



Concha Maria Höfler

Boundaries and Belonging in the Greek Community of Georgia



Nomos

Border Studies.
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Volume 2

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To my parents, Johanna and Felix Höfler

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Transcription conventions

The transcription is based on the *Gesprächsanalytische Transkriptionssystem* GAT 2 nach Selting et al. (2009).

°h / h°	in-/exhalation
(-)	short estimated break of about 0.2-0.5 second
(-)	medium estimated break of about 0.5-0.8 second
(—)	longer estimated break of about 0.8-1 second
(1.3)	longer measured break
[]	simultaneous articulation of two or more speakers
because_ah	slurring
bec_	abrupt cut-off
((laughs))	para- and non-verbal activities
<<smiling> >	smiling utterance with range
(x), (xx)	one/two unintelligible syllables
((unintelligible 1.2))	unintelligible sequence with duration
(and)	unclear or probable item
(they/they're)	probable alternatives
: :: :::	lengthening, duration analogue to breaks
akZENT	focus accent

Chapter 1: Introduction

I first heard about the Greek community in Georgia in a casual conversation with Stavros Skopeteas in early 2010. As he talked about his most recent research project over coffee, my fascination grew. The community's ancestors had come to Georgia from present-day Anatolia during Ottoman times. They (self-)identified as Greek, but spoke little or no Standard Modern Greek (SMG). Instead they spoke a Turkish or Greek variety as heritage language, and otherwise communicated in Russian and some Georgian. At that point, I had only begun to explore how social categories are established in interaction, the use of language in national(izing)¹ projects and the production of putatively unitary belongings. With its unique mix of languages and complex points of potential identification, I was captivated by this community.

That fall, having secured funding to actually go to Georgia to find out more, I first met Violeta Moisidi in Berlin. A self-identifying Greek living in Georgia, she had taken on the task of being the first to put her heritage variety into writing for the *Urum Documentation Project* (Skopeteas et al., 2011a). When I tried to ask her all the potential interview questions I had thought up, she smilingly softened my zeal: “you want too much from the Urum language”. Still, and very luckily for me, she and her family hosted me in Tbilisi in 2010 and 2013 and treated me like a (slightly eccentric) family member. Violeta patiently answered my myriad questions (not all of which made much sense to her) introduced me to potential consultants, translated during the interviews in 2010 when my Russian was still very shaky, and took me to meet her friends. In short, she was a consultant, interpreter, gatekeeper, and friend all in one. My learning and research trip to Tbilisi in 2010 resulted in an MA thesis (Höfler, 2011) that might be considered a pilot to the present study. This book, then, tells the story of my ongoing fascination with the Greek community in Georgia.

In this Chapter, I will first introduce the Greek community of Georgia in Section A., briefly summarize the current state of research in Section B.,

1 I borrow this term from Brubaker (1996) who uses it to describe nation state-building projects in the post-Soviet sphere as facing the task of not only establishing institutions but also imagining the nation.

elaborate my research questions in Section C., and finally outline the structure of this book in Section D..

A. *Introducing the Greek community of Georgia: A note on naming*

The Greek community of Georgia today looks back on a history of diverse migrations, which I will explore in more detail in Chapter 2. In this Section, I will focus on how to speak about this community and its individual members for the purpose of a scholarly text exploring the construction of identification and belonging in conversational interactions.

Eleni Sideri (2006, p. 26) lists a great number of labels for the community: “‘Pontic-Greeks’, ‘Pontians’, ‘Greeks of the Black Sea’, ‘the last of the Byzantines’, ‘Greeks of the Soviet Union’, ‘Rössopontii’, ‘Ellēnopontii’, ‘Rōmii’, ‘Urumebi’, ‘Tsalkalēdes’, ‘Greki’, ‘Pontiyski-Greki’, ‘Greek-Georgians’, ‘refugees’, ‘migrants’, ‘diaspora’, ‘deportees’, ‘repatriates’...” She rightly points out that while these labels are used in different languages, varieties and registers to refer to the same “group” of people, they “hide different histories, represent specific status and power relations, provoke differing feelings and memories” (Sideri, 2006, p. 26). While Sideri aims to uncover the histories behind these labels, I will explore how the ones used in my interview corpus are established, contested, filled with ascriptions, and evaluated – all in order to communicate identification and belonging and thereby to make and unmake boundaries. These labels do not merely “tell a story”, i.e. reference the temporal dimension of the people thus categorized, they also reference spaces and social constellations. One of the theoretical aims of this book is to uncover the interplay of these dimensions through a uniquely instructive case study.

To my consultants, the most casual reference to their community, the one they perceive to be the most correct, and the one they will establish and struggle for throughout our interview conversations, is *greki* ‘Greeks’ in Russian and *berdznebi* ‘Greeks’ in Georgian.² As a researcher keen to recognize and respect my consultants self-identification, why look any further? This is where the distribution of heritage varieties in the community comes in: there are those who speak a Greek variety known to linguists as *Pontic Greek* and

2 The transliteration of Russian follows the BGN/PCGN standard (National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, 1949/2017), that of Georgian the *Georgian national system of romanization*.

those who speak the Turkish variety labelled (*Caucasian*) *Urum*.³ Notably, *Pontic* refers to the southern coast of the Black Sea and thereby to the community's geographical location previous to migrating to Georgia. *Urum* refers via *rum* 'Rome' to the Byzantine Empire, as well as the Ottoman category system placing all Orthodox Christians in the *millet-i-um* in contrast to other religiously defined groups in the *millet* system, which was only much later translated into the concept of "nations" (Fortna, 2013). For our purposes, the label *Urum* importantly categorizes this Turkish variety as "Orthodox Christian" and thus (later) "Greek", tracing the religious affiliation of its speakers from Byzantium until the present day.⁴

Pontic and *Urum* are mutually unintelligible and their speakers today live in different areas of Georgia following the massive Greek emigration from the country. Having been intrigued from the start by how these languages might be made (ir)relevant for identification and whether they might be used to create differences, I chose to label consultants according to their heritage variety at least in some contexts. I am acutely aware that the terms *Pontic Greeks* and *Urum Greeks* do not, in many cases, match the label consultants would have chosen for themselves⁵ and I therefore use the label (*Georgian*) *Greeks* in as many contexts as possible. Quite frequently, however, the topic of the analysis is precisely the comparison of views expressed by speakers of the two heritage varieties and in these instances I will refer to them by their heritage variety.

Moving on to matters of typographic representations of the categories and quotes encountered in this book, I first of all follow the linguistic convention of citing sequences in languages other than English in *italics*.⁶ Depending on the necessity of their being understood literally, they are followed by their semantic equivalent in single quotation marks and then by an idiomatic

3 See the entries for the ISO 639-3 codes *pnt* (Pontic) and *uum* (Urum) in Eberhard et al. (2019).

4 Note that some historians write of *Ottoman Rums* rather than *Ottoman Greeks* (Fortna, 2013, p. 6), thereby underscoring that equating Orthodox Christianity with the national affiliation "Greek" is a link established only by the advent of the nation state. In order not to complicate the complex historical picture beyond the scope of this book, I will refer to Orthodox Christians living in Asia Minor during Ottoman times as Ottoman Greeks.

5 This is more pronounced in the case of consultants who speak *Urum* as heritage variety, as will become apparent in Chapter 5, especially in excerpt 5. Thanks are also due to Dionysios Zoumpalidis for our discussions on this topic.

6 Key terms are also introduced in italics at first mention, and I use italics – sparingly – for emphasis.

translation into English in double quotation marks or simply by the latter. Quotes from, and categories brought up in, the excerpts discussed are given in double quotation marks. Categories emerging as relevant for the analysis and methodical devices established and used frequently by consultants are set in SMALL CAPS throughout the analysis. Note that especially in the chapters leading up to the analysis, I will refer to spaces, countries and national affiliations without constantly typographically highlighting their constructedness. This, as well as my choice to avoid marking the labels Pontic, Urum, and Georgian Greek unless they are established in the analyzed excerpts, is a concession to readability rather than a claim that these categories are in any way less constructed than the others.

A final note on naming concerns the label given to the individuals who agreed to the recording of our conversations, and whom I extensively quote in this book. I mostly refer to them as *consultants* instead of *informants* – a term commonly employed in linguistics but carrying unpleasant connotations, especially in the post-Soviet space. I also find the term *interviewees* lacking, as it conveys too little of what these individuals actually do: they are not merely taking part in an interview, they are consulting us on the relevancies of their lifeworlds.⁷

B. Research on Georgia's Greek community

To date, very little scholarship has been dedicated to the Greek community in Georgia, most of whose members have emigrated to Greece since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Numbering around 100,000 in 1989 (Geostat, 2013), only 5,500 were counted in the latest census carried out in 2014 (Geostat, 2016). Almost no other numbers are available regarding the community – apart, perhaps, from the estimation in 2011 by the president of the *Federation of Greek Communities of Georgia*, Foti Chitlov, that roughly 80% of the remaining Greek population in Georgia still speak or used to speak Urum as heritage variety.

There are some anthropological accounts, especially on the Urum Greeks living in the Ts'alk'a district of Kvemo Kartli (Jalabadze, 2011; Melikishvili / Jalabadze, 2016; Pashaeva, 1992) and a number of anthologies listing members of Georgia's Greek community collected by community mem-

7 Many thanks to Samantha Litty for our discussions on how to appropriately name people I would refer to as *Gewährspersonen* in German.

bers (Chitlov et al., 1992, 1995). Eleni Sideri has contributed a number of anthropological accounts carefully exploring the historical situatedness of the Greek community across Georgia, its heterogeneity, and the liminality of the migration experiences to Greece (Sideri, 2006, 2007, 2012, 2017). Importantly, she focuses on place-making and thus on Greek experiences in Georgia rather than across the entire post-Soviet space. The latter is a problem afflicting many sociological and anthropological contributions on post-Soviet Greek migrations to Greece, which overlook the very different experiences of Greeks in different Soviet Republics. This is something Zoumpalidis (2009, 2014, 2016) shows to be highly relevant in comparing Greek immigrants from Georgia and Russia to Cyprus in terms of the choices they make about their own and their children's language use.

From a linguistic point of view, a number of recent contributions have explored Urum (Böhm, 2015; Lorenz, 2019; Neugebauer, 2016; Schröter, 2019; Skopeteas, 2014) building on the research project *The impact of current transformations on language and ethnic identity: Urum and Pontic Greeks in Georgia*, which also provides the frame for this study. Crucially, the already mentioned *Urum Documentation Project* documented this hitherto unwritten variety for the first time (Skopeteas et al., 2011a,b; Skopeteas / Moisidi, 2011). Earlier accounts had taken it to be either “the same” or very similar to Crimean Urum (Podolsky, 1986; Uyanık, 2010) or had even categorized it as Azerbaijani (Kock Kobaidze, 2001). As a conservative Greek variety, Pontic Greek has received more scientific attention (Drettas, 1997; Sitaridou / Kaltsa, 2014; Tombaidis, 1988), albeit less so on Georgian territory (Berikashvili, 2016, 2017; Markopoulos / Skopeteas, 2012). The southeast coast of the Black Sea – referred to in Greek as *Póntos* – was home not only to the ancestors of Georgia's Greek community, but also to people who self-identify as Turkish Muslims and who speak a Pontic Greek variety labeled *Rumca* or *Romeyka*, which Sitaridou (2013, 2014a,b)⁸ has recently explored. The sociolinguistic vitality and attitudes towards this variety are discussed in Schreiber (2016); Schreiber / Sitaridou (2018).

It is hard to identify comparable research on communities in which language use and ethnic or national identification appear not to coincide, as one might assume for the Urum Greeks in this study. This difficulty arises mostly because studies tend to employ rather essentialist conceptualizations of both a “stable identity” and of what exactly constitutes a “language”. Early studies challenging this essentialism and pointing to the danger of category systems

8 See also the project website: www.romeyka.org (last accessed on 8/30/2020).

based solely on language use include Leach (1954) and Moerman (1965), who similarly underscore the importance of self-identification as well as the fluidity of systems of social categorization. Nevertheless, an interesting and geographically proximate case is that of the *Pomaks*, a Slav speaking Muslim minority in Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey. The conflicting attempts by larger political entities at state level to appropriate them for their purposes are discussed in contributions to Steinke / Voß (2007) and by Voß (2018). In Greece, their self-identification as “Muslim” was first met with attempts by the Greek government to re-categorize them as “Turks”, in order to distance them from Bulgaria. When this shift had been successfully completed and Turkey became interested in this minority, the Greek government once again emphasized their “Greekness” (Meinardus, 2002, p. 88f.).

There is much to be gained from a careful and thorough look at how identification and belonging are established in interaction and related to the various languages spoken in Georgia’s Greek community. Complementing research on an understudied community, this quite special case of a “minimal pair” is especially productive for research on identification and belonging, and the concomitant processes of (un)making boundaries. In the following two sections, I will outline the project of this book.

C. Research questions

As elaborated above, the most striking attribute of the Greek community in Georgia is that they self-identify as “Greek” and that some of them speak the Greek variety Pontic and some of them the Turkish variety Urum. My first research question is therefore: how are the languages spoken in the community made relevant for the identification and belonging of their speakers; and, closely connected to this, how do consultants, in their everyday lives, interactively respond when their self-identification is challenged with reference to their language use?

The second and third research questions also regard processes of identification and belonging, but focus on how boundaries are established, negotiated and contested through these. I will introduce the theoretical background in more detail in Chapter 3. It must be mentioned here, however, that research on boundaries has so far very rarely put equal analytical weight on their spatial,

temporal and social dimensions in their complex interrelation.⁹ And while I am primarily interested in being GREEK as an emergent social category, I will show how taking into account its temporal and spatial aspects is pivotal to exploring its full depth. The second question, accordingly, asks about the temporality of belonging, specifically about the implications the end of the Soviet Union has had for my consultants' BELONGING TO GEORGIA. The third question focuses particularly on boundaries and asks about the (un)making of boundaries by consultants and by members of the various out-groups they perceive and narrate as challenging their identification. The fourth research question, finally, is methodological in nature and asks how this is achieved in the interview conversations.

The contribution of this book is both substantive and theoretical and will further extant research in three ways. Firstly, it adds a methodologically novel and profound perspective to research on the severely understudied Greek community in Georgia, complementing historical and anthropological accounts, as well as work from the field of linguistic typology. The investigation thereby also contributes to regionally interested (post-Soviet) area studies of the Southern Caucasus and the post-Soviet Greek diaspora. Secondly, grounding the study in a thorough ethnographically informed conversation analysis, crucially highlights the interactional and context-dependent nature of not only identification and belonging, but also the (un)making of boundaries. Applying this finely grained approach to an analysis of the interplay of social, spatial and temporal dimensions in boundary processes, this book thirdly adds a methodologically succinct and novel perspective to transdisciplinary border and boundary studies.

