analyses of the relationship/s between landscapes, perceptions of peripheralization and discrimination, and identity.


Methodological Considerations

Rather than focus specifically upon official endeavors to (re)produce geopolitical and socio-cultural borders at the state level in Georgia, in this study I present the voices of members of a peripheral, “non-titular” group as agents encountering, experiencing, negotiating, and at times contesting the effects of officially propagated collective identity narratives. By examining the encounters and perceptions of the Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli with official endeavors pertaining to material and symbolic landscapes, I seek to highlight how members of this collective respond to official meta-narratives of identity and examine the ways in which these responses inform individuals’ perceptions of their own group identity. Emphasis is placed upon community leaders’ and social media users’ stories and interpretations of key events that are seen as: 1) setting them apart from titular Georgians; and 2) connecting them to members of their “imagined community.”

The primary sources of data include: 1) Interviews with Georgian Azeri-Turk community leaders and social activists (Appendix 1); 2) participant observation; 3) landscape analysis; and 4) social media analysis. Data were obtained over the course of four fieldwork trips between January 2016 and August 2018. Both content and discourse analysis proved to be useful methods for interpreting not only the interviews, but also social media posts. By identifying the most popular Facebook pages for discussions of local and national issues among Georgian Azeri-Turks through my own online networks of friends and acquaintances, I uncovered the most popular sources of local news and discussion platforms (chiefly Gundelik, MarneuliFM, Marneuli City, Marneuli TV, Kvemo Kartli Governor’s Office, and local NGO Facebook pages). Content and discourse analysis of Facebook posts revealed that a number of issues of importance identified by interview participants also resonate with many of the Azerbaijani-speaking followers of these Facebook pages. Additionally, field notes and photographs from 2016-2018 were utilized to interpret data gleaned from participant observation and landscape analysis, particularly with regard to local celebrations and commemorations.

Built Landscapes: Where the Symbolic Meets the Material

A number of recurring themes surfaced during interviews with Georgian Azeri-Turk activists/community leaders and analyses of Facebook posts that demonstrated the contested nature of national identity narratives as they are manifested in the landscapes of Kvemo Kartli. After applying content and discourse analysis to the interview and social media data, it became apparent that these recurrent themes were part of four larger discursive categories related to local landscapes: 1) Physical presence/
residence; 2) Place names; 3) Religious symbolism in the built environment; and 4) Collective utilization. Each of the aforementioned categories represents a field or arena wherein dominant identity narratives are manifested and contested by members of the community in question. Locals’ perceptions of discrimination within each of these fields is central to individual conceptions of Georgian Azeri-Turkic identity. Emphasis here is placed upon interpretations of the constitutive events of these discursive categories as sites of discrimination and identity negotiation.

Physical Presence/Residence

The first category, that of physical presence/residence, refers to a number of locals’ claims alleging that ethnic Georgians forced Bolnisi-based Georgian Azeri-Turks to migrate in the early 1990s. If representatives of the Georgian government acknowledge the forced displacement of Georgian Azeri Turks at all, then it is typically justified by reference to national security (i.e., the ouster of so-called “separatists” from the territory). For example, when queried about allegations that some 800 families were forcibly displaced from their homes during this period, a representative from the Georgian Ministry of Diaspora Affairs responded that, “You are absolutely correct. There were 800 families, but those were families who participated in anti-state activities that were planned by the Russians, in subversive activities. After their plans did not work out, these 800 families had to leave the country.” (AUI 2016) For a number of representatives of the Georgian Azeri-Turkic community, however, the forced displacement of these individuals was an unwarranted tragedy wherein members of the titular majority perpetuated ethnic discrimination and violence against an already disadvantaged minority group. According to Huseyn Yusubov, Chairman of the Congress of Georgian Azerbaijani (henceforth “GAK”),

At this same time [the early 1990s], Azerbaijanis’ rights were being extremely violated. Due to all of the social, political, ethnic, and economic problems in the country, thousands of Azerbaijani families left the country and spread to different countries of the world where various tragedies befell some of them…(AUI 2016)

Similarly, Ali Baba Askar of Geyrat Public Movement (GPM) states that:

From 1991-1994, there was a serious ethnic displacement of Georgian Azerbaijanis… Azerbaijanis had to run away unwillingly…During that period of time, the centers of Bolnisi, Dmanisi, Kazreti and several other
villages were completely emptied. (AUI 2016)

The difficulties of the Gamsakhurdia period and the then-tense relations between local Georgians and Georgian Azeri-Turks constituted a recurring theme in interviews with NGO representatives. This period and the alleged forced displacement of members of the minority group serves as a particularly poignant and enduring node in the memories of many locals, many of whom experienced trauma first-hand or were close to those who endured such trauma during the early 1990s. For example, Leila Suleimanova of the Union of Georgian Azerbaijani Women recalls:

It was a very difficult situation in those years, as the collapse of the USSR led to many destructive conflicts such as Abkhazia, [South] Ossetia, and also difficult societal relations in Kvemo Kartli. Kvemo Kartli consists of six administrative regions, one of which is Bolnisi. There, at that time, the relationship between ethnic groups was very difficult. Very many Azerbaijanis were forced to leave the country. At that moment, the safest place for them to move was Azerbaijan. So they left, including my own relatives. (AUI 2016)

Mayak Nemetov of the “Elder Council” NGO reflects that,

He [Zviad Gamsakhurdia] stepped up to the podium and said that “Georgia is for Georgians”. ... The President says this, and what are we to think? And then very many people left, their lives ruined. A 50-year-old person leaves his homeland...his whole life he’d saved up for and made his home, and then leaves. What should he do? (AUI 2016)