D. Outline of the book

This book is structured as follows: Chapter 2 will provide the necessary historical background for an understanding of the analysis, elucidating in particular the continuities and ruptures of possibilities for identification and belonging for Greeks in Georgia today. Chapter 3 will provide the theoretical and methodological background for a thorough analysis of identification, belonging and the (un)making of boundaries. Chapter 4 serves as transition

9 This has been proposed for instance in Schiffauer et al. (2018) and elaborated in contributions to Gerst et al. (2018a).

to the analysis, detailing the interview and data collection, as well as analytic processes.

The presentation of the analysis itself follows narrative considerations and the research questions introduced above. In Chapter 5, I will start with a detailed exploration of how the languages spoken by community members serve them as resources to position themselves in the interviews and beyond. It is, after all, the question about the identificatory potential of the heritage varieties and the challenges they might pose for Georgian Greeks' belonging that first drew me to this community and that makes them such a special "minimal pair" in discussing matters of language, identification, belonging, and the concomitant boundaries. The second part of the analysis (Chapter 6) will trace the profound changes consultants link to the end of the Soviet Union, both in challenging their belonging to the newly emergent Georgian nation state and in offering new points of juncture. The third analytical Chapter (7) will take a snap-shot, as it were, of contemporary boundary (un)making at the time of the interviews and will analyze the spatial, temporal, and social dimensions of this boundary work, particularly as it relates to the categories GREEK and GEORGIAN. Throughout these three Chapters, I will delineate the interactional devices used by consultants to conversationally position themselves, their community, and relevant out-group members. In Chapter 8 I will consolidate the analysis on a higher level of abstraction and conclude in Chapter 9 with a summary of the answers to the research questions and the contribution of this book.

Chapter 2: Historical background

[H]istorians can provide a more contextual and contingent view of the social and cultural construction of a nation that in its various incarnations over many centuries represented itself in different ways. History is full of experiences, only a portion of which are mobilized at any given moment for cultural purposes or political struggles. (Suny, 1994, p. 335)

In this Chapter, I will focus on the historical contexts and contingencies that consultants draw on in articulating the topics they make relevant in our interviews. Rather than attempting the impossible task of relating “everything” there is to know about the past roughly two hundred years of history in present-day Turkey, Georgia and Greece, my narrative will focus on moments of (dis-)juncture, as well as on opportunities and challenges for identification and belonging. I am particularly interested in how identification(s) were constructed as traceable through time in three ways: through language, because this is what sparked my interest in the community, and through ancestry and religion – because this is both what consultants make most relevant in our conversations, and also how they were assigned to categories over large stretches of time. Furthermore, the analysis should appreciate changes in their interplay and the weight attributed to them in the transition from empires to nation(alizing) states:

While it would be exaggerating to maintain that empires or premodern territorial states were not at all interested in shaping and policing ethnic boundaries, the change from empire to nation-state provided new incentives for state elites to pursue strategies of ethnic – as opposed to other types of – boundary making. (Wimmer, 2008, p. 990f.)

I begin by recounting the migration(s) from the Ottoman to the Russian Empire that my consultants make relevant (Section A.). I then explore the complex dynamics of Soviet attempts at both supra-national homogenization and national particularization (Section B.). Finally, I deal with the post-Soviet encounters with the nation state (Section C.), covering the transition from a multi-national political entity (the Soviet Union) to the Georgian nation state (I.), and the Greek migrations from the post-Soviet space to Greece and the challenges encountered there (II.).

A. Migrating from the Ottoman to the Russian Empire

The ancestors of Greeks living in Georgia today migrated from the Ottoman Empire to what was since 1801 the *gruzinskaya guberniya* “Georgian Governorate” of the Russian Empire.¹ I have already mentioned their region of origin as Pontus, which denotes the territory “roughly between the river Kizil Irmak (west of Trebizond), the Georgian/Turkish borders (east of Trebizond) and the Taurus mountains (Ala/Bulghar-Dagh) in the south” (Sideri, 2006, p. 24). Figure 2.1 depicts the areas of origin based on historical sources and oral histories of the community, as related in accounts collected for this book and during the various documentation efforts outlined in the previous Chapter. It also shows the areas Ottoman Greeks were settled in.

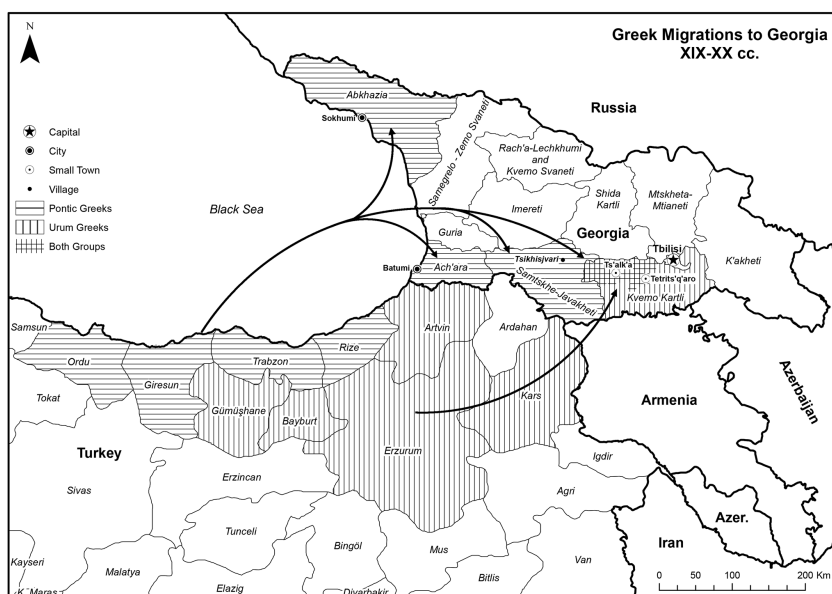


Figure 2.1: Areas of Origin. Map compiled by Nika Loladze (Loladze, 2019, p. 31).

Historical sources date Greek settlements on the territory of the contemporary Georgian nation state to as early as 1000 BC (Kokoev et al., 1999, p.

¹ For an excellent and comprehensive history of *The Making of the Georgian Nation* cf. Suny (1994).

23) or 800-600 BC (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1991, p. 357). Neither these movements nor the settlement of Ottoman Greeks close to mines on Georgian territory in the second half of the 18th century AD (Kokoev et al., 1999, p. 23) are mentioned in the narratives collected in recent research projects. The migrations discussed in this book are thus not the first east-west migration of Greeks onto the territory of the contemporary Georgian nation state. This is corroborated by Fonton (1840, p. 149), who puts the number of Greeks living in the Georgian Governorate at roughly 3,000 prior to the migrations of the 19th-century. Fonton was an eyewitness to General Ivan Fyodorovich Paskevich's military campaign in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828-29, triggered by the Greek War of Independence. I mention Paskevich because his name comes up with some frequency in the narratives told by members of Georgia's Greek community today. This allows us to specify which of the four main migratory movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries consultants believe to have brought their ancestors to present-day Georgia.² Importantly, all four followed armed conflicts involving the Russian and Ottoman Empires.

The first movement took place after the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), which granted Greece independence, while Russia gave back to the Ottoman Empire much of the territory marked in Figure 2.1 as the area of origin of Urum-speaking Greeks (Eloeva, 1994, p. 458). As a result, about 42,000 Ottoman Greeks and a large number of Armenians fled the Ottoman Empire (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1991, p. 358).³ The second and third large-scale migratory movements followed the Crimean War (1853-56) and the Russo-Ottoman War (1877-78) (Kokoev et al., 1999, p. 23). Taken together, these three migrations saw 150,000 Greeks resettle across the Caucasus as a whole (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1991, p. 360), i.e. not only in present-day Georgia. The latter two migrations in particular must be considered in light of Russian attempts at religious homogenization through population exchange, ousting Muslims and inviting Christians from the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran (Sideri 2006, p. 105; Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou 1991, p. 359f.). A prominent example is the deportation of Circassians to the Ottoman Empire after their defeat in the 1860s and the allocation of formerly Circassian land to Russian, German, Greek, and Bulgarian settlers (Allen / Muratoff 1953, p. 107f.; Richmond 2013). The fourth large-scale migration of 80,000 Ottoman

2 That is, migratory movements larger than individual or family migrations, which also took place "continuously" along the Black Sea coast according to Sideri (2006).

3 The area marked as Pontic speaking remained under Ottoman control throughout the war.

Greeks, this time very clearly in flight from persecution, occurred during and towards the end of the First World War, when the Russian army retreated in 1917 from what is today Turkish territory (Allen / Muratoff 1953, p. 461; Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou 1991, p. 361; Kokoev et al. 1999, p. 24).

These four waves of emigration from Ottoman territory resulted, at least in part, from mounting pressure on the Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire during and after wars. This is especially the case for the periods following the Greek War for Independence (1828-29) and towards the end of the World War One, which for the Kingdom of Greece and the Republic of Turkey ended only on 24 July 1923 with the Treaty of Lausanne and the *ex post facto* legalization of a population exchange that had forcibly resettled about 1.5 million Orthodox Christian “Greeks” from Asia Minor and about half a million Muslim “Turks” from Greece. Areas exempt from the treaty were Istanbul, Western Thrace and the islands Imvros and Tenedos (Hirschon, 2008b; Meinardus, 2002). While the ancestors of the Greek community in Georgia had mostly left Asia Minor by that time, the treaty is notable because it used religious affiliation as the sole attribute deciding the future national affiliation of the uprooted individuals (Meinardus, 2002, p. 82).⁴ According to Hirschon (2008b, p. 8) this was established as the relevant criterion by the Turkish negotiators, reflecting the Ottoman way of categorizing the Empire’s subjects, to which I now turn.

The narrative corpus we have of Greeks in Georgia relates histories of subjugation and persecution: *pod igom turkov* “under the Turks’ yoke” is one of the key phrases used when speaking about the time in the Ottoman Empire.⁵ This is very understandably an account of the experiences of displacement following the wars outlined above, especially the Greek secessionist endeavors of the 1820s when Greeks in all parts of the Ottoman Empire were viewed as potentially dangerous (Barkey, 2008, p. 278). Contemporary historians, however, underscore the internal diversity of the Ottoman Empire, with Barkey (2008) even naming it an *Empire of Difference*, i.e. one based not on homogeneity but on heterogeneity, which was reflected in how it created institutions to govern its non-Muslim subjects. Importantly, Barkey (2008) also shows how Ottoman Greeks took part in the building and administration

4 Cf. the contributions in Hirschon (2008a) for a comprehensive transdisciplinary appraisal of the population exchange and its impact on the uprooted people and their governments.

5 Zoumpalidis’ (2014) consultants in the Northern Caucasus tell similar stories. Cf. also the Section on heritage varieties in Chapter 5 on the narrative of Urum Greeks having been made to “choose between language and religion”.

of the Ottoman Empire, and Fortna (2013) gives examples of Ottoman Greek officials clearly practicing their allegiance to the Ottoman Empire rather than the Greek Kingdom.⁶

Ottoman non-Muslim communities were organized in the *millet* system already mentioned, with the Orthodox *millet-i-rum* being the largest non-Muslim *millet* (cf. Issawi, 1999). Crucially, these “communal differences within the pluralistic Ottoman concatenation of peoples were expressed in terms of religious confession and to a much lesser extent regional and ethno-linguistic identification” (Fortna, 2013, p. 3). Thus, being OTTOMAN ORTHODOX RUM (later: GREEK) was based on a community’s religious affiliation⁷ rather than on the language spoken (Mackridge, 2009). Speaking an Anatolian Turkish variety thus did not conflict with belonging to the Orthodox *millet*. Notably, the Ottoman administration’s policies on conversion were also not uniform and depended on how manageable a community was perceived to be:

For the Greeks, the conqueror recognized the Greek Orthodox patriarchate in Constantinople as the most powerful force among the Christian population. The Orthodox Church would dominate ethnically and linguistically diverse populations that followed more or less a uniform Orthodox practice. (Barkey, 2008, p. 131)

Controlling the patriarchate was therefore a measure for controlling the Orthodox population as a whole; communities without such a strong central institution, such as Jews and Armenians, were hence considered more difficult to govern (Barkey, 2008).

There were differences between the *millets*, with members of the non-Muslim *millets* mostly being subject to higher taxation and enjoying inferior economic and social status (Barkey, 2008; Göl, 2005; İçduygu et al., 2008; Prévelakis, 1998). Crucially however, until the advent of the Young Turks at the beginning of the 20th century and their nationalizing mission, there were no systematic attempts at religious conversion, forced linguistic assimilation or other ethno-national homogenization (Barkey, 2008; İçduygu et al., 2008; Fortna, 2013). Barkey (2008, p. 122) contrasts this with policies in the Russian Empire. Her argument that extensive Russification took place in the Russian Empire is questionable, however, since this focused on reli-

6 For a broader discussion, the reader is referred to the illuminating contributions to Fortna et al. (2013). Although these accounts highlight the fluidity of category memberships especially among the elite, such fluidity was not part of all everyday interactions across the Empire.

7 Conversion was usually only possible for a whole (village) community at once and not infrequently based on political considerations.

gious homogenization alone. Linguistic Russification depended on feudal categorizations, and was largely limited to non-Russian elites in the Empire (Pavlenko, 2008, p. 278f.):

[T]urning everyone into Russians was never a goal of Russian nationality and language policies, nor was language the main criterion for Russianness: it was habitually trumped by social class and religion. The full-fledged membership in the Great Russian nation was offered to Christian elites of all ethnic backgrounds and to all Orthodox Eastern Slavs. (Pavlenko, 2011, p. 348)

This contemporary assessment notwithstanding, the Georgian (literary) elite evaluated the Georgian language as being threatened and rallied for its preservation as early as the 1860s (Hewitt, 1989, p. 127).⁸

The central point here is that the ancestors of the Greek community in Georgia were categorized by their membership in the *millet-i-rum* and thereby solely on the basis of their Orthodox religious affiliation. Being recognized as “Greeks” was made palpable for instance in the suspicion they faced surrounding the Greek War of Independence (Barkey, 2008, p. 278) and ultimately enshrined in the Treaty of Lausanne. As we will see in Section C., this had important implications for their recognition as Greeks by the Greek nation state after the demise of the Soviet Union. Crucially, the Russian Empire also recognized them not only as “fellow Orthodox Christians” but as “Greeks”, a categorization later adopted by the Soviet Union (cf. Section B.).

Upon their arrival in present-day Georgia, the Ottoman Greeks set about turning the new space into their homeland and endured great hardship, as their descendants tell us. This home-making was achieved by remembering and re-creating the homeland they had left: “These migrants began re-mapping the old communities left in Pontos through reinvention of foundation myths, naming the new villages after the old ones, building churches and houses” (Sideri, 2006, p. 32). This re-mapping is still visible in the churches built and the gravestones set during that time, which differ markedly from their Georgian contemporaries. These churches are found in each and every Pontic and Urum Greek settlement I have visited (cf. Figure 4.1), dating back to the first arrival of Greeks to the village in question, mostly in the 19th century. These stony traces make it very implausible that the ancestors of the Greek community in Georgia today were ever predominantly anything but Orthodox Christian, as is sometimes alleged (cf. Chapter 5).

⁸ The importance of the Georgian language as a symbol of the Georgian nation will be discussed in Chapter 5.

B. The Soviet Union: Processes of homogenization and particularization

There is much to be said about how the Soviet administration through its 70 years of existence attempted to achieve governability through homogenization of the people inhabiting its vast territory. This involved the centralization of power both organizationally (in the Communist Party), and geographically (in Moscow); collectivization of land and labor; extensive Russification particularly of the education system; and brutal repression of those individuals or collectives perceived as dissenting from or threatening this “unity”. However, attempted homogenization was only ever partial in both intention and implementation. The Communist Party was structured in a way that not only enabled but encouraged (elite) members of the titular nationalities of the individual Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR) to hold positions of power in the institutions of their respective SSR through an elaborate quota-system. Furthermore, “mother tongue” education (alongside compulsory Russian classes) remained in practice throughout the Soviet Union’s existence, albeit not for all nationalities.⁹ Rather than taking on the task of tracing these often contradictory practices in all their complexity, I will restrict my account to issues that the analysis of the interview corpus has identified as influential. In particular, the way Soviet citizens were categorized by their national affiliation emerged as an important reference point for (self-)identification.

First, however, a few words on Georgia. Georgia became – not quite voluntary – part of the Russian Empire in 1801 and briefly regained independence after the Russian Revolution, which was to last from May 26, 1918 until the Soviet invasion in February 1921. The political memory of the Georgian Democratic Republic (however much distorted) was taken up, starting in the 1980s, by the campaign for national independence from the Soviet Union.¹⁰

Perhaps the most fundamental thing to understand about the traces left by the Soviet Union is that the concept of an ethno-national group, i.e. of a socio-cultural membership in a community based on ancestry and shared territory,¹¹ was understood as irreducible and often welcomed (Slezkine, 1994). This

9 I will discuss the Soviet notion of *rodnoy yazyk* ‘native language’ in more detail below.

10 For the importance of these types of national narratives cf. Hobsbawm / Ranger (1983); Suny (2001); for a differentiated analysis of the political implications of the Republic cf. contributions to Jones (2014).

11 As laid out in *Marksizm i national'nyy vopros* “Marxism and the national question” Stalin’s first scholarly essay in 1913 (Stalin, 1950). The second part of this title is echoed in how some consultants speak about the rising Georgian nationalism in the 1990s, when they label it *national'nyy vopros*, as we will see in Chapter 6.

relied on the Marxist notion of a “historical logic” that anticipated a stage of nationhood before progressing into socialism, and the conviction that this process could be sped up by what Hirsch (2005, p. 8) calls “state-sponsored evolutionism”. She defines its aim as follows:

The long-term goal was to usher the *entire* population through the Marxist timeline of historical development: to transform feudal-era clans and tribes into nationalities, and nationalities into socialist-era nations – which, at some point in the future, would merge together under communism. (Hirsch 2005, p. 8f., emphasis in the original)

To this end, they were to be constituted as “kulturell ‘eigenständig’”¹² (Thun-Hohenstein, 2015a, p. 12), even if this meant first identifying – and thereby establishing – the collectives, cultures and languages that were then to be elaborated and supported in a process labeled *korenizatsiya* ‘putting down roots’ “nativization” (Crisp, 1989; Pavlenko, 2008).¹³ However, this never meant that the Soviet administration would support all national projects or cultures and languages on its territory. On the contrary, these might equally be attacked and destroyed in the attempt to “‘help’ them to ‘evolve’ (and/or amalgamate) into new official nationalities” (Hirsch, 2005, p. 10).¹⁴ Crucially, *korenizatsiya* was not simply a socio-cultural project invested in developing and supporting languages and “national cultures”. It was intended to reform the administrative and political structure of the vast Soviet Union, in effect transforming “das Russische Vielvölkerreich in administrativer Hinsicht zum ‘multinationalen’ Sowjetimperium”¹⁵ (Maisuradze, 2015a, p. 27). This meant implementing a complex administrative hierarchy of territories of different sizes, shaped on the basis of “national” differences and endowed with different levels of autonomy.¹⁶ This also afforded a certain amount of institutional power to the titular nationalities, i.e. those whose national affiliation coincided with the label of the territory they were living on, and included a quota system for titular nationalities and “national minorities”, for instance Greeks living in the Georgian SSR.¹⁷

12 “Culturally ‘independent’”, my translation.

13 *Einwurzeln* in German, cf. Maisuradze (2015a, p. 39f.) for its etymology and what he analyzes as implications for the Soviet imaginary that intimately linked collectives to territory.

14 Cf. Gorenburg (1999) for a careful study of these changes in Bashkortostan.

15 Transforming “the Russian multi-ethnic Empire in its administrative aspects to the ‘multinational’ Soviet Empire.” My translation.

16 Cf. Hirsch (2005) for a thorough account of how ethnographers and ethnographic knowledge helped shape this complex structure.

17 Note that this administrative complexity was accompanied by a complex system of labeling the different points on the hierarchy of hereditary categories: *plemya* ‘tribe’,

These national categories were then enshrined and carried forward not only in registries based on census data, but from 1932 onwards, in the Soviet internal passport. Even when this “cultural technolog[y] of rule” (Hirsch, 2005, p. 275) did not have dangerous consequences, as it did when deciding on the deportation of 40,000 Greeks from Western Georgia and Abkhazia to Central Asia in 1949 (Sideri, 2006, p. 92),¹⁸ it was felt in everyday life:

Every Soviet citizen was born into a certain nationality, took it to day care and through high school, had it officially confirmed at the age of sixteen and then carried it to the grave through thousands of application forms, certificates, questionnaires and reception desks. It made a difference in school admissions and it could be crucial in employment, promotions and draft assignments. (Slezkine, 1994, p. 450)¹⁹

This practice, together with the titular nationalities’ political and cultural (nationalizing) control of the republics’ institutions, created tensions between titular nationalities’ elites’ aim of homogenizing their republics and their national minorities’ resistance to this agenda (Slezkine, 1994, p. 451). This has been argued to contribute in no small part both to the individual republics’ campaigns for independence and to the difficulties facing the newly independent nation states in their nation building efforts (Arel, 2003; Brubaker, 1996; Suny, 1993).

A key aspect here concerns the language policies of the Soviet Union.²⁰ In this field, *korenizatsiya* in the 1920s meant a tremendous effort at “developing” all recognized 192 languages. In some cases, this implied developing alphabets for hitherto unwritten languages. In all cases it implied ensuring the

narodnost ‘people’ (Maisuradze 2015a, p. 32, p. 42 translates it as *Völkerschaft* into German), *natsional’nost* ‘nationality’ and *natsiya* ‘nation’ were taken to refer to different stages of “development” (Slezkine, 1994, p. 450) and not used uniformly over the 70 years of the Soviet Union’s existence. To further complicate matters, *narod* ‘people’ could also refer to “the people” in terms of social class rather than as a national category or one encompassing all “Soviet nationalities”, as in the aspired to *sovietskiy narod* ‘Soviet people’ (Maisuradze, 2015a, p. 42). In my interview corpus, consultants use *narod* most frequently when speaking about a national category, followed by *natsional’nost* and *natsiya*.

18 They were usually allowed to return to the Georgian SSR, however not the Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, in the mid 1950s. Eleni Sideri’s and my Pontic Greek consultants who experienced the deportation have never been able to make sense of them (cf. Loladze 2019).

19 This is precisely the type of knowledge my consultant OP refers to when he adduces his passport as proof of his Greekness and concludes his account with *ya znal chto ya grek* “I knew that I was Greek” (excerpt 24, Chapter 7).

20 For thorough and differentiated accounts cf. Grenoble (2003); Pavlenko (2008); and the contributions to Kirkwood (1989).

teaching of these languages in schools and the production of textbooks and translations from and into these languages. When the reduction of recognized languages and extensive Russification were implemented in the 1930s, this also meant the transfer of very recently developed Latin alphabets into the Cyrillic script. Russification of the education system was achieved in two main ways. For some national minority schools – for instance those that had been Greek up to that point – the language of instruction was changed to Russian. Secondly, “bilingualism” in Russian was furthered by making it a compulsory subject in all schools and in higher education. Above a certain professional and/or political level, competence in Russian was indispensable, making education in Russian the most appealing choice for families not belonging to the respective titular nationality from 1959, when they were allowed to choose the language of instruction (Crisp, 1989; Grenoble, 2003; Hewitt, 1989; Kreindler, 1989; Pavlenko, 2008).

Russification was thus consequential for Georgia and Greeks in Georgia in two ways. First of all, Russification and “mother tongue” education meant that Georgia’s Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian minorities would choose education in their native language or in Russian rather than Georgian. Secondly, Russification was especially successful among the smaller and non-titular nationalities, which often led to language loss rather than stable bilingualism. In the census, respondents were asked to give their *rodnoy yazyk* “native language”, which was perceived as a property of the heritage collective rather than the individual respondent (Arel, 2006, p. 9).²¹ This not only makes this component of Soviet census data notoriously unreliable (Grenoble, 2003, pp. 28-31), but also furthers the disjunction of language competence and national affiliation.²²

For the Greek community in Georgia, the Soviet Union, like the Russian Empire preceding it, recognized their self-identification as “Greek” – to the point of persecuting some of them. It furthermore enshrined this category membership in its internal passports as a purely hereditary attribute, having officially discounted the importance of religion for anything including belonging²³ and having decoupled competence in one’s “native language” from national affiliation. It was against this background that the Greek community of Georgia encountered the (making of the) modern nation state.

21 This despite the very bodily etymology of *rodnoy* (Maisuradze, 2015a, p. 43f.).

22 Cf. Brubaker (2011, p. 1796) for how this *de facto* everyday disjunction was perceived as a threat to nationalizing projects.

23 But cf. Maisuradze / Thun-Hohenstein (2015) for how a religious imaginary was fundamental in constructing the Soviet Union.

C. Encounters with the nation state

I. Georgian transformations

In the following, I explore the development of the independent Georgian nation state, which offers a deeper understanding of the positions voiced in the interviews. To this end, I will firstly give a brief summary of the main events in Georgia's existence as an independent nation(alizing) state. Secondly, I will look at the role language, religion and territory have continued to play in the Georgian nation-building project and its implications for the Greeks living in Georgia. Thirdly, I will consider the internal migration from the regions of Svaneti and Ach'ara to the rural districts of Ts'alk'a and Tetrts'q'aro, which is an important point of reference both for speaking about Urum as a heritage variety (Chapter 5) and for drawing boundaries in this context (Chapter 7).

The main historical milestones can be summarized briefly. Mikhail Gorbachëv's aspirations to more *glasnost* 'publicity' in the sense of "transparency" from the mid-1980s onwards "stimulated a rapid escalation of ethnic politics in Georgia" (Suny, 1994, p. 321). These found their outlet not only in more fervent expressions of desire for Georgian independence but also in strengthened claims for greater autonomy from the Georgian SSR on the part of the Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. However, the Georgian nationalist movement saw these as part of "Georgian territory" by virtue of "Georgians" living there.²⁴ When on April 9, 1989 Soviet armed forces violently broke up a peaceful demonstration by Georgian nationalists in Tbilisi, leaving 20 people dead and many more wounded, the Georgian nationalist movement gained momentum (Suny, 1994, pp. 321-323).

Zviad Gamsakhurdia's nationalist coalition won the first multi-party parliamentary election in Georgia on 28 October 1990, and the Georgian parliament declared the republic's independence from the Soviet Union on April 9, 1991. Before armed conflict broke out on December 22 of the same year and Gamsakhurdia was forced to flee, his exclusionary nationalist rhetoric, labeling national minorities in Georgia as "Moscow's fifth column" and putatively

24 While territorial questions only emerge from the corpus as being contested in Ts'alk'a, for the Georgian nation state the issue of territory remains unresolved. The impetus of the nationalist movement and subsequent Georgian governments was to establish sovereignty over all the lands inhabited by "Georgians", thus striving to make the state's name semantically adequate to the toponym *sakartvelo* 'land for Kartvelians' "Georgia", including those in the autonomous regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

coining the slogan *gruziia dlya gruzin* “Georgia for Georgians” (cf. Chapter 6), had deeply unsettled non-Georgian minorities. The ensuing (civil) wars that were to last until the end of 1993 were “a kind of multi-player chess game” (Wheatley, 2005, p. 66), pitting troops loyal to Gamsakhurdia against his armed opposition, which took over the government newly headed by the former Soviet Foreign Secretary Eduard Shevardnadze. Also opposing Gamsakhurdia (but not necessarily fighting together) were Abkhaz troops, supported by fighters from the Northern Caucasus, Ossetian troops, and various paramilitary groups. Russian troops supported almost all players at different stages apart from Gamsakhurdia (Cheterian, 2008; Suny, 1994; Wheatley, 2005). By early 1995 the Shevardnadze government had gained an effective monopoly on organized violence (Wheatley, 2005, p. 91).

For the civilian population, these first tumultuous few years of independence were as difficult as one can imagine. The stories told, not only by the consultants I interviewed for this book, center on the loss of livelihood in terms of lack of paid employment as well as basic foodstuffs, water, gas, and electricity. This was augmented by fundamental uncertainty over the political future and the very immediate danger posed by (not always political) armed conflict. Especially in rural Ts’alk’a, there were also reported incidents of organized armed banditry on the roads (Skopeteas / Moisiidi, 2011). Years of widespread mismanagement, corruption and finally blatant electoral fraud in the parliamentary elections of November 2003 brought demonstrators – encouraged by opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili – out to the streets. Shevardnadze resigned on November 22, 2003. In January 2004, Saakashvili was elected president. For the duration of his presidency – until he lost the October 2012 parliamentary elections – Saakashvili maintained what can be summarized as a staunchly pro-Western, anti-Russian political orientation, culminating in the Five-Day War with Russian-backed South Ossetian forces in 2008. “Pro-Western” is not to be conflated with “democratic”, however: from the outset, the aim was not to increase democratic participation, but rather to establish law and order, create an attractive business climate, and bring recalcitrant regions back into the fold, thereby positioning Saakashvili as “founding father of the nation” (quoted in Wheatley, 2005, p. 208). In other words: “he attempted to introduce liberal measures by means of autocratic methods and illiberal discourse” (Wheatley, 2005, p. 208).