Most often, as is the case with the quotations from the interviews cited above, Georgian Azeri-Turkic individuals old enough to remember the events of the turbulent 1990s give voice to a narrative of victimhood when speaking about the economic, political, and social developments in Georgia over the past 25-30 years. Directly tied to this narrative of victimhood is the rise of ethno-nationalism witnessed by these individuals in the late-Soviet/early independence period and the associated slogan “Georgia for Georgians.” The rather abrupt end to Soviet rule in Georgia facilitated crises in collective memory, identity, and legitimacy at the level of the newly-established state, and these crises were often perceived by local
Georgian Azeri-Turks as direct challenges to their safety as well as to their right to continue living in Georgia as members of a non-titular minority group. As GAK’s Huseyn Yusubov states,

for centuries this place has been the homeland of our grandparents, and we would not leave it for anything. So we had to fight against it [“Georgia for Georgians!” and “Everyone else should leave the country!”], and unfortunately we felt the need to explain to some people that this place was our homeland...that our home was here. (AUI 2016)

With the (re)establishment of independent statehood in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia in 1991 and the territorial disputes over Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh, compactly settled minority groups such as the Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli and the Georgian Armenians in Samtske-Javakheti became a renewed source of suspicion for the Georgian government. Linked to these suspicions are issues pertaining to group affiliation and presumptions of loyalty to the Georgian state versus external states framed as the ancestral homelands of individuals of particular socio-cultural, linguistic, and spiritual backgrounds (i.e., the territorial state of Azerbaijan as the ancestral homeland of all Azerbaijanis). The so-called “national” landscapes of the region, the “ancestral homelands” and their associated political apparatuses, were reformulated to be by and for their titular peoples, and those who did not neatly fit the mold of membership in the titular nation found themselves subject to heightened scrutiny by state and media representatives. In some cases, interview participants alleged, members of minority groups suffered such scrutiny at the hands of private individuals as well, resulting in situations in which individuals felt victimized due to their non-titular status. In this case, the landscape of Kvemo Kartli and its specific villages became a site of identity contestation.

Interviewees allege that, for state officials as well as a number of private individuals, the landscape of Kvemo Kartli took on renewed meaning as an integral part of a threatened Georgian “homeland” best represented and protected by titular Georgians rather than by members of non-titular groups. Many local Georgian Azeri-Turks contested such narratives of ethno-nationalism, however, largely by struggling to remain in Georgia rather than be forced out by the implicit or explicit threat of violence and/or relative deprivation. Accompanying the victimhood narrative stemming from the early 1990s are public assertions of respect

for the Georgians as a nation and loyalty to the state. These assertions are commonly employed by Georgian Azeri-Turks to appear as non-threatening as possible while voicing concerns over preservation of cultural autonomy and calling for greater representation in Georgia’s economic, political, and socio-cultural spheres. In this case, the landscape is a crucial element of the aforementioned socio-cultural sphere. The second discursive category commonly mentioned in interviews and Facebook posts, that of place names, represents another site of identity contestation for Georgian Azeri-Turks.

**Place Names**

In her recent paper concerning changes to the region’s toponyms since 1918, Gordón gives voice to another prominent concern of representatives of the Georgian Azeri-Turkic population—arbitrary changes to historical Turkic village names and the “baptism” of these villages with new Georgian ones.25 Gordón notes that the majority of the village names that have been changed over the past century have been Turkic rather than Armenian, German, or Russian. Along similar lines, a 2011 report published by the Human Rights Group for Ethnic Monitoring (MRMG) contains brief explanations concerning the changes to 38 Turkic village names in the Bolnisi district as well as summaries of locals’ chief concerns. Concerning the arbitrary changes to Georgian Azeri Turk-populated village names, Yusubov of GAK states that,

> The names of all of those settlements had certain explanations. Azerbaijani names had certain explanations, a history, and a certain past. But the Georgian names—for example, the name of a certain village sounds like the word “cucumber” to me, “Muxrani”—they are meaningless names. (AUI 2016)

Both this quotation and the views represented in the 2011 MRMG report suggest that, to a great many locals, place names matter. Despite the public outcry that followed the aforementioned changes to Georgian Azeri-Turk-populated village names in the early post-Soviet period, discussions concerning changes to local place names in Kvemo Kartli have recently resurfaced, this time particularly with regard to the Marneuli municipality. In mid-July 2018, representatives of the Marneuli district government announced upcoming changes to existing “writings, squares, streets,

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monuments, and village names bearing communist ideology.” As Gordón notes in her aforementioned work concerning toponyms in the Kvemo Kartli region, village names in the Marneuli district have largely been exempt from the kinds of changes made in the Bolnisi and Dmanisi districts in the post-Soviet period. This is no doubt due in large part to the sheer concentration of Georgian Azeri-Turks in the Marneuli district (83.4% of the population, compared to 63.3% in Bolnisi and 65.5 and 43.5% in Dmanisi and Gardabani, respectively). The announcement of the upcoming changes to toponymic references to the Soviet era and its personages, though perhaps new to the Marneuli district, is part of a larger trend of “de-Sovietization” of public spaces in Georgia that has been going on since the late 1980s. Although the anticipated changes have largely yet to go into effect in Marneuli, there is reason to suggest that Marneuli’s Neriman Nerimanov Park might be one of the first locations targeted.

Neriman Nerimanov Park is situated in downtown Marneuli, near the offices of the Mayor and City Council. Within the park, a statue of Nerimanov sits adjacent to the Marneuli House of Culture (see Figure 1). The park is a central space within the city; state-sponsored as well as non-state events are regularly held there. When the leadership of a local religious organization, the Supreme Religious Organization of All Georgian Muslims (henceforth SROAGM), wrote to the municipal government informing them of an event to be held in the park celebrating the holy month of Ramadan, a response from the Mayor’s Office uncovered a number of inconsistencies regarding the park’s official name. According to SROAGM’s Seyid Mirtagi Musevi,

We wrote a letter … Our representative took this letter to them, and this was their response: “We do not recognize a park named after Neriman Nerimanov in the municipality of Marneuli. We cannot help you in any way.” … Through this letter, the public found out that the plaque [on the front of the Cultural House] and the monument of Neriman Nerimanov were just a formality, [and that] the park had not actually been named after him. After this, a new wave of objection started within the society. (AUI 2018)

26 Marneuli TV Facebook post, July 11, 2018.
27 Gordón, Nomen est Omen?
28 The de-Sovietization drive intensified with the passing of the “Freedom Charter” under the authorship of the Strong Georgia party and with the support of Saakashvili’s then-ruling party, United National Movement (UNM), in 2011. The Charter forbids the public display of Soviet and/or fascist symbolism and added further impetus to Saakashvili’s campaign to rid Georgia of remnants of its “distasteful” Soviet past.
Georgia’s Azeri-Turks

Figure 1. Statue of Neriman Nerimanov (1870-1925) in Marneuli’s disputed Neriman Nerimanov Park. Near this statue is the Culture House, which, according to two worn plaques (one in Georgian, the other in Azerbaijani), is named in honor of Nerimanov.

Source: Author’s photo, January 2016, Marneuli municipality, Kvemo Kartli

Representatives of the municipal government currently allege that the park known to locals as “Neriman Nerimanov Park” has in fact never existed under that name. Similar disputes are currently taking place with regard to the name of Marneuli’s House of Culture, which locals claim is also named in honor of Nerimanov. Local activists such as Aygul Isayeva assert that the incident concerning Nerimanov Park demonstrates official infringement on local Georgian Azeri-Turks’ rights to cultural autonomy (AUI 2018). For individuals like Isayeva, Nerimanov was much more than a Soviet-era communist; rather, he was a talented Tbilisi-born intellectual, physician, playwright, and writer who, despite his later leadership roles with the Communist Party of the Azerbaijani S.S.R., began his pursuits in
the present-day Georgian Azeri-Turkic village of Kizilhajilo. According to Elvir Hasanoglu, a mathematician and local social activist,

I think that the change of the name of the cultural center named after Neriman Nerimanov has nothing to do with the Soviet Union. If the case was really about the Soviet Union, there are sufficient streets and monuments named after Soviet Union activists in Georgia. If anything is changed, then all those names should be changed as well. However, I am totally against this idea if they are only going to change the name of Neriman Nerimanov. (AUI 2018).

Similarly, Leila Memmedova of the Union of Azerbaijani Youth of Georgia states:

There are many places here that are named after Soviet figures, so why don’t they change those?! … It is an undeniable fact that the Soviet Union damaged all of us. It took our freedom away. However, Neriman Nerimanov was a public figure, he was a teacher here, he was helping people. The people would never forget that. … History cannot be erased, especially in such a secret and contemptible way. … By changing all these names, we do not damage the ethnic minorities, but we do damage our own history. We, the ones who change these names, are trying to show that Azerbaijanis are no one here; however, we do not quite realize that we are destroying our own future. (AUI 2018)

Locals frame changes to Georgian Azeri-Turkic village names and recent attempts to rename Marneuli’s disputed Neriman Nerimanov Park as attempts by state officials to erase or downplay the historical presence of Georgian Azeri-Turks by “Georgianizing” the region’s topography. Locals are highly vocal in asserting the presence of their ancestors upon the territories of contemporary Kvemo Kartli and contest such arbitrary changes to the landscape. Recently, local Georgian Azeri-Turks have taken to laying flowers in front of the Nerimanov statue in Marneuli to appeal to local government officials to take heed of the minority community’s wishes. These appeals are about much more than the name of a park, however; they are about the desire of a segment of the minority community to be seen and heard in a state that prioritizes socio-cultural symbols of the titular majority over those of the minority. Community leaders and
activists allege that similarly discriminatory behavior by local and regional government officials with regard to the built environment is shaped to suit the interests of the titular majority—occasionally at the expense of the local Georgian Azeri-Turks.

**Religious Symbolism in the Built Environment**

In interviews with NGO representatives and in posts on the *Gundelik* Facebook page, members of the Georgian Azeri-Turkic collective repeatedly describe official interventions in changes to the region’s built environment as being detrimental to the group’s identity. Two particular themes surface repeatedly in interviews and social media posts: 1) the arbitrary installation of crosses near primarily Muslim Georgian Azeri-Turkic locales; and 2) the withholding of necessary permissions to construct or repair mosques by state officials. The close relationship between the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) and the state, officially codified by the 2002 concordat acknowledging the “special role” of the GOC in the historical development of the Georgian nation-state, contributes to the alienation of the country’s religious minority groups. Low public support for religious exogamy among members of the Church, the tendency of state officials to “turn a blind eye” to the Church’s proselytizing activities in Adjara, and the Church’s paranoid ambivalence toward the activities of the country’s religious and linguistic minority groups all contribute to the development of an environment wherein one cannot easily be “Georgian” if one is anything but Georgian Orthodox Christian, especially if one is Muslim (AUIs Khalilov 2016 and Musevi 2016, 2018). It is within this context that the symbolism behind the placement of large crosses near Muslim Georgian Azeri-Turkic villages is best understood.