Saakashvili achieved early successes: in 2004, he faced down the ruler of Ach’ara, Aslan Abashidze, thereby extending the Georgian state’s control to a formerly autonomous region, which had often been considered a potential third breakaway region. The penal code was made more severe and a far

reaching police reform was implemented with the aim of eliminating (low level) corruption. This was accompanied by extensive economic liberalization.²⁵ Many of these successes were highly publicized in the West, making Georgia the poster-child for “successful” post-Soviet reforms. My consultants generally speak highly of Saakashvili, especially of his “law and order” approach and the police reform. The first is credited with having stamped out (low level) criminality, the second as having made encounters with police officers more predictable, both furthering the perception of personal safety.

In addition to these reforms, two language specific policies were adopted, which impacted the lives of my consultants along with other national minorities living in Georgia. The first is the educational reform carried out in 2005, which specified that Georgian should be either the sole language of instruction or compulsory language of instruction for some subjects. This most strongly affected schools in regions with compactly settled minorities.²⁶ In these regions, Russian had long functioned as the language of inter-ethnic communication and many schools had used Russian, Armenian or Azeri as languages of instruction. Russian was taught as the default second language – and there had only been the compulsory one lesson of Georgian per week (cf. Chapter 5). The reform was implemented so rapidly that children in such regions could not acquire the necessary competence (Wheatley, 2006b, p. 33). Moreover, it was carried out using textbooks that did not account for the divergent Georgian competence of children living in the urban centers (usually very high) and those living in the rural areas (usually quite low) (Korth et al., 2005, p. 41). The second language-related policy introduced in 2005 requires all government employees to pass a Georgian language exam. In regions inhabited primarily by national minorities, this resulted in a demographic shift among government employees, with said minorities being replaced by (ethnic) Georgian speakers, furthering the perception of alienation and forced assimilation (Nilsson / Popjanovski, 2009, p. 17). This was exacerbated by the fact that public institutions from local administrations to courts had to be officially addressed in Georgian only (Wheatley, 2006b, p. 37).

These measures point to the importance of the Georgian language not simply as a medium of communication but, unsurprisingly, as a symbol of

25 For a recent critique cf. Gugushvili (2017).

26 Regions in the South-West for Azerbaijanis (especially districts in Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti and Shida Kartli) and Samtskhe-Javakheti for Armenians. The Russian-backed breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are *de facto* independently governed, and were therefore not affected by these reforms.

the Georgian nation.²⁷ This was also visible in its immediate instatement as official language in Georgia's brief independence 1918-1921 (cf. Smith et al., 1998; Suny, 1994). There are two further lines of analysis linking the Georgian language to contemporary nationalizing efforts. Smith et al. (1998, p. 193) underscore perceptions of the "perseverance" of the Georgian language, which has been documented as a literary language for a comparatively long time. It thus allows the construction of a narrative of continuity, tracing the *Making of the Georgian Nation* (Suny, 1994) through times of foreign rule and fragmentation. Closely linked is another element providing a narrative of differentiation and endurance: the autocephalous Georgian Orthodox Church (Suny, 1994, p. 334). In Maisuradze's analysis, this prepared the ground for the later Georgian nationalizing project in its emphasis on the language of religious practice and he thus calls it "eine Art 'präsekularer' Nationalismus"²⁸ (Maisuradze, 2015a, p. 34).²⁹ It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Georgian Orthodox Christianity was immensely influential in the Georgian movement for national independence (Maisuradze, 2015b, p. 315).

We will see in Chapter 5 that some of my consultants in the rural districts of Ts'alk'a and Tetrts'q'aro bemoan their lack of competence in the Georgian language, which they perceive – concurring with dominant views – to be important for being GOOD GEORGIAN CITIZENS. For the others, their competence enables them to underscore their belonging to Georgia. The fact that Orthodox Christianity is taken to be such a quintessential aspect of being GEORGIAN, and in particular the narrative tracing this religious affiliation back to Byzantium, sets a precedent by which it is relatively easy for members of the "co-religious" Greek community to assert their being GREEK by similarly tracing their identification to Orthodox religious affiliation, regardless of their language competence. Thus, their religious affiliation together with the perpetual reassertion of their "Greek" ancestry throughout Soviet times, enables them to self-identify as GREEK and to have this self-identification recognized and not questioned.

27 The theoretical underpinnings to these kinds of group-making projects will be explored in the following chapters. For now, suffice it to say that language has been viewed as an important symbol of national unification and nationalizing projects (Anderson, 1991; Billig, 1995; Blommaert, 2006).

28 "A type of 'pre-secular' nationalism." My translation.

29 Cf. also Fuchslocher (2010), who argues that scholars underscoring the importance of language and print capitalism in the formation of the nation, as most prominently Anderson (1991) or Gellner (1983), miss the importance of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches in instilling a sense of (national) belonging in their believers.

Only in rural Ts'alk'a do Urum Greek consultants report challenges to their GREEK self-identification based on their language use, as well as to their "right to the land", echoing the nationalist territorial sentiments outlined above. I will explore how consultants talk about dealing with these challenges in Chapter 7 and focus here on the background of what was fundamentally an economic conflict over land and housing spurred by the mismanagement of public funds. In the late 1990s, as large numbers of Greeks (had) left Kvemo Kartli (cf. next Section), internal "eco-migrants" fleeing landslides in the highlands of Svaneti and Ach'ara settled in "empty" Greek and Ossetian villages. They acted in accordance with a 1998 presidential decree that allocated a large amount of public funds to the purchase of "abandoned" houses. The funds, however, disappeared after only a small number of houses had been bought, leading to conflicts over houses and agricultural land. Nevertheless, informal networks and the prospect of employment on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline led to further migration to Ts'alk'a. By 2005-06, this process was generally better managed, with internal migrants being allocated money to buy the houses they inhabited.³⁰ By 2006, the number of Georgian internal migrants in Ts'alk'a amounted to about 6,500 (Wheatley, 2006a, p. 9f.).

Framing this conflict in ethnic terms as per Brubaker (2004) was facilitated by linguistic difficulties. The *lingua franca* of the region had been Russian, a language the internal migrants from fairly secluded and exclusively Georgian-speaking regions were not competent in. Nor were most Greeks, Armenians and Azerbaijanis living in Ts'alk'a fluent in Georgian.³¹ Importantly, while both Svans and Ach'arians self-identify and are officially recognized as ethnic Georgians, they are far from a homogeneous group.³² Georgians from Svaneti are predominantly Orthodox Christians with some Pagan traditions and speak Svan, a Kartvelian language related to but substantially different

30 This is reflected in consultants' narratives that predominantly speak of conflicts having ceased, cf. Chapter 7. For a thorough account of the political and economic contexts cf. Wheatley (2009).

31 The numbers given by Wheatley (2009, p. 8) indicate that almost 70% of respondents from national minorities living in Ts'alk'a assessed their Georgian competence as being restricted to "some basic words" at best. My rural consultants assess their Georgian competence to be much higher (Table I.).

32 This does not preclude them from being portrayed as homogeneous by consultants in some instances, or from having their Georgianness questioned on the basis of their (putative) religious affiliation, cf. Chapters 5 and 7.

from Georgian³³ while the Georgians displaced from the highland regions of Ach'ara are predominantly Georgian-speaking Muslims, who sometimes face quite strong pressures to convert.

Overall, we can conclude that while the journey from the Soviet Union to the Georgian nation state has been very challenging and at times quite dangerous, the belonging of the Greek community to and in Georgia as well as their self-identification as GREEK is narrated as having been questioned only around the presidency of Zviad Gamsakhurdia – and sometimes later in Ts'alk'a. Greater challenges to their identification and belonging are told as having arisen in Greece, which I turn to now.

II. Emigration to Greece

In the funeral oration which he gave in 1872 for his university colleague, Konstantinos Asopios, [Konstantinos] Paparrigopoulos asked rhetorically 'What is Hellenism?'. To which he gave the answer: 'the Greek language'. 'What then is the Greek language? Hellenism' (Clogg 2002, p. xvii, citing Dimaras 1986, p. 260)

This quote foreshadows an important part of how the encounter between the newly immigrated post-Soviet Greeks and the modern Greek nation state would play out. The experiences they relate in the interviews frequently center on their not being recognized as “genuine Greeks” unless they speak Standard Modern Greek (SMG) at a high level of competence (cf. Chapter 7). Greece is not an exception among the Western European nation states, as a recent poll suggests: while 50% – a rather high number – of Greeks in Greece consider “being born in Greece” to be “very important for being truly Greek” (Stokes, 2017, p. 3),³⁴ “being able to speak our national language” is considered to be “very important for being truly Greek” by 76% of respondents (Stokes, 2017,

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- 33 Ethnologue: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/sva>,
Glottolog: <http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/svan1243>,
WALS: http://wals.info/languoid/lect/wals_code_sva [accessed on 6/25/2020].
For recent research on the Svan community in Kvemo Kartli cf. Voell et al. (2014); Voell (2016).
- 34 This is “rather high” because, with the exception of Hungary (52%), being born on the territory of the corresponding nation state is evaluated as much less important by the other surveyed European states: Italy and Poland at 42%, Spain 34%, UK 32% France 25%, Netherlands 16%, Germany 13%, Sweden 8% (Stokes, 2017, p. 3). The usual caveats for large-scale, comparative, quantitative studies apply.

p. 8).³⁵ A point not stressed by our consultants is the importance of religious affiliation for being GREEK in Greece: in the same study, Greece leads in this category, with 54% of respondents considering religious affiliation to be “very important for being truly Greek”, which all other surveyed European countries evaluate as much less important (Stokes, 2017, p. 20).³⁶

In this Section, I will first briefly explore the process of emigration from Georgia and then return to the questions of identification and belonging in terms of “Greek” ancestry, language and religion. The last census carried out in the Soviet Union puts the number of Greeks living in the Georgian SSR at 100,300 in 1989 (Geostat, 2013, p. 22). This number fell drastically to 15,200 in 2002 (Geostat, 2013, p. 22)³⁷ and further to 5,500 according to the latest census carried out in 2014 (Geostat, 2016). Importantly, not only members of national minorities emigrated but many Georgians also left the country, due to the wars described in the previous Section and the dismal economic situation (Geostat, 2013; Kokoev et al., 1999).³⁸ Greece and Cyprus were the main destinations for emigration, but not necessarily the *final* destinations, as demonstrated by communicative networks established from our interview data (Loladze, 2016, pp. 187-89). This migration was greatly facilitated by the Greek government, which officially recognized the “Greek descent” of all those registered as Greeks in the former Soviet Union and initially made it very easy to obtain Greek citizenship (Hess, 2010; Kaurinkoski, 2010).³⁹ Furthermore, Greek immigrants were institutionally supported, for instance with low interest rates on mortgages and access to the healthcare and welfare system (Loladze, 2016, p. 177).

This official recognition and support, especially in the time immediately following the end of the Soviet Union, was not necessarily matched on the level of everyday interactions with “Greek Greeks” (Hess, 2010; Hionidou, 2012; Kaurinkoski, 2010; Vergeti, 1991). In other words: “the same people

35 Note that in this evaluation Greece is not an outlier in comparison with the other surveyed European countries: Netherlands 84%, Hungary 81%, Germany 79%, France 77%, Poland 67%, Sweden 66%, Spain 62%, Italy 59% (Stokes, 2017, p. 8).

36 Note that this is true even in comparison with Poland (34%) and Italy (30%).

37 This includes the 14,000 Greeks living in Abkhazia in 1979 (Hewitt, 1989, p. 138), who also all left during the war in 1992-93, judging from the information we were able to gather.

38 For a thorough exploration cf. Loladze (2016, 2019).

39 Similar to the policies in Germany, the process of obtaining citizenship became stricter and more exclusionary over time. For a comparative account of “co-ethnic” migrations following the end of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia cf. contributions to Čapo Žmegač et al. (2010).

who were called ‘brothers in diaspora’ when they lived in Georgia were transformed into ‘aliens’ or ‘second class Greeks’ when they decided to ‘return’” (Sideri, 2006, p. 27). While perceived differences in behavior also played a role, language competence and use was the difference made most relevant in establishing this boundary between post-Soviet Greeks and the societal majority. There are two interrelated ways of looking at this. The first is to focus on the importance of the Greek language as a symbol of the Greek nation, and thus an indispensable attribute for determining category membership or exclusion. This view is taken by Mackridge (2009) and expressed by Sideri:

the purity of the language was a foundation stone of the Kingdom of Greece in the 1830s. Language remains a prerequisite for integration into Greek society, affecting all the migrants living in the country. (Sideri, 2006, p. 141f.)

In order to become Greek, then, one has to speak SMG – crucially, Pontic Greek does not suffice, as we will see in the analysis. As the above-mentioned poll indicates, the Greek societal majority is not alone in this evaluation in Western Europe. These experiences are, for instance, mirrored by the difficulties faced by another “co-ethnic” immigrant group: post-Soviet German migrants to Germany (Hess, 2010; Mandel, 2010; Panagiotidis, 2019; Rosenberg, 2010).

The second way of looking at this issue would be to ask why Orthodox Christianity and “Greek ancestry” were not considered to suffice for recognition as “Greeks”. This is particularly vexing given that Greek law considers “Greek ancestry” a sufficient prerequisite for Greek citizenship, and that the Greek societal majority accords religious affiliation such importance as a marker of “being truly Greek” (Stokes, 2017). Orthodox Christianity is, in fact, frequently adduced as the other pillar of GREEKNESS (Mackridge, 2009). In the words of Richard Clogg: “from the outset, Orthodox Christianity and the Greek language have been deemed to be the key determinants of Greek identity” (Clogg, 2002, p. ix). Why, then, is this being “co-religious” not accepted as a sufficient prerequisite for the post-Soviet Greeks being recognized as GREEK? This points to an analysis of boundary-making as put forward since Barth (1969), in which it is not merely a “list of attributes” that determines inclusion and exclusion but which of these is perceived as salient enough to be made relevant as the one determining where (and how) to draw the boundary. In Chapter 7 I return to the question of why religious affiliation and ancestry are trumped by language competence and use in the contemporary Greek context. At this point, however, I move to examine the

theoretical background on identification, belonging and boundary-making that I have constantly alluded to in this Chapter.

Chapter 3: Researching identification, belonging, and the (un)making of boundaries

There are as many approaches to *identity* as definitions of what is, can, cannot or should be understood by this term. Some authors have resolved to reject it outright (Brubaker / Cooper, 2000; Hall, 1996; Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011). They argue that it is problematic if a term is used indiscriminately for everything and nothing (Brubaker / Cooper, 2000), and that its ubiquity makes it difficult to use at all, especially since its past uses are fraught with essentialism, falsely claiming clarity about who is “in” and who is “out” (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011, p. 203). Brubaker (2004) solves this problem on the collective level by speaking of processes of *groupness* instead of clearly bounded groups, a notion I adopt and further elaborate in Section A..