In the early 1990s, as well as more recently (in 2008 and 2009), regional authorities engaged in the practice of installing crosses outside minority-populated villages, primarily in the Bolnisi district (see Figure 2). This practice baffles and irritates local village residents in equal measure, and, in locales where villagers have already been subjected to arbitrary toponymic changes, the installation of such crosses outside their places of residence adds insult to injury. According to Sabina Talibova of Mtredi,

> They have placed a cross at the entrance of every Azerbaijani village [in Bolnisi]. At the entrance and even within the village, even though only Muslims live there. I don’t even have to go very far into the area in

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which I live—they have placed a cross on the top of the five-story building, too, even though it is mostly Muslims who live beneath that roof. … As a nation, we are loyal. It is not the cross itself that irritates me—it is the fact that they have done it on purpose. I mean, that is some kind of message. (AUI 2016)

Emin Yadigarov, a social activist and an intern at the National Democratic Institute’s Tbilisi office, and Musevi of SROAGM both recently sought to uncover the reasons behind the placement of these crosses, as well as the specific actors involved. In the end, however, regional government officials appeared to know very little about these crosses—how many were erected, near which specific villages, and under whose direction. Moreover, officials showed little interest in local villagers’ concerns regarding these crosses (AUIs 2018). Zaur Khalilov of Civic Integration Foundation queries:

If I live in a village where 100% of the population is ethnic Azerbaijani and Muslim, then why should there be a problem constructing new mosques? And why should priests come and, let’s say, go to my village and place crosses…to remind me that I am living on the territory of a Christian state?! (AUI 2016)

Figure 2. Cross and Georgian language sign at the entrance to Marneuli. The sign reads “Georgia is first above all.” Local Georgian Azeri-Turks lament the installation of crosses like these at the entrances of many minority villages in the Kvemo Kartli region, particularly in the Bolnisi district.
Khalilov makes an important connection here between the erection of crosses outside Georgian Azeri-Turkic villages and another prominent issue cited by members of this community—difficulties faced in constructing mosques and other religious sites.

Speaking from an office within the Imam Ali Mosque in Marneuli, SROAGM’s Musevi explains that,

In reality, you cannot build a mosque or madrasa—you have to say that you are building something else when constructing madrasas or mosques. …one has to say that one is building him/herself a house, or the house of the aksakallar [village elders]. In the second month of this year [February 2016], I myself wrote a letter to the Ministry of Education stating my desire to build and open a religious school, college, or university in an official manner, in accordance with all the laws, asking them if I was allowed to do so. Their response was like this: “In this country, no one other than the Patriarch can do that.” (AUI 2018)

Although the state-sponsored body, the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia, listed 312 mosques as officially operating in Georgia as of 2016,31 ascertaining the true number of mosques operating in Kvemo Kartli—officially or unofficially—is much more complicated. This is due to the difficulties detailed by Musevi in obtaining official permissions to construct mosques and sites of religious instruction. A list compiled in 2011 by MRMG demonstrates that the vast majority of the 79 mosques listed—most of which are based in villages of Kvemo Kartli—are not officially recognized by the state. Many of the aforementioned mosques are registered instead as private houses.32 The official rights and protections typically afforded state-recognized places of worship and religious instruction—including the legal right to function, as well as to claim recompense for damages incurred during the Soviet period33—are enjoyed neither by the worshipers at these unofficial locations in Kvemo Kartli, nor by their leaders. This means that when occasional conflicts occur between Orthodox Christian Georgians and Muslim Georgian Azeri-Turks concerning the functioning of these informal religious sites, local Muslims have little legal recourse to defend their right to worship collectively at these locations.

SROAGM’s Musevi argues that it has become increasingly difficult to obtain permission to construct places of worship and religious instruction since the state-sponsored creation of the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia in 2011, which is based in Batumi and consists of both Sunni and Shia Muslims. For Musevi (SROAGM), Khalilov (CIF), and Askerov (GPM), the organization’s reputation is poor among local religious leaders and worshipers alike, due in large part to the heavy role played by the Georgian state in its founding. Furthermore, the above individuals lament the ways in which actual religious leaders and community representatives were alienated from discussions concerning the organization’s creation and subsequent operation (AUIs 2016, 2018). According to Musevi, control of Muslim religious properties passed from the Georgian Ministry of the Economy to the Batumi-based leadership of the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia shortly following the organization’s creation. This, he says, has created a situation in which lands, permissions, and official recognition are granted only to those religious leaders who are in favor of this organization and agree to bring their sites and operations under its umbrella.

Rather than join the Administration, which would likely have given Marneuli’s Imam Ali Mosque official status, local religious and community leaders created the Supreme Religious Organization of All Georgia’s Muslims in 2013 to counter the authorities of the state-sponsored Administration of Muslims of All Georgia. To this day, Imam Ali Mosque, with a history that dates back to the mid-18th century, lacks the official status of a mosque. Despite lacking this status, it is an important bastion of spiritual identity for Marneuli’s predominantly Shia Muslim Georgian Azeri-Turks. Despite the organization’s efforts to demonstrate goodwill to the non-Muslim representatives of the municipality, the leaders of the mosque and the SROAGM were recently discouraged from publicly celebrating the commencement of the holy month of Ramadan. Nevertheless, Ramadan was celebrated in the disputed Neriman Nerimanov Park on June 15, 2018.