Before coming to processes of group formation, I will briefly look at individual *identification*¹, since it is in individual (everyday) interactions that identification, belonging and boundaries are established, negotiated and contested. Crucially, we are dealing with a *social* process: identification is not something we are born with “but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, it develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process” (Mead, 1934, p. 135). Already in Mead’s (1934) symbolic interactionism, an individual’s identification remains in process just as society remains in process (Mead, 1934, p. 182).

Jenkins (1994) takes Mead’s model and a good portion of Bourdieu’s thinking, developing a more dynamic approach that includes the power relations in any society. In this view, processes of identification both on the individual and supra-individual level are determined by internal and external definitions of who we are and who the other(s) is. Importantly, the individual’s internal definitions must also be conceptualized as at least partly interactional and therefore social “because they presuppose both an audience, without whom they make no sense, and an externally derived framework of meaning” (Jenkins, 1994, p. 199). Identification, then, is something we actively *do*, that we

1 I adopt Hall’s (1996; 2004) terminology in speaking of processes of identification instead of seemingly stable identity. Whether they can ever lead to anything like a stable identity in everyday language is not the issue here, what matters is that people engage in processes and attempts of identification that are observable in interaction.

cannot do without our social environment, and that emerges in the constant interplay of internal and external attempts at definition:

[I]dentity is located within a two-way social process, an interaction between ‘ego’ and ‘other’, inside and outside. It is in the meeting of internal and external definition that identity, whether social or personal, is created. (Jenkins, 1994, p. 199)

How this type of interaction unfolds has been laid out for instance in Goffman (1959, 1967); how to get to grips with it methodologically will be outlined in Section C..

Hall (1996, 2004) reminds us of the precarity and fragmentation of all forms of identification. What to Jenkins is internal definition, for Hall turns into *fiction* and *fantasy*. He alerts us to the importance of narration and fantasy in processes of identification:

[Identities] arise from the narrativization of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity, even if the belongingness, the ‘suturing into the story’ through which identities arise is, partly, in the imaginary (as well as the symbolic) and therefore, always, partly constructed in fantasy, or at least within a fantasmatic field. (Hall, 1996, p. 4)

It is precisely this “narrativization of the self”, the telling and re-telling of our stories, that make narratives such an exceptionally productive topic in the investigation of identifications. In line with Hall, linguistic narrative research holds that “das Erzählen von Selbsterlebtem nicht nur Selbstdarstellung, sondern auch Selbstherstellung ist”² (Günthner / Bückner 2009, p. 4, emphasis in the original). In other words, through telling a seemingly coherent story about ourselves to others, we also tell it to ourselves and convince ourselves of its veracity. The precarity of identification is especially visible when it is challenged. At the same time, the interactive handling of these challenges allows us to more clearly delineate the processes through which it is negotiated and established. As we shall see, some of the (narrativized) fragments in the sense used by Hall (1996) appear to be more readily available and more easily held together than others, as they are conventionalized through countless re-tellings.

This Chapter is structured as follows: Section A. explores the basic processes of group formation, while Section B. is devoted to one part of this process, namely the (un)making of boundaries between perceived social

2 “Narrating individual experiences is not only self-presentation, but also self-production.”
My translation.

groups. Section C. explores methodological considerations that apply to tracing these processes in interactional data.

A. *Processes of groupness and belonging*

Much has been written in sociology, anthropology, social psychology and political science about what happens when more than two individuals come together and see themselves as a “group” – be it based on shared interests, social status, religious or political affiliation, something as hard to pin down as shared “culture”, or the supposedly more tangible notion of shared “ancestry”. As elsewhere in this book, I will not retell the whole science-historical becoming of the concepts of groupness and belonging, but rather focus on those parts that shed light on my data. This also means that I will not spend time on “the routine beating of the dead primordial horse” in the words of Wimmer (2013, p. 2).³ It is trivial that collective identifications have neither ceased to exist nor lost their strength in our post-modern, globalized world. While we do not have to follow Walzer (2004) in taking the communities into which we are socialized as static entities, he is right to point out that it is not so easy to disentangle ourselves from these communities.⁴ There is ample research suggesting that identification varies according to context (Barth, 1969; Bucholtz / Hall, 2005; Gal / Irvine, 2019; Leach, 1954; Moerman, 1965), while some boundaries are drawn very clearly and unambiguously (Wimmer, 2008, p. 982) in that they are made relevant across a large number of contexts and established as unquestionably durable. How, then, can we explore this complex? In a nutshell, by taking this sense of commonality and difference seriously and not letting analysis become blindfolded by the categories used in the practices of establishing, maintaining or weakening groupness. In other words, by analyzing the social *processes* of group formation.

Before going into specific details, I would like to begin with Anderson’s (1991) seminal and succinct definition of the nation⁵ as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). Being imagined does not render the nation in any

3 Readers interested in his – perhaps slightly exaggerated – exegesis of the influence of Herderian concepts on the study of ethnicity are referred to his book (Wimmer, 2013).

4 Cf. also Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011, p. 207) on the obligations and pressure that go hand in hand with the “cosy notion” of belonging.

5 Even though Barth (1969) wrote about ethnic groups as socially constructed long before Anderson.

sense “false”, however, but points out its cognitive constructedness – which Anderson attributes to any community, not just national ones (Anderson, 1991, p. 6) (cf. Section I.). The feature of *limitedness* raises questions about how exactly the nation and other “groups” are limited and who wields the power to (un)make a particular boundary. I will explore this in section B.. *Communality* will be important for questions of solidarity and shared (cultural) experiences of people, who see each other as belonging to the same community (cf. Section II.). Sovereignty – central to the genesis of the modern nation state – does not play a major role in the present study, since it is not concerned explicitly with nationalizing projects but rather with some of their ramifications.⁶ Similarly, the political implications of groupness processes will only be mentioned in passing as they were not usually made relevant by my consultants. I will stress one point not elaborated by Anderson, namely the processual nature of group formation with a focus on the actors of groupness (cf. Section III.).

I. Imagination: Categories and groupness

What is entailed in imagining a community? Fundamentally, this is a question about the categories we use to structure the world, the characteristics we ascribe to them and the internal and external ascription of people to these categories. Importantly, we cannot ignore the power relations implicit in these processes. The categorical nature of groupness and the importance of ascription rather than of some essential or primordial feature was first laid out by Barth (1969) and later extended and developed by himself (Barth, 1994, 2000) and others (Brubaker, 2004; Cohen, 1994; Jenkins, 1994; Wimmer, 2008, 2013). In an instance of these more recent analyses, Brubaker reminds us that “ethnicity, race, and nationhood are fundamentally ways of perceiving, interpreting, and representing the social world. They are not things *in* the world, but perspectives *on* the world” (Brubaker 2004, p. 17, emphasis in the original). Distinguishing between categories and “groups” – or rather different levels of groupness – allows us to analyze how people use categories to do things with them (Brubaker 2002, p. 169; Garfinkel 1967; Sacks 1992), for example clamoring for heightened groupness in the face of some perceived “external threat”.

6 It is a question arising from the discussion in the previous Chapter 2 though, and an unabatedly pressing one for the Georgian nation state.

In Barth's terms, self-ascription entails subscribing to the perceived values and evaluation criteria of the group one ascribes to – and a willingness to be judged by members of that group on precisely those values. Categorizing somebody as a member of the same community, then, implies the ascription of a shared set of values, whereas we would not expect the same broad agreement on the important values and criteria of evaluation from someone we categorize as a “stranger” (Barth, 1969, p. 15).

Importantly, the “dialectical process of internal and external definition” (Jenkins, 1994, p. 205) does not take place in a power vacuum. On the contrary, categories may be forced upon marginalized social or ethnic “groups”, which over time may or may not take on some of the negative characteristics ascribed to them (Alonso, 1994; Jenkins, 1994; Lamont / Molnár, 2002; Tilly, 2004; Wimmer, 2008). Georgian Greeks being denied recognition as “Greeks” in Greece – and how they contest this denial (cf. Chapter 7) – exemplifies the unequal distribution of the power to define the category “Greek”.

II. Community and belonging

As has become clear, not only the categories and limits of a purported “group” require our attention but also what individuals in the collective feel they share, what makes them feel they belong. Trivially, “people share significantly more than merely common identity markers” (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011, p. 204). Barth calls this *convergence* and explains how self-ascribed members may “converge in behaviour and style because of a widely embraced code or value in terms of which they struggle to excel” (Barth, 1994, p. 16). He uses an example from Yemen, where participating in a poetry tournament distinguishes those who participate in it from members of those social and ethnic categories who do not. Taking an example from a context more familiar to the present writer, we could say that participating in a heavy metal music festival creates a space of shared experience among the participants that is important for their sense of identification with this particular subculture (Varas-Díaz / Scott, 2016).⁷

7 Cf. Schulze (2015) for a critique of the clearly defined boundaries the term *subculture* implies.

Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011) puts forward the concept of *belonging*, which she proposes instead of identity.⁸ Under belonging, she subsumes commonality; a “sense of mutuality” and “collective allegiance”; and finally “material and immaterial attachments that often result in a sense of entitlement” (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011, p. 201). Commonality “is a *perception* of sharing, notably sharing common lot as well as cultural forms [...], values, experiences and memory constructions” (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011, p. 202, emphasis in the original). This shared understanding fosters a sense of mutuality, which entails mutual obligations and something she calls *regimes of belonging*. This term “combines the cosiness of human forms of commonality, the warmth of communitarian existence, with its putative opposite, i.e. ‘regime’ as something authoritative and constricting” (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011, p. 205). Attachments, finally, “make people belong to spaces and sites, to natural objects, landscapes, climate, and to material possessions” (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011, p. 206), a dimension of belonging we will encounter quite frequently in the corpus. While I follow her in stressing the importance of *space*, she emphasizes space and particularly *home* so much in her concept of belonging (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011, p. 207) that it loses the traction to theorize the multiplicity of belongings found in transnational communities, global subcultures or professional identifications. While there are many local differences between doing linguistics in Western Europe and India, for example, an international conference will nevertheless make participants feel a sense of belonging due to shared professional interests and experiences. Similarly, a heavy metal fan will feel “at home” in most concert venues and metal crowds around the globe because the music and the subculture connected with it are recognizably shared. This type of belonging has been explored especially in terms of multi-sited communities (Marcus, 1995; Schulze, 2015), or in those characterized by transnational migrations and superdiversity (Appadurai, 1996; Blommaert, 2013; Padilla et al., 2015; van de Vijver et al., 2015; Vertovec, 2007, 2009).

III. Actors, processes, and context

Barth (1994, p. 25) reminds us that people’s attitudes towards the groups they perceive in the world may change over time. In the same vein, Brubaker (2002, p. 168) suggests that we view successful groupness as an event –

8 Cf. Vallengin (2019) for a thorough theorization of this concept and its application to a Guatemalan Highland community.

which may but does not necessarily occur. Grounding groupness firmly in the realm of (individual) social interactions, we have to view social identification and the concomitant processes of groupness as “*practical accomplishments* rather than *static* form” (Jenkins 1994, p. 218, emphasis in the original). This means analyzing the actors of group-making projects and how their endeavors impact on and are perceived by the individuals they target. Such actors strive to determine the salience of one category over another (ethnicity over gender over professional identification, for example) and to make it an important feature of the respective lifeworld (Barth, 1994, p. 12). These actors also complicate the researcher’s job through their *reification* of the things we seek to investigate (Barth, 1994, p. 13). This makes them overstate the “cultural cleavages” between groups:

We need to recognize that the dichotomized cultural differences thus produced are vastly overstated in ethnic discourse, and so we can relegate the more pernicious myths of deep cultural cleavages to the category where they belong: as formative myths that sustain a social organization of difference, but not as descriptions of the actual distribution of cultural stuff. (Barth, 1994, p. 30)

It is clear that group making projects do not usually start “from scratch”, as it were, but employ some contextually salient features that might be made relevant⁹ and, in the “best” case, an already heightened sense of groupness (Brubaker, 2002, p. 171). What a challenge it is to reach levels of groupness conducive to joint action can be observed, for instance, in the rather slow movement in post-Soviet Georgia towards an active civil society focusing on political challenges beyond territorial sovereignty. More sharply put, the fact that it is human beings categorizing their environment and then raising the feeling of groupness to perhaps dangerously violent heights, does *not* mean that this is in any way a context- and history-free process. It does mean, however, that we as analysts must look at the *processes* at work, rather than taking the categories presented to us by the actors we encounter for granted.

Before moving on to the topic of boundaries, let me clarify what kinds of identification I am interested in, as the above discussion may have appeared to move rather freely between what in other works is juxtaposed as *social identification* vs. *ethnic identification*. While Barth is clearly concerned with questions of ethnic identification, other authors discussed here (most notably Brubaker, Jenkins, and Wimmer) stress the similarity of group formation and collective identification across all types of groupness, whether framed in ethnic, regional, political, religious, national, (sub)cultural or professional

9 *Diacritics* in the terms of social anthropology (Cohen, 1994, p. 63).

terms.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the question how exactly *ethnicity*, “*race*” and *nation* relate to each other remains. Some authors, notably Jenkins (1994) and Wimmer (2008), argue that ethnicity is the umbrella term and that “*race*” and *nation* are special historical cases of ethnicity. Brubaker (2014) contends that this special historical context makes the categories ethnicity and nationhood do different things: a claim to nationhood is almost always also a claim to political independence, for instance, while a claim to ethnicity may stop at questions of special minority rights. In the present study, the theoretical distinction between categories and groupness matters, less so the type of collective is evoked. In terms of the categories at work in the lifeworlds of my consultants, the question is always about *national belonging*, which in most cases is perceived to hinge on ancestry and religion, as Chapters 5 to 7 will show.

B. The limits of belonging: Boundaries

The one important feature missing so far from the discussion of Anderson’s (1991) features of an imagined community is the sense of it *being limited*. This Section is devoted to developing a working definition of what I will mean by the term *boundary* in this book. The first eloquent and comprehensive definition comes from Hegel:

Die Negation ist im Dasein mit dem Sein noch unmittelbar identisch, und diese Negation ist das, was wir *Grenze* heißen. Etwas ist nur *in* seiner Grenze und *durch* seine Grenze das, was es ist. Man darf somit die Grenze nicht als dem Dasein bloß äußerlich betrachten, sondern dieselbe geht vielmehr durch das ganze Dasein hindurch.¹¹ (Hegel 1970, p. 197; emphasis in the original)

Thinking about boundaries as all-pervasive is not unappealing. It does, however, beg the question of how we are supposed to empirically research something that does not only bound but permeate all existence. Karafillidis (2009, 2010) draws attention to the specific *operation* of the *nackte Grenze*, the

10 Note that Barth (1969, p. 28) holds that while ethnicity and other types of social status work similarly in many cases, it is much harder to lose ethnicity than other types of social status, like rank for example. In that, it may be similar to other rigidly constructed categories like gender.

11 “In existence, negation is still immediately identical with being, and it is this negation that we call *border*. Something is only *in* its border and *because of* its border what it is. Therefore one must not regard the border as simply external to existence, but it rather runs through all existence.” My translation.

‘naked boundary’ (Karafillidis, 2010, p. 78f.), asking what the boundary actually does once it is stripped off the particular (sociological, tangible etc.) entities it separates and connects in whatever empirical situation? His answer is that the primary operation of the boundary is that it divides and connects, which he then proceeds to term *Kopplung* ‘coupling’ and *Entkopplung* ‘decoupling’. These operations are closely connected, there is no coupling without there being at the same time a decoupling on another level or in another place – at least as long as we are actually dealing with a boundary (Karafillidis, 2010, p. 84f.).

This fundamental operation of the boundary is in other work usually grasped in terms of its potential to include and exclude. This mechanism of including “one’s own” while excluding “the other” is central to much of the sociological, linguistic and anthropological interest in the topic, as well as to this book. While social boundaries are particularly powerful and appear incontestable when they are made to look “natural”, “clear”, or “simple” (Vasilache, 2007, p. 50), this clarity masks the complexity of apparently “simple” boundaries (Gerst et al., 2018b, p. 5f.), as we will see below. Importantly, boundaries may be maintained from one side, rather than from both sides, often excluding or being imposed upon those with less power (Barth 1969, p. 31; Tilly 2004).

Before further exploring the characteristics of the boundary, some clarifications of how the terms *boundary* and *border* relate to each other are indispensable. Haselsberger (2014, p. 509) defines *border* as “a legal line in space”, thereby placing it squarely in the political and spatial realms. *Frontier* she describes as a term that is covered in contemporary writing as *border region*¹²: the area on both sides of a (geographical) border, an area rather than a line, soft and fluid in terms of where it starts and ends. *Boundary* for her is a “linear concept, demarcating one particular facet (e.g. religious community)” (Haselsberger, 2014, p. 509). As we will see in Section I. below, these boundary lines can be layered, making the boundary thicker with each “particular facet” that is aggregated. Haselsberger notes in passing that in anthropology and the social sciences, boundaries are taken to be contested and not stable. In her reading, however, a boundary is a clear linear concept – echoing her

12 For an overview of the development towards reconceptualizing borders as kaleidoscopic, blurred, pluritopical and plurivocal *borderscapes* cf. Brambilla (2015). Cf. Anzaldúa (1987) for a ground-breaking early account of being “both here and there” in the Mexican-US *borderlands*, and for how the frontier serves as a place of interaction as much as of closure.

spatio-political interest in the matter.¹³ Cohen (1994, p. 63) uses the term *diacritical feature* instead, reminding us that it is not just any difference but specific ones that are relevant in creating layers of social boundaries.

But how are these social boundaries to be understood? And how do they relate to spatio-political borders? Lamont / Molnár (2002) suggest to distinguish between *symbolic* and *social* boundaries. Whereas symbolic boundaries are categories claimed and ascribed by and to people and subject to being negotiated and contested in interaction, social boundaries are “objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and non-material) and social opportunities” (Lamont / Molnár, 2002, p. 168). They see the difference between symbolic and social boundaries as one of individual vs. group processes: “The former exist at the intersubjective level whereas the latter manifest themselves as groupings of individuals” (Lamont / Molnár, 2002, p. 169). Crucially, they take the existence of a symbolic boundary to be “a necessary but insufficient condition for the existence of boundaries” (Lamont / Molnár, 2002, p. 169).¹⁴ Wimmer similarly distinguishes between a boundary’s *categorical* and *behavioral* dimensions:

The former refers to acts of social classification and collective representation; the latter to everyday networks of relationships that result from individual acts of connecting and disconnecting. [...] Only [...] when ways of seeing the world correspond to ways of acting in the world, shall I speak of a social boundary. (Wimmer, 2008, p. 975)

There are objections to this way of conceptualizing boundaries: Karafillidis (2010) contends that symbolic boundaries are social boundaries too, since symbolic boundary-making necessarily takes place in the social sphere. He therefore suggests differentiating between *symbolic* and *institutionalized* social boundaries. Jenkins (2015) underlines the interactional nature of these processes: “The existence of a symbolic or categorical boundary can only be known if it is expressed in behaviour such as speaking, writing or non-verbal

13 Similarly, van Houtum (2005) speaks of the discipline of border studies having shifted from being interested in the *boundary line* to *border studies* that “can now dominantly be characterized as the study of human practices that constitute and represent differences in space” (van Houtum, 2005, p. 672). Cf. also contributions to Wilson / Donnan (2012).

14 One example Lamont / Molnár (2002, p. 176) give of how symbolic boundaries are turned into social ones relates to people being reprimanded if they fail to conform to gendered expectations. Cultural markers being employed to strengthen class distinction in the sense used by Bourdieu (1984) is their example of symbolic boundaries being used to legitimize social boundaries.

communication” (Jenkins, 2015, p. 12). Although it leaves out the material aspects of boundaries (cf. Green, 2017; Star, 2010), this understanding does allow for the social and material accomplishment of not only the boundary but also the border. While Jenkins (2015) characterizes the difference between border and boundary studies as one of academic discipline rather than substance, current approaches in cultural studies aim to unite transdisciplinary perspectives on spatio-political borders and socio-cultural boundaries (Gerst et al., 2018b; Gerst / Krämer, 2019; Weier et al., 2018).

This brings us back to the features of boundaries that are relevant to the present study. Apart from their inclusionary and exclusionary nature, I discuss how boundaries 1) rely on and constitute difference(s), 2) are relational, 3) are subject to negotiation and processual, 4) surpassable, and 5) complex. I will address these points in turn.

Firstly, perceived and constructed *difference* is crucial for boundaries. Green (2009) draws widely on Derrida’s notion of *différance* to theorize boundaries as *traces* (a term she ultimately abandons in favor of the even less “linear” *tidemarks*):¹⁵

The fabric of the trace, for Derrida, is difference; and difference is articulation. That sounds to me like quite a good description of border: an entity that always-already implies difference; the articulation of difference. (Green, 2009, p. 12f)

In less poetic terms, boundaries make difference(s) visible. Indeed, the perception of things “being different on the other side” accounts for much of what my consultants refer to when they talk about the – internally homogenized (cf. Hirschauer, 2014) – groups they discern in their lifeworld. Recall, however, that not every difference constitutes a boundary.

Secondly, by excluding the Other, any boundary nevertheless constitutes a relation between the things it separates, as the Other remains present in its exclusion (Kleinschmidt, 2014; Lamont / Molnár, 2002). This resonates with Tilly (2004), who views boundaries as made up of four types of relations: relations on either side of the boundary (1-2), relations across the boundary (3) and representations about the boundary on both sides (4) (Tilly, 2004, p. 214). Karafillidis takes Tilly’s concept of relationality and expands it by reminding us that these four relations are related to differently by members of both groups, thereby establishing a complexly interwoven network of relations of relations:

15 The concept of boundaries as traces and thereby inherently *historical* will allow me to tease out precisely these traces of historical contexts in the interviews. Cf. also Little (2015); Höfler (2019); Hirschauer (2014); Hurd et al. (2017).

Genau genommen haben wir es sogar mit einer vierstelligen Relationierung von Relationen zu tun, denn in den Geschichten über die Grenze und ihren Relationen wird *auf beiden Seiten* diese vierstellige Relationierung reflektiert und ineinander verflochten.¹⁶ (Karafillidis 2009, p. 109, emphasis in the original).

While the present corpus does not yield information on all four types of relations Tilly makes relevant, it is possible to investigate some of them. Crucially, by narrating one's perspective on and experiences of the boundary to an outsider a fifth relation is constituted.

Conceiving boundaries as relational enables us, thirdly, to view boundaries as interfaces between the perceived “groups” (Lamont / Molnár, 2002, p. 179) – a site where negotiation and contestation may take place (cf. also Gerst / Krämer, 2019; Karafillidis, 2018). Boundaries are subject to ongoing negotiations about who and what belongs, or does not (Vasilache, 2007, p. 33), complemented by negotiations about what this belonging entails by self-ascribed members of a given “group”. Wimmer (2008, p. 998) rightly stresses that there must be some minimal consensus over which categories are meaningful and relevant in a situation, otherwise there can be no struggle over their interpretation and breadth. “Svan”, “Ach’arian”, “Greek” or “Georgian” are all categories that are used in everyday life in the rural region of Ts’alk’a – the struggle concerns the question of their salience, who they include and exclude, and what characteristics are ascribed to people who are internally and/or externally defined as falling into any of these categories. The struggle over who gets to define how the category “Greek” is filled, over who is included and excluded and thereby where the boundary is to be drawn, is also at the heart of the contest taking place in Greece. Both negotiations are discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

Understanding boundaries as subject to negotiation allows us to analyze them as historically contingent, i.e. temporal processes as much as social and spatial ones (Brambilla, 2015; Green, 2009; Hirschauer, 2014; Little, 2015; Tilly, 2004). Hence, terms such as *bordering*, *boundary (un)making* and *(de-)coupling* emphasize how both individuals and institutional actors act on boundaries: drawing them, fortifying them, questioning them, subverting them, changing them, tearing them down, re-establishing them, redrawing them. Consequently, Brambilla takes boundaries to be in “a constant state of becoming” (Brambilla, 2015, p. 17) and aims “for a *processual ontology* that

16 “Strictly speaking, we are dealing with a quadruple relation of relations, since in the stories about the border/boundary and their relations this quadruple relation is being reflected and intertwined *on both sides*.” My translation.

conceives reality as actively constructed, as what constitutes reality depends on human understanding and practice” (Brambilla 2015, p. 26, emphasis in the original). Taking boundaries to be negotiated and processual means they are accessible via a methodological approach focusing on interaction, as introduced in Section C..

In that, they are also products of narrative strategies that serve to fortify boundaries – and identifications:

Die besondere Betonung der Fremdheit und Andersartigkeit des hinter der Grenze Liegenden, ist eben kein Zeichen einer starken Grenze, sondern soll die Stärke der Grenze selbst erst produzieren, eine solche narrative Strategie ist demnach kein Zeichen von Sicherheit, sondern eher das sprichwörtliche Pfeifen im dunklen Walde.¹⁷ (Vasilache, 2007, p. 33)

An account of the quality and strength of any boundary therefore must take into account that boundaries presented in interaction as strong, thick, durable may reflect the speakers perception and/or intention more than the difficulty individuals may encounter in crossing or even noticing said boundary.

Fourthly, boundaries gain visibility when they are being crossed (Kleinschmidt, 2011, p. 11). In my data, consultants speak angrily about internal migrants using abandoned Greek houses as cowsheds – in my consultants’ eyes clearly crossing a boundary that for the “crossers” apparently does not exist in the same way. Furthermore, they are perhaps most strongly felt when they come up as insurmountable. This is true of national borders that are easily crossed by some but not by others: “they work differently on different individuals” (Rumford 2008, p. 9; cf. also Khosravi 2010). It is also true of social boundaries that heavily depend on the features made relevant for the ability to *pass*, as my consultants relate in their narrations about their and their community’s experiences in Greece.

As has become apparent, boundaries (and borders) are, finally, complex and multidimensional (Gerst et al., 2018b; Gerst / Krämer, 2019), which is grasped analytically in them being described as, for instance, *borderscapes* (Brambilla, 2015), *textures* (Weier et al., 2018), or *assemblages* (Sohn, 2016). In the following, we will examine the complexities relevant to the present study.

17 “The special emphasis on the strangeness and otherness of what lies behind the border/boundary is not a sign of a strong border/boundary, but intended to produce the strength of the border/boundary in the first place. Such a narrative strategy is therefore not a sign of security, but rather the proverbial whistling in the dark forest.” My translation.

I. Qualities of boundaries

Almost trivially, no two boundaries are the same. They differ in terms of their quality, in how they treat people of different categories, i.e. who can cross them more easily, and in which contexts they are made relevant and how. For Wimmer (2008) there are four dimensions in which (ethnic) boundaries may vary: their political salience, their social closure or groupness, their cultural differentiation and finally their stability, i.e. how easily and fast they can be changed. These four features determine the degree of individual choice in identifying oneself:

Where boundaries are not politically salient, where degrees of closure and hierarchization are low, when cultural differentiation has not produced an empirical landscape with clearly demarcated territories of cultural similarity, classificatory ambiguity and complexity will be high and allow for more individual choice. (Wimmer, 2008, p. 1002)

Regarding the dimension of social closure, he follows Weber in so far as “[h]igh degrees of closure imply that the boundary cannot be easily crossed” (Wimmer, 2008, p. 980). In the terms of the frameworks discussed below, high degrees of closure would equal a very thick or durable boundary. These frameworks – by Haselsberger (2014), and Schiffauer et al. (2018) – focus mainly on the variable of stability, which seems to coincide with if not depend on social closure. However, the other dimensions arguably also play a role and it is hard to imagine one of the four dimensions all by itself.

Schiffauer et al. (2018) advocate thinking “from the boundary”¹⁸ and propose a rather comprehensive framework for researchers to tap into – or to expand on (cf. Bossong et al. 2017; Gerst et al. 2018b; Gerst / Krämer 2019; Zinkhahn Rhobodes 2016). Firstly, they distinguish between the *spatial*, *social* and *temporal* dimension of boundaries. These can coincide but

18 “Anzustreben ist eine Analyse, die nicht Grenzen als im wahrsten Sinne ‚peripheres‘ Phänomen am Rande mitberücksichtigt, sondern analytisch an diesen Grenzen ansetzt, um somit auch sozial-kulturelle Ordnungen als etwas sichtbar zu machen, was sich immer erst über mehr oder minder stabile oder fragile Grenzziehungen zu einem Außen ergibt und dabei unintendiert mannigfache Zwischenzonen produziert” (Schiffauer et al., 2018, p. 12).

“An analysis should be sought, which does not only marginally include borders/boundaries as a truly ‘peripheral’ phenomenon, but which starts analytically at these borders/boundaries, in order to show socio-cultural orders as something only ever resulting through more or less stable or fragile boundary-making *vis-à-vis* an outside and at the same time unintentionally producing manifold intermediate zones.” My translation.

theoretically do not have to, even if they do coincide in the overwhelming majority of empirical cases. In the analysis, I will focus on the interplay of temporal, spatial and social aspects of establishing boundaries with differing qualities. An analytical focus on space and time is crucial for a full understanding of the emergence of social positions and boundaries. So, while Chapter 6 explores the social changes after the end of the Soviet Union, it is their temporal relation to “how things were before” that is made relevant in the interviews and allows my consultants to position themselves in the new social order, for instance as GOOD GEORGIAN CITIZENS (cf. Höfler, 2019).