The cases presented in this section—the arbitrary installation of crosses and difficulties in constructing places of worship in locales populated by Georgian Azeri-Turks—demonstrate a central theme in analyses of material and symbolic landscapes: the role of contextually bound power relations in determining who is able to make changes to the landscape as well as whose narrative interpretations are to be represented therein. As the “ancestral homeland” of the Georgian people, the culture, religion, and language of the titular majority are prominent in the political and public spheres of the country and are seen to bolster the legitimacy of the sovereign Georgian territorial state. By placing crosses near Georgian Azeri-Turkic villages and limiting the number of mosques officially operating in the region, state authorities exercise control over which symbolic narratives
are embedded in the landscape. Whereas my field notes and analysis of region’s landscapes revealed that Georgian Orthodox Christian symbols were prominent even in locales predominately populated by members of religious minority groups, the construction of mosques for members of the community is clearly not as palatable to local governing authorities. The crosses symbolize the central role of the Georgian Orthodox Church in Georgian society and politics and do indeed remind local Muslims and others of this fact. Locals do not dare attempt to remove the crosses themselves, lest they incur the ire of state authorities or the Georgian public. The tendency of locals and community leaders is to emphasize their tolerance of Georgians and their religion, but to question the symbolism behind such arbitrary interventions into their local landscapes. Musevi of SROAGM states that,

The cross itself is really beautiful, but in Christian villages, not in Muslim ones. … The Church has no intention of bringing our people closer; the Church has united the Georgian people, and there is no room for us there. (AUI 2016)

By promoting Christian symbols and limiting the presence of Muslim ones, whether in the form of religious celebrations (such as Ramadan) or mosques, the Church and state are sending a message to local Muslims: that as Muslims, they and their religion do not belong in Georgia in quite the same way as do ethnic Georgians and Georgian Orthodox Christianity.

Collective Utilization

Not only have the local government authorities in Marneuli attempted to change the name of a site of importance to the local Georgian Azeri-Turkic community (namely Neriman Nerimanov Park), but local officials have also, on occasion, discouraged members of this group from collectively utilizing public spaces, as evidenced by events concerning the Ramadan celebration. Although Ramadan was indeed celebrated despite discouragement from local officials, the Georgian government—both at the central, regional, and local levels—has successfully intervened in local Georgian Azeri-Turks’ celebrations of other holidays, particularly the Elat festival. Elat, also known as “El Bayrami,” is a holiday for the people (the “el”) in celebration of locals’ Turkic roots. It is a celebration of dying historical nomadic traditions, the cyclical nature of the seasons, and the bearing of these seasons upon grazing patterns. It is a time to gather in the mountains, have picnics with family and friends, race and ride horses, and sing and dance. Over the past few years, however, the Georgian
government has taken to exercising greater control over the celebration of Elat by creating several smaller official celebrations with Georgian names (Elat becomes “Dmanisoba” in Dmanisi and “Sadakhloba” in Sadakhlo, for example). According to Alibala Askerv (GPM): “Dmanisoba has nothing in common with Elat. Therefore, we condemn this act of the government, as there was nothing political there [in previous celebrations of Elat], and nothing against the government.” (AUI 2018)

“Dmanisoba” was held in the mountains of the Dmanisi municipality on July 26, 2018, and although a large number of Georgians as well as Georgian Azeri-Turks were in attendance, field notes and participant observation pointed to an interesting phenomenon. Whether through conscious decision-making or by more organic means, Georgians tended to be concentrated around the stage area, whereas Georgian Azeri-Turks set up their tables and bonfires separately, past the celebration’s roped-off area. A number of booths displaying traditional Georgian cuisine, art forms, and national costumes, as well as local produce and wines—all complete with Georgian-language signage—presented Dmanisoba as a celebration of Georgian culture rather than that of the Georgian Azeri-Turks (see Figures 3 and 4). Meanwhile, local Georgian Azeri-Turks gathered with their horses and raced along a pasture behind the stage and exhibition areas, occasionally brazenly leading their horses into the crowded areas of the main celebration (see Figure 5). Despite token speeches of local and regional politicians touting famous Georgian multiculturalism and inter-ethnic friendship or the performance of one or two Azeri/Azerbaijani songs/dances, it was clear that Dmanisoba was not a holiday chiefly by or for the local Georgian Azeri-Turkic population. “Sarvanoba” (also known as “Dagoba”), however, celebrated on August 1, 2018 in the mountains of the Tsalka municipality, was attended almost exclusively by Georgian Azeri-Turks.

The mountains of the Tsalka district have become a popular location for members of the group to gather in celebration of Elat. The event itself was much more organic in its organization than was Dmanisoba, with information mostly circulated by word of mouth prior to the event. Sarvanoba 2018 was a memorable event of local song, dance, food, friendship, and sport (horseracing). The presence of a handful of politicians did little to spoil the mood of the local people, who were too busy feasting, toasting, and enjoying the fine weather to lament the officials’ presence. Field notes from the event highlight the collective delight and excitement of the crowd, which built up in anticipation of the horse race, when young men raced their horses up the mountain in hopes of being the first to retrieve the Georgian flag. The victor raced back down the mountain to the cheers and applause of the waiting crowd (see Figures 6-8). A survey
Figure 3. The booth of the Marneuli district at the Dmanisoba celebration in the mountains near the lake known locally as “Armudlu gölü” (“Pear Lake”). The booth features staples of Georgian cuisine (including wine, khachapuri, cheeses, lobio, etc.), national costumes, and local produce. On the right hand side of the photo, traditional Georgian art forms are on display (tapestries made from felt and featuring traditional designs). The Georgian-language banner reads, “Marneuli—the cradle of wine.”