The second analytical perspective Schiffauer et al. (2018) suggest is to examine boundaries concerning their *durable*, *permeable* or *liminal* qualities. While the text suggests these to be heuristic categories marking different states of boundariness, conceptualizing them in reference to a continuum appears more promising for a process-oriented approach. A durable boundary would be one established as hard or, at the extreme end of the continuum, impossible (for some) to cross, with the social categories it differentiates constituted as irreducibly different in the situation in which they are made relevant.¹⁹ In the interview corpus, durable boundaries are in many cases established using the religious differentiation between CHRISTIANITY and ISLAM as insurmountable and opposing. A permeable boundary, in contrast, would be one established as traversable under certain conditions; most international borders, for instance, are permeable for individuals with passports constituting them as citizens of the Global North (cf. Khosravi, 2010; Rumford, 2012). At the extreme end, a boundary that all individuals can cross without notice has ceased to exist. Liminality characterizes the boundary during moments or periods of transition. It is the quality of the change from one category or state to another, as delineated for *rites-de-passage* in Turner (1987) and elaborated in contemporary approaches as a processual quality inherent in all boundaries (cf. Gerst / Krämer, 2019; Horvath et al., 2015; Kleinschmidt, 2011; Rampton, 1999). Indeed, conceptualizing the post-Soviet transitions as a (perhaps prolonged) liminal phase is the only way to do justice to the way consultants speak about it (cf. Chapter 6; Höfler 2019).

As we have seen, Haselsberger (2014) treats boundaries as *layered*, with more layers increasing a boundary’s thickness, or stability. She differenti-

19 While in principle it were entirely feasible for me to join the police force, if I am stopped and asked by a police officer to identify myself, the categories and possible ranges of action ascribed to us in that situation are fundamentally and impassably different.

ates between four subsets of boundary layers: geopolitical, socio-cultural, economic and biophysical (Haselsberger, 2014, p. 507). Discussing geographical borders, her argument is “that the thicker a border is, meaning the more boundaries it consists of and the more functions imposed upon it over the years, the more difficult it is to cross, both physically and mentally” (Haselsberger, 2014, p. 510). Thin boundaries, then, are more permeable whereas thick boundaries become increasingly more durable. As a first conceptualization, the layering approach is empirically helpful, although the socio-cultural subset needs further development for our purposes: religious, ancestral, linguistic, and boundaries relating to everyday practices all play a role for Georgia’s Greek community. However, it is not only their interplay that needs to be explored, it is also crucially the relevance they are imbued with. Finally, for Haselsberger the boundary appears to be a cumulative process only: she does not account for the removing of layers: boundaries or layers becoming less relevant and finally shifting or dissolving. As we will see in Chapter 7, however, some boundaries in my corpus are subject to processes of blurring and loss of relevance.

II. (Un)making boundaries

Taking boundaries to be processual poses the question of how their making and unmaking is achieved. Barth (1969) can quite rightly be said to have stood anthropology on its feet, as it were, in moving the focus away from writing histories of cultural traits to writing about processes of boundary-making and their maintenance. Importantly, it is those features that are made relevant by the actors that will determine how (and where) the boundary is drawn (Barth, 1969, p. 14). This, in turn, depends on whether enough people can be made to subscribe to a particular perspective on the world:

One major impetus to ethnicity arises if people can be made to join in creating the appearance of discontinuity by embracing a few neatly contrasting diacritica, rather than the variable and inconstant whole of culture. An imagined community is promoted by making a few such diacritica highly salient and symbolic, that is, by an active construction of a boundary. (Barth, 1994, p. 16)

Even though Barth (1969, p. 15) famously claimed to be more interested in the boundaries drawn than in the stuff they enclose, one can not be considered

without the other, especially if we bear in mind the previous discussions on the importance of shared experiences for belonging.²⁰

Wimmer (2008) offers what he claims is the first systematic framework of “different degrees of political salience of ethnic boundaries, of social closure and exclusion along ethnic lines, of cultural differentiation between groups, and of stability over time” (Wimmer, 2008, p. 972). To do so, he combines attention to the institutional framework, power relations and actor networks with a typology of the already mentioned *Elementary Strategies of Ethnic Boundary Making*, elaborated in more detail in Wimmer (2013). The typology comprises *expansion*, *contraction*, *inversion*, *repositioning* and *blurring* of (ethnic) categories. Expansion and contraction have to do with changing the size of the category in question, in one case making it larger (“peasants” and many others into “Frenchmen” in Weber’s 1976 famous dictum), in the other excluding people from the in-group (Wimmer, 2008, p. 987). Inversion covers attempts at reinterpreting the hierarchy between groups – the Black Power movement is a famous example. Repositioning is a strategy, which individuals pursue to move from one category into the other; assimilation and passing are its main instruments (Wimmer, 2008, p. 988). In linguistic research, this is usually conceptualized as *crossing* from one discernible way of speaking to another (cf. Cutler, 2014; Rampton, 2000; Rampton / Charalambous, 2012). Blurring often takes the form of emphasizing “universal” values like belonging to “humanity” as such, rather than a smaller category and is said to be especially used by stigmatized groups (Wimmer, 2008, p. 989).

My consultants are both subject to and agents of contraction: the former when they are not recognized as “real Greeks” in Greece and the latter when they divide the category “Georgian” into “real Georgians”, “Svans” and “Ach’arians” in order to exclude the last from the positively evaluated category “Georgian” – whereas the excluded decidedly contest this categorization (cf. Chapter 7). Pontic Greek consultants sometimes attempt inversion when they claim that they, rather than “Greek Greeks”, are “real Greeks” because in their view they speak a more “archaic” form of the Greek language (cf. Chapter 5). An example of an Urum Greek consultant attempting inversion on the grounds of “ancestral purity” will be analyzed in excerpt 28 in Chapter 7. Repositioning plays a role especially in Greece, mostly through linguistic assimilation, which fits well to the majority society’s emphasis on language

20 To give credit where it is due, Barth (1994, 2000) later also expresses interest in the “cultural stuff”.

competence as the most relevant boundary feature, as introduced in Chapter 2. Boundaries being blurred to the point of their dissolution is something we will encounter when examining boundaries between Georgians and Georgian Greeks in Chapter 7, although Wimmer might analyze this too as a case of repositioning. I prefer to associate blurred boundaries in this context with an increase in permeability, because the image emerging from the analysis is not one of individuals or their putative community “moving across a threshold” but rather one in which the boundaries between the two categories become less relevant and blurred over time to the point of disappearing in certain contexts (cf. Hirschauer, 2014). In Wimmer’s (2008) theory, these five methods should be discussed in relation to relevant institutional frameworks, power relations and networks of the actors in question. Having discussed the Soviet Union as a nationalizing institutional framework in Chapter 2, we will see how this plays out in the analysis.

So far, this Chapter has aimed to situate the present work against theoretical approaches to processes of individual and collective identification, belonging, and the (un)making of boundaries. Crucially, these are social processes that rely on interaction to constitute the categories and boundaries in question and to establish which of their attributes is to be selected as relevant. One attribute that is made relevant very differently by consultants is LANGUAGE, which some evaluate as the most essential feature of identification while others evaluate it as marginal and almost superfluous (cf. Chapter 5). For many consultants, RELIGION and/or ANCESTRY determine inclusion or exclusion and thereby not only where the boundary is to be drawn but also how permeable it might be (cf. Chapter 7). It is thus not simply the *number* of layers accumulated (as per Haselsberger 2014) but how these layers are related by the interactants, which ones are made relevant, how these relevancies are contested and who holds the power to decide upon category membership.

From the analyst’s point of view, the stories and relations about the boundary as per Tilly (2004) are very productive, as is an emphasis on the historicity of boundaries and other social constellations (Green, 2009; Hirschauer, 2014). This is complemented by Schiffauer et al. (2018) and their reminder to closely examine the interplay between the social, temporal, and spatial dimensions. Finally, understanding boundaries as complex and multidimensional (Gerst et al., 2018b; Gerst / Krämer, 2019; Weier et al., 2018) allows me to explore questions of belonging and patterns of language use that enrich the analysis in important ways.

C. Methodological considerations

This Section tackles the challenge of developing a way to apply these conceptualizations of identification, belonging and the (un)making of boundaries to actual data. The theories outlined in the preceding sections already provide a number of pointers as to what such a methodology might look like. First and foremost, if the things we are interested in are established in interaction, it is interaction that we need to explore. Secondly, if we aim to study *categorization* and actions accomplished through the use of categories – establishing groups, contesting boundaries – research programs dealing with these processes like Conversation Analysis (CA) and Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) provide an appropriate approach. Both points are covered in Section I.. Thirdly, we need to look at how interlocutors position themselves and others in the interactions of interest. Since they are used frequently by my consultants, I will explore how deictics and narratives are used to this end in Section II.. Finally, in relating their lifeworlds and answering my questions, consultants draw on broader social, political, and cultural contexts. Section III. introduces a way to trace these links in the data.

Note that I will outline my approach here in a way that puts various things next to, or rather behind, each other. In the analytical Chapters 5 through 7 I will, however, follow the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 as they emerge from the interview data and elaborate the interactional devices consultants use in speaking about these topics as we go along. This is due to the primary research focus being content-based, as laid out so far, rather than being focused narrowly on the interactional devices used.²¹

Furthermore, it is particularly the *kommunikative Hervorbringung* ‘communicative production’ (Hausendorf, 2000), i.e. the *social* processes of identification, belonging and boundary-work that I am interested in, rather than their cognitive representation.²² This does not mean that participants do not, for instance, evoke shared knowledge in an interaction, but the analysis

21 In Höfler (2018b) I explore *chestno govorya* “honestly speaking” as an interactional device furthering proximity between interlocutors.

22 Cf. Hausendorf’s (2000, p. 16-19) discussion of treating the two as separate systems: “Innerhalb der Kommunikation kann nicht auf Zugehörigkeits-Repräsentationen zurückgegriffen werden, ohne daß bei diesem ‘Rückgriff’ aus der Repräsentation eine Darstellung wird, und vice versa kann innerhalb des Bewußtseins nicht auf Zugehörigkeits-Darstellungen Bezug genommen werden, ohne daß bei diesem ‘Bezug’ aus der Darstellung eine Repräsentation wird” (Hausendorf, 2000, p. 18).

focuses on the way this knowledge is referenced, which part of it and from what perspective.

Summing up my methodological approach as precisely as possible, I am engaged in an ethnographically informed conversation analysis as per Deppermann (2000, 2013a), which takes into account contexts beyond the immediate interaction wherever relevant, i.e. whenever speakers draw on these discourses for their positioning and boundary work.

I. Categorization

Taking a non-essentialist perspective on processes of identification, boundary-making and belonging implies avoiding presuppositions about an interaction and examine what is used and made relevant by its participants. For our purposes, this means we should not presuppose difference or convergence between two participants putatively differing or converging in their groupness but rather observe *how* differentiation or convergence are established in the particular interaction. The most promising way of doing this, I argue, is to reconstruct the interactional methods participants use to achieve an activity and to thereby establish and account of the meaning of said activity. Seminal ethnomethodological work by Garfinkel (1967) and Sacks (1992)²³ has inspired two broad strands of research relevant to the present study: Conversation Analysis (CA) and Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA), with the former having gained considerably more research momentum since their inception (Stokoe, 2012). Both are interested in how participants rather than analysts structure interaction and their social world, and orient to the ongoing interaction and participant roles in the interaction. Historically, CA has been more focused on the structure and organization of an interaction, and MCA more on the methods interactants use to describe and understand the world (Stokoe, 2012, p. 278). The present study draws on a combination of these approaches (Watson, 2015).

Central to the focus on how participants accomplish activities and establish their meaning is the basic tenet that interaction is ordered and structured *sequentially*. Voluminous research has appeared on elements of this interac-

23 Note that while in CA terminology I would mostly write about interactional *devices*, in Ethnomethodology it is not just researchers who have access to *methods*, but participants are also understood to be using observable methods to structure their lives and interactions, and to make sense of their lifeworlds (for a very readable introduction cf. Hester / Francis, 2004).

tively established ordering, for instance turn-taking or adjacency pairs (such as greetings or question-answer sequences).²⁴ Examining the sequential order of an interaction, it becomes apparent that conversational settings are not all the same: an interview differs markedly from, say, a family dinner table conversation in terms of the roles participants establish and fill. This must be taken into account when analyzing interview data (Deppermann, 2013b), especially when the interviewer is an outsider, like in the present study. Sequentiality has another implication for the analysis, namely that it is generally inadmissible to “jump ahead” and look for interpretative cues further ahead in the transcript, i.e. at things that had not already been articulated at that point in the conversation (Kesselheim, 2009, p. 27). At heart, this is an issue of context and will be discussed in more detail in Section III.. A further feature of conversation that becomes apparent in studying its sequential order is *recipient design*: the very stable observation that speakers orient towards what they presume and/or know about the knowledge and positions of their interlocutor(s), and towards the shared understanding that has already been established, either in the ongoing or in previous interactions. I will explore recipient design in the next Section II. and will now turn to matters of categorization.

Hausendorf (2000, p. 99) describes the establishment of *Zugehörigkeit*²⁵ as a “communicative problem” that is “solved” in interaction. He discerns three tasks that participants may carry out to accomplish this endeavor: *Zuordnen*, *Zuschreiben* and *Bewerten* (Hausendorf, 2000, pp. 106-14). In this process, entities are *categorized*, *ascribed* certain attributes, which are finally *evaluated*. Importantly, it is categorization that establishes category membership, making the other two steps optional (Hausendorf, 2000, p. 108). Categorization enables the other two: “Durch das Zuordnen werden das Zuschreiben und das Bewerten gleichwohl nahegelegt und in vielen Fällen sogar hochgradig anschlussfähig”²⁶ (Hausendorf, 2000, 112). Categorization, finally, is also the prerequisite for ascription, and evaluation is impossible without at least implicitly suggesting an ascription and a category. All three

24 For overviews cf. Goodwin / Heritage (1990); Hutchby / Wooffitt (2002); Kallmeyer (1988).

25 *Zugehörigkeit* translates as *belonging* or *membership* into English. When participants establish their category membership as GREEK, for instance, I will in most cases speak of identification. When *Zugehörigkeit* is accomplished through highlighting commonality and attachment as per Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011), I will speak of belonging.

26 “By categorizing, ascription and evaluation are nevertheless suggested and in many cases extremely connectable.” My translation.

may be established explicitly in the foreground of a conversation or merely suggested or signaled in the background of a sequence whose main topic is not the establishment of *Zugehörigkeit* (Hausendorf, 2000, p. 132).