Source: Author’s photo, July 26, 2018, Dmanisi district, Kvemo Kartli

Figure 4. The main stage, reading Dmanisoba in Georgian

Source: Author’s photo, July 26, 2018, Dmanisi district, Kvemo Kartli
Figure 5. Georgian Azeri-Turk males gathering their horses outside of Dmanisoba’s main area of celebration

Source: Author’s photo, July 26, 2018, Dmanisi district, Kvemo Kartli

Figure 6. Young boys waiting for the traditional horserace to begin at Sarvanoba 2018

Source: Author’s photo, August 2, 2018, Tsalka district, Kvemo Kartli
Figure 7. Cemetery in the mountains near the location of the Sarvanoba celebration. The stones feature Arabic text, suggesting that they predate the advent of Soviet rule in Georgia.

Source: Author’s photo, August 2, 2018, Tsalka municipality, Kvemo Kartli

Figure 8. The victor of the horserace at Sarvanoba 2018. This gentleman was the first to retrieve the Georgian flag and race back down the mountain to greet the crowd.

Source: Photo taken by Griffith Ridgeway, August 2, 2018, Tsalka municipality, Kvemo Kartli. Reproduced with permission.
of the surrounding landscape noted additional Georgian flags dotting the horizon, erected either privately atop a family’s tent or collectively by several individuals on one side of the mountain. At one point, the latter individuals, deciding that the previous flag was too small, replaced it with a much larger Georgian flag and then proceeded to pose by the new, larger flag for pictures.

*Sarvanoba* combines elements of a spatial, Georgian place-based identity (i.e., “gurcustanli” identity) with those of a “pan-Turkic” identity in a manner that celebrates both in equal measure. Although the Georgian government has attempted to coopt and control *Elat* through the creation of several smaller “oba” holidays, representatives of the Georgian Azeri-Turkic community continue to encourage locals to celebrate in their own traditional ways (see Figure 9). These same representatives (GPM’s Askerov, Mtredi’s Talibova, and GAK’s Yusubov) frown upon the state’s efforts to control and coopt the traditions of the local people in such a manner, and while they are fearful of what such cooptation and control might mean for the future of these traditions, they are hopeful that locals will not let their traditions die (AUIs 2018). Beyond exercising control over minority utilization of local landscapes for socio-cultural and/or religious celebrations, state authorities exercise control over the ways in which Kvemo Kartli’s landscapes are utilized for marketing purposes.

In July 2018, the Governor’s Office released a promotional video with the aim of increasing tourism to Kvemo Kartli. The approximately one-and-a-half-minute video was comprised of drone footage taken throughout the region, featuring at least ten shots imbued with Georgian Orthodox Christian symbolism in addition to others featuring Georgian national costumes and winemaking culture. Nowhere in the video, however, was there reference to the fact that this region is and has long been home to Georgian Azeri-Turks as well as other minority groups, including Armenians, Greeks, and Russians. This egregious omission of representatives of minority groups, their customs, and their traditions was keenly felt by Georgian Azeri-Turkic community leaders and, judging by locals’ response to the video on various Facebook pages, by laypeople as well.

The nearly two hundred comments and responses to the video posted on the Facebook page of the Governor’s Office at the time of writing reflect questions concerning what it means to *belong* in Georgia (see Figure 10). At one point during the dialogue, an Azerbaijani-speaking Facebook user requested that one of the participants sum up the gist of the largely

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34 Zelimkhan Memmedli of Baku-based “Borchali Society” (*Borchali Cemiyeti*) was actively involved in organizing Elat celebrations from 2009 to 2014. Along with a few other individuals in the Society’s leadership, Memmedli has since been banned from entering Georgia, allegedly for posing a threat to Georgian national security.
Figure 9. Although the main organizers of previous Elat events are no longer able to enter Georgia, a banner produced by their Baku-based organization, Borchali Ictimai Cemiyyeti (Borchali Society), was still visible at the Dmanisoba event of 2018. Members of the organization gathered around a large table beyond the official area roped off for the event and had their own celebration. The sign features the Georgian motto, “Strength in Unity,” in both Georgian and Azerbaijani languages.

Source: Author’s photo, July 26, 2018, Dmanisi district, Kvemo Kartli

Georgian-language conversation so that non-Georgian speakers could understand. The latter succinctly replied:

In short, it was that the region of Kvemo Kartli is comprised by nearly 50% ethnic Azerbaijanis, [which is] nearly one million people of the country’s population.\textsuperscript{35} For whatever reason, we cannot see ourselves in this video material. As was stated in the comments, we are blamed for the fact that ethnic Georgians living in the

\textsuperscript{35} The 2014 Census places Kvemo Kartli’s population at 423,986 individuals (approx. 42% of the population is classified as “Azerbaijani,” 51% “Georgian,” 5% “Armenian,” 6% “Russian,” etc.).
Azerbaijani state are discriminated against and only when all of their problems are eliminated can we come here and give voice to our “pretenses” [i.e., concerns]. I noted that we are not responsible for the similar circumstances that occur in neighboring countries—whether Turkey or Azerbaijan. We are fully-fledged citizens of this country. We respect all of the nations, cultures, and cultural monuments of this country, and if there is going to be talk about tolerance and integration, then you should also allow us to see the same things [problems] that you do [regarding Georgians in Azerbaijan].

Following widespread criticism of the government-sponsored video among local Georgian Azeri-Turks on Facebook, SROAGM produced and disseminated its own promotional video of the region. This version combined much of the original footage with depictions of local mosques and religious celebrations. Also included were the traditional costumes, instruments, cuisines, handicrafts, and socio-cultural festivals of Georgians as well as Georgian Azeri-Turks. Although considerably less polished than the original, the new clip received a positive response from Azerbaijani-speaking Facebook users immediately following its dissemination (see Figure 11). In the words of SROAGM’s Musevi,

We described our culture and monuments while keeping the video’s original music. We just removed the part with wine and the cross that appeared at the beginning of the video and presented it to the public. The public was really positive toward the video that we made… The reality of Kvemo Kartli is shown in our video, not theirs. They [representatives of the regional government] totally ignore us and do not consider us to be human beings. Through this video, we showed them that we exist! (AUI 2018)

A number of Georgian-speaking Facebook users responded negatively to the alternative video, however, with one such individual making repeated reference to it on the Facebook page of the Governor’s Office, posting: “This is Kvemo Kartli, not Upper Azerbaijan. Imagine beginning an advertisement of Rome with a local mosque instead of the Vatican.”

The Governor’s Office, for its part, responded to non-titular individuals’ concerns by stating that the video was made from the materials available,

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36 Posted publicly July 8, 2018.
37 Posted publicly August 1, 2018.
implying that officials had no access to resources showing the cultures and traditions of the region’s other inhabitants. Furthermore, the Office assured the dissatisfied portion of the public that efforts would be made in the future to produce a video more representative of the region’s diversity.
The cooptation of the Elat celebration by local authorities, coupled with the regional government’s decision to release a video promoting selective elements of Kvemo Kartli’s demographic and socio-cultural makeup, demonstrate the governing authorities’ tendency to control the ways the landscape is utilized for symbolic and/or material (i.e., economic) purposes. In order to make Elat more palatable to state authorities, over the past few years officials have promoted smaller celebrations confined to particular villages and christened with Georgian names. The virtual erasure of Kvemo Kartli’s minority populations from the official promotional video evinces the ways in which one culture’s symbols (i.e., those of the titular majority) are selectively employed in marketing the landscape for domestic as well as external, touristic consumption. The threads pertaining to the aforementioned promotional video revealed push-back against Georgian Azeri-Turks for finding fault with the video in the first place, with the attitude of “We Georgians are tolerant, we let you live and practice your religion/culture here, so you have no right to complain” predominant among Georgian-speaking commentators. As the Azerbaijani-speaking individual stated in his summary of the proceedings, Georgian Azeri-Turks are often asked to answer for the wrongdoings of neighboring states (i.e., Azerbaijan and Turkey) against Georgians, as if the misdeeds of one state were to justify those of another. As the Azerbaijani-speaking commentator pointed out, Georgian Azeri-Turks are Georgian citizens, not Azerbaijani or Turkish citizens.38 Despite their long-term historical roots in Georgian territories and/or Georgian citizenship, however, there is a tendency on the part of Georgian state authorities to treat Georgian Azeri-Turks as Azerbaijanis, or as belonging more in their so-called “ancestral homeland” in Azerbaijan rather than in Georgia. This tendency is reflected in the responses to the promotional video posted on the Georgian-language Facebook page.

Discussion: Labels, Landscapes, and Identity

In his post on the Facebook page of the Governor’s Office, social activist Elmeddin Memmedov asked Georgian-speaking commenters: “I see you in this video, [but] do you see me?”39 Similarly, frustrated by local officials’ silence following the video’s release, GPM’s Askerov asked them, “Do we exist or not? If we don’t, then who are you? Who are you representing?” (AUI 2018) These questions—along with the desire of SROAGM’s leadership to show the Georgian government that “we exist!”—represent a collective plea by Georgian Azeri-Turks to the Georgian government and titular society: to accept that Georgian Azeri-Turks belong in Georgia,

38 Neither Georgia nor Azerbaijan presently allow for dual citizenship, although Turkey allows multiple citizenship.
too. To truly consider Georgian Azeri-Turks as belonging in Georgia, the symbolic parameters of membership in the Georgian “nation”40 would need to widen, facilitating widespread acceptance among politicians and laypeople alike that Georgia is the rightful homeland of other socio-cultural groups as well as “ethnic” Georgians.

When all the Tbilisi-based rhetoric of tolerance, multiculturalism, and integration is stripped away, what remains is an as-yet conservative society with deep attachments to Orthodox Christianity and the desire to maintain its unique cultural traditions in the face of globalizing modernization.41 The existence of a territorial state by the name of Azerbaijan next door complicates matters with regard to Georgia’s largest minority group, the Georgian Azeri-Turks, in that members of this group are officially and popularly recognized as “Azerbaijanis,” or as belonging historically to Azerbaijan rather than to Georgia. The diaspora politics of the contemporary Azerbaijani government perpetuate this situation of (dis)association, as has been the status quo for some 80 years. Today, when Georgian Azeri-Turks express the desire to truly belong in Georgia rather than in Azerbaijan, they find that, although they are citizens of only one state (Georgia), Georgian official meta-narratives of national identity resist their efforts. This article has been my attempt to scratch the surface of this resistance by highlighting the roles that landscapes play in the creation, legitimation, and/or contestation of collective identity for Georgian Azeri-Turks.

At the state’s disposal are various methods aiding in the spatial socialization of members of a group as loyal members of the “imagined national community,” yet members of particular groupings are bound to have different experiences of these processes than members of the titular majority. In societies such as Georgia, where the notion of ethnicity is an enduring aspect of national identity, spatial socialization can, on occasion, take the shape of peripheralization—at times, being different results in perceptions of differential or discriminatory treatment of “non-titulars” by “titulars” and/or officials in power. Interviews with community leaders, participant observation, and landscape and social media analysis demonstrate that perceptions of peripheralization and discrimination resulting from state-sanctioned control over landscapes are important sites of identity contestation for Georgian Azeri-Turks. These sites unite affected members of the community under the umbrella of perceived deprivation while differentiating members of this marginalized community from the

40 Storm, “Unpacking the Georgian Nation.”
titular population, whose language, religion, and culture are actively promoted by the state.

Perceptions of peripheralization and discrimination (and the negative emotions that they generate) can produce different outcomes—including anger, resentment, contempt, avoidance, retaliation, etc.—and can solidify perceived boundaries between groups. These negative emotions also produce further obstacles to potential positive identity shifts, including to the availability and ordering of material and normative costs/benefits involved in the process. These obstacles can prove to be significant bulwarks to larger projects seeking to decrease the socio-cultural and political-economic distance between groups (including, for example, initiatives in the realms of acculturation, integration, and assimilation) for purposes of inter-group cooperation, understanding, and/or reconciliation. That said, negative emotions resulting from perceptions of alienation and/or discrimination can and certainly do affect both psychological and sociological processes of collective identification. With regard to the Georgian Azeri-Turks, institutional (Georgian and Azerbaijani political projects), material, and normative in-group constraints inhibit group strategies toward the alleviation of the sources of perceived peripheralization and discrimination. Given the underrepresentation of Georgian Azeri-Turks in state bodies at the national, regional, and even municipal levels, the particularly biased and contentious nature of the electoral system (where power and influence are disproportionately held and exercised by majoritarian sycophants), limited access to information, and the imbalance in Georgian-Azerbaijani relations (due in part to Georgian reliance on Azerbaijani investments), Georgian Azeri-Turks currently have limited recourse to alleviate the
concerns detailed in this article. Expressions of victimization and unfair treatment at the local, regional, and/or national level/s all too often fall upon deaf ears or are relegated to the sphere of political discourse and unfulfilled promises.

By continuing to categorize Georgian Azeri-Turks as “ethnic Azerbaijanis” living in the historic homeland of “ethnic Georgians,” exclusive narratives of national identity maintain their legitimacy and salience. Territories of the “homeland” become imbued with socially- and politically-constructed narratives of collective identity at the behest of those in power. For those with neither political power nor claims to “correct” identity attributes, however, opportunities to shape (and be shaped by) material and symbolic landscapes are subject to heightened control and surveillance by state authorities. Questions like “Who are we?” and “Where are we?” become prisms through which state-sanctioned identity narratives are encountered, perceived, and contested by members of marginalized groups such as the Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli.

As has been demonstrated in this study, this contestation/negotiation takes a variety of forms, ranging from complaints to local authorities, family members, and/or friends to community-wide calls for solidarity in the face of perceived discrimination. By laying flowers in front of the Nerimanov monument, worshiping in “elders’ houses” rather than in official mosques, refusing to take part in particular celebrations in favor of other, more “authentic” gatherings, and/or by creating alternate representations of the Kvemo Kartli region’s peoples and landscapes, local Georgian Azeri-Turks contest dominant identity narratives while simultaneously reaffirming their own distinctiveness. Narratives of Georgian Azeri-Turkic identity are formed in no small part in juxtaposition to the officially propagated Georgian narratives that are, at times, exclusionary in character.

There is a palpable desire among local Georgian Azeri-Turks to be seen by wider Georgian society and state leaders as belonging in Georgia as legitimate, valued, loyal, and fully-fledged citizens. Yet equally as palpable as this desire to belong is the desire to see themselves and be seen by others as members of a unique socio-cultural group with its own unique norms and traditions. The landscape is both an avenue and arena in and through which this identity is exercised and contested, whether through sheer presence/residence; appeals to construct, protect, or remove particular monumental structures; or festive gatherings.

In a region that is home to three unresolved territorial disputes, two of which directly concern Georgia, there is a marked tendency to guard territory—its symbolic and material attributes in addition to the authority to determine the content and form of said attributes—jealously. Issues of national identity, (b)ordering/othering, and belonging exist at the heart of official and popular ambivalence to Georgia’s non-titular minority groups.
Are Georgians—politicians as well as laypeople—willing to move beyond political rhetoric of inclusivity and tolerance to concrete actions evincing these values? The country has been grappling with this question since independence and, unfortunately, the answer remains unclear at present. If the answer to this question is ever to be in the affirmative, then greater efforts by officials to include local Georgian Azeri-Turks in discussions related to the symbolic and material landscapes of Kvemo Kartli will be an important step in this direction.

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Appendix 1. Interviews Referenced in the Text


A considerable degree of ‘in-between-ness’ exists among the Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli regarding collective affiliations and positionalities. This state of liminality is both a byproduct of and contributor to symbolic and material bordering processes at multiple scales. This dissertation examines how officially sanctioned forms of national identity are propagated by state actors and how these identities are encountered, contested, and negotiated by individuals at the grassroots level.

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THE DYNAMICS OF IDENTITY NEGOTIATION IN A BORDER REGION: The case of the Georgian Azeri-Turks of Kvemo Kartli