In MCA literature, this is usually discussed in terms of ascribing *category-bound predicates* or *category-bound activities*, following Sacks (1992). Kesselheim uses the terms *Aufrufen* ‘to invoke’ and *Füllen* ‘to fill’ for categorizing and ascribing, respectively, and argues that categories may also be filled with evaluations (Kesselheim, 2009, p. 110f.). For the present purposes, Hausendorf’s triad is particularly useful, since distinguishing between these three tasks and being aware of their progression allows for a nuanced analysis of the interaction. From examining the interview data, it appears that it is especially the (negative) evaluation that interactively distinguishes an ascribed difference from a social boundary.²⁷

II. Doing things with categories: Positioning the self and others

Through interaction, participants achieve more than simply categorization, ascription and evaluation: they do things with categories by positioning them, themselves and their interlocutors to order their social world. To explore this, I will on the one hand outline the methods that emerge as the most important for the corpus,²⁸ and at the same time explain how positioning is achieved in narratives and through the use of deictics.

Positioning relies heavily on recipient design, underscoring the interactional nature of conversation: “Mutual orientation between speaker and hearer is the most basic social alignment implicated in spoken interaction” (Goodwin / Heritage, 1990, p. 292). This holds for seemingly basic activities like addressing the interlocutor depending on their presumed or contextually established social status, referencing previously established relative proximity or distance between interlocutors, as well as establishing and orienting to shared knowledge. This is particularly easy to observe in interactions in

27 Research on what Heitmeyer (2012) broadly labels *gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit* ‘group-related hostility’ also points to negative evaluation being at the core of social boundaries that are established and perceived as durable (Dijk, 1987; de Cillia et al., 1999; Hå, 2004; Tajfel, 1981; Wodak et al., 2009).

28 For studies exploring methods for the construction of identification and belonging more generally and that come up with quite comprehensive catalogs of methods and linguistic forms cf. Dijk (1987); Hausendorf (2000); Kesselheim (2009); Roth (2005); Wodak et al. (2009).

which the participants have never met before and carefully establish shared knowledge on their similarities and differences. In cases where participants relate things that might be read as (socially) contentious – for our purposes especially in evaluating an established out-group very negatively – participants may also carefully test the reactions of their interlocutor(s) in building their account over a number of turns (cf. Roth, 2005; Stoltenburg, 2009). This is observable in interactional data:

if a category-feature formulation ‘works’, that is, it does not become the object of repair, then it works on the basis that speakers share category knowledge and unspecified inferences enough to progress the sequence underway. (Stokoe, 2012, p. 291)

This co-construction also happens in much less precarious contexts, in which participants support each other in establishing meaning. This can range from producing supportive feedback signals during a narration (Czyżewsky et al., 1995, p. 80) via longer and substantial contributions – co-constructing a narrative, for instance (Fina / Georgakopoulou, 2008) – to the explicit co-construction of utterances (Jacoby / Ochs, 1995; Jungbluth, 2011, 2016; Thörle, 2012). Participants may also voice disagreement and contest the account being produced. Crucially, this means that all people present in an ongoing interaction should be considered *active* participants and cannot be left out of the analysis (Czyżewsky et al. 1995, p. 80; Kesselheim 2009, p. 28).²⁹

As an introduction to positioning, categories enable the ordering of the world in that collections or sets of them may be structured in a way that assigns categories within the set different positions (Stokoe, 2012, p. 281). A “sports team” or a “family” might be established as such sets. Note that even though some sets may appear to be more conventionalized and therefore stable across contexts,³⁰ they nevertheless have to be at least hinted at and filled every time they are invoked.³¹ Establishing the Soviet Union as a “family”, as featured

29 This means including in the transcript all listener responses that my colleague Nika Loladze and I produce, instead of leaving them out as “inconsequential”, and to draw on our participation in the analyses.

30 Sack’s (1992, p. 255) famous example “The baby cried. The mommy picked it up.” illustrates such a highly conventionalized set.

31 While in Sacks (1992) there are examples of both: category sets being established sequentially as well as categories that are taken to be somehow “universal”, contemporary research on membership categorization has firmly embraced the sequential and interactional approach (cf. Deppermann, 2013a; Hausendorf, 2000; Kesselheim, 2009; Stokoe, 2012; Watson, 2015).

in Chapter 6 shows that category sets can be employed for purposes beyond what might be deemed their conventional application.³² Another instance of this type of positioning is the hierarchical ordering of the language varieties I ask consultants about (cf. Chapter 5). When it comes to ordering social categories, the most frequent method speakers use in the corpus is to *contrast* the categories by way of evaluating the attributes they have ascribed to them, i.e. by way of comparing and evaluating their category-bound predicates and activities.³³ In the relevant sequences in my corpus, this whole process – categorization, ascription, evaluation, contrast – is usually achieved through narratives, in which the first part of the contrastive comparison is the one evaluated as “better”.

Doing positioning with categories is only one of a number of ways interlocutors can signal, negotiate and contest their position(s) in an ongoing interaction. I will look at three main concepts, namely *sociolinguistic variation*, *deictic expressions*, and *narrative*. From a sociolinguistic perspective, there is well-established research on the ways speakers signal their regional and/or social identification and belonging by way of adapting their language use (Bucholtz / Hall, 2005; Gumperz, 1982; Labov, 1966; Le Page / Tabouret-Keller, 1985; Tabouret-Keller, 1997; Rampton, 2000; Schilling-Estes, 2004). As I am not a competent speaker of all the languages spoken by Georgian Greeks, these types of positioning will play only a minor role in the analysis.³⁴ The way to get from the use of a specific linguistic feature to something like an interactional position or regional identification is to treat it as *indexical*, i.e. as referencing a social category or position within or external to the ongoing interaction. Note that contemporary (socio)linguistic approaches as well as traditional CA and MCA treat all language use as indexical in that its meaning is interactively established and negotiated, and can only be made sense of in its sequential context (Garfinkel / Sacks 1976, p. 143ff.; Gal / Irvine 2019; Silverstein 2003).

32 Cf. Thun-Hohenstein (2015b) for a detailed discussion of the conventionalization of this metaphor for the Soviet Union. For an appeal to extend MCA beyond the realm of establishing and positioning purely social categories cf. Gerst (2016).

33 Contrast as a method of establishing clear and morally evaluated differentiation between categories – boundaries in the terms laid out in the preceding sections – has been studied *inter alia* by Dijk (1987); Hausendorf (2000); Kesselheim (2009); Roth (2005); Stokoe (2012); Tajfel (1981). For contrast as a method to achieve self- and other positioning in an ongoing conversation cf. Gal / Irvine (2019); Kern (2009).

34 I will discuss the issue of the interview languages in more detail in Chapter 4.

Focusing on deictic expressions of place, time and person offers the analyst a straightforward starting point for exploring how participants position themselves and others in the context of the interaction as well as with regard to larger societal contexts (cf. Section III.). Since the analysis in Chapters 5 to 8 is structured around matters of content rather than linguistic form, I will summarize some of the findings here. I will start with person deixis, as it is most easily connected to social categorization, before considering place and time. Much research on referencing categories and/or social “groups” through the use of personal pronouns has focused on the dichotomy of *us* versus *them* (cf. contributions to Duszak 2002, especially Hausendorf / Kesselheim 2002; Helmbrecht 2002), which I will discuss together with narrative below.³⁵ The first person plural *we* has also attracted much attention (cf. Pavlidou 2014a). Apart from expressing the speaker’s membership in the collective referenced, the precise extension of this collective will in many cases remain more or less ambiguous (Helmbrecht, 2002; Pavlidou, 2014b). An example from the present corpus is the contrast between the clearly indexed “Europe” and a space referenced by the expression “how we do it”, which could contextually refer to the inhabitants of a certain village, of Georgia, or of the post-Soviet space as a whole (excerpt 26, Chapter 7). The first person plural possessive pronoun is used with fairly high frequency in my data to refer to the Georgian Greek in-group. This may happen either in conjunction with the substantive, as in *nashi greki* ‘our Greeks’ or simply *nashi* ‘our_PL’.

Further to positioning their more or less ambiguous in-group, participants may also indicate “ihre eigene Position in dem von ihnen konstruierten Kategoriengeflecht”³⁶ (Kesselheim, 2009, p. 117) more explicitly. To achieve this, participants may declare their category membership or evaluative *stance*³⁷ towards something by using the first person singular: “Durch das Selbst-Verorten wird im Gespräch eine Art ‘Nullpunkt’ festgesetzt, von dem aus die Gesprächsteilnehmer die von ihnen konstituierten Gruppen beurteilen”³⁸ (Kesselheim, 2009, p. 118). This is also where the relationship between the participants is interactively established (Jungbluth, 2015) and their (dis)alignment and/or (dis)affiliation is negotiated. In terms of person

35 In my data this contrast is usually achieved through the juxtaposition of *my* (Russian) or *chven* (Georgian) ‘we’, and *oni* (Russian) or *isini* (Georgian) ‘they’.

36 “Their own position in the category network they construct.” My translation.

37 Stance is usually conceptualized as expressing an evaluative position, cf. contributions to Englebretson (2007) and Jaffe (2009), particularly Bois (2007).

38 “By locating the self, a ‘zero-point’ is fixed from which interlocutors evaluate the groups they constitute.” My translation.

deixis, the relationship between the interlocutors is established and made visible through terms of address and/or honorifics (Mondada, 1994; Silverstein, 2003). In my data, the second person plural *vy* (Russian) or *tkven* (Georgian) was the most common form of address among participants (both in how I addressed them and how they addressed me), especially in the beginning and always with people who were at least my age or older.³⁹ With younger consultants, the more informal second person singular *ty* (Russian) or *shen* (Georgian) was usually either established at the very beginning of the interview or took place gradually over the first few minutes of our conversation. Sequential shifts from second person plural to singular in those interviews where the plural form had been established as the conversational norm were mostly used by consultants in constructing general rules of “how things work”, using the second person singular to generalize their statement (cf. Roth 2005).

Moving on to explicitly spatial considerations, the physical orientation of participants has been shown to influence how they refer to the interactional space (Jungbluth, 2003, 2011). Mondada (1994) studies how the experience of space is turned into a topic of conversation. Contributions in Hausendorf et al. (2012) offer a number of interesting perspectives, albeit focused on how participants draw on the immediate interactional space as a resource. My analytical focus, however, is on how participants construct and compare spaces outside of our immediate conversational context in order to position themselves, their community and the various out-groups they establish.⁴⁰ Similar to space, there are a number of comprehensive accounts of temporality in interaction, focusing mostly on sequencing (cf. Deppermann / Günthner 2015; Hausendorf 2007). Less has been written on how time is made relevant and used as a resource for the construction of identification and boundary work. Specifically, what has not been attempted yet is a comprehensive analysis of spatial, temporal and social positioning in the interactional construction of identification, belonging and boundary (un)making.

Returning to positioning, Deppermann (2013a) conceptualizes the analysis of interactional positioning⁴¹ as heavily dependent on MCA methodology:

39 Note that both Russian and Georgian encode person through verbal inflection and that pronoun use is optional.

40 For an approach from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, cf. Torkington (2011).

41 Developed as Positioning Theory in Davies / Harré (1990); Harré et al. (2009), and adapted for the study of narrative particularly in Bamberg (1997); Bamberg / Georgakopoulou (2008).

Since social identities of persons in discourse provide for major relevancies of positioning activities, membership categorization of and attributing category-bound properties and activities to persons are basic practices of positioning. (Deppermann, 2013a, p. 67)

Difficulties for MCA arise, however, when the assignment of predicates or activities to a category are disputed in an interaction: “The same behaviors and even the same actions can be treated as giving evidence of different and even competing identity-ascriptions” (Deppermann, 2013a, p. 77). This type of contest is at the heart of a number of excerpts we will encounter during the analysis, in which there is negotiation and at times open conflict over the category membership indicated by the activity of speaking a Turkish variety.

Apart from the sociolinguistic variationist research tradition, narrative has been intensively discussed in reference to the interactional positioning that allows participants the establishment of identification and belonging. While Lyotard (2012) holds that knowledge itself is structured narratively, Sacks (1992) finds that people prefer to share knowledge via narrative rather than “simply stating facts”. Introducing identification as a social process at the beginning of this Chapter, we have already encountered theories that understand identification as a fundamentally narrative endeavor (cf. Günthner / Bückner, 2009; Hall, 1996).

Labov / Waletzky (1997) developed an approach to the analysis of narrative that has since been criticized for being too static, especially for the analysis of everyday *small stories* (cf. Bamberg, 1997, 2007; Bamberg / Georgakopoulou, 2008; Fina / Georgakopoulou, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2006, 2007).⁴² Studying narrative as a method whereby participants position themselves and others, three expanding contexts of positioning emerge: firstly, categories and actors are positioned in the contexts of the narrated situation, secondly participants are positioned in the context of the interaction itself through the narrated story – also by choosing which story to narrate and how, and thirdly participants are positioned in contexts external to the interactional context (Bamberg, 1997; Bamberg / Georgakopoulou, 2008; Deppermann, 2013a; Lucius-Hoene / Deppermann, 2004; Günthner, 2012; Wortham, 2000). As already mentioned, consultants frequently use narratives to establish and position various facets of the Georgian Greek in-group, a

42 Note that Dijk (1987) develops a narrative structure based on Labov / Waletzky (1997) – assuming that some parts of the structure “may remain implicit” (Dijk, 1987, p. 64) – and observes that stories, in which the out-group is established and evaluated negatively, in many cases do not end with a resolution of the narrated complication but establish the out-group as so problematic that the conflict cannot be solved.

number of out-groups and also the other participants in the conversation.⁴³ Of course, this is also a result of the interview set-up in which I ask narrative questions and in which Nika Loladze and myself support consultants through the feedback responses we produce. On the level of the narrated episode, we will see that consultants position themselves in many cases as active, quick-witted, and resilient in dealing with difficulties.

One method that comes up with some frequency in the narratives is the construction of *extreme cases*. Here I follow the terminology introduced in Pomerantz (1986),⁴⁴ who establishes it to analyze instances of generalization, which are interactively constructed in a way that makes it hard for the respective interlocutor(s) to object to the generalization. While this has been productively used in the analysis of positioning the out-group as morally deficient (Figgou / Condor, 2006; Tileaga, 2005), in the present corpus it is not only used in this vein but mostly to establish a *general rule* of “how things work”. To this end, an extreme case is constructed by giving an example that is perceived to be “far away” from the interview context and/or the lifeworld of the consultants. By positing that the established rule also holds for such an extreme case, the rule is shown to apply generally. In the corpus then, *empirical generalizations*, i.e. based on observation or established as “potentially observable”, are more conspicuous than *apodictic generalizations* in the typology offered by Kallmeyer / Keim (1986, p. 112). As observed already by Sacks (1992), members of any category are always established as *representative* of their category when they are invoked in narratives or other descriptive sequences: “Man kann einer Kategorie Verhaltensweisen oder Eigenschaften als typisch zuschreiben, indem man das Verhalten oder die Eigenschaften eines ihrer Mitglieder beschreibt”⁴⁵ (Kesselheim, 2009, p. 58).

Note that the opposite may also occur: particularly when talking about the transition from Soviet Union to the independent Georgian nation state, consultants frequently *downplay* the profundity and impact of the changes by positioning themselves as “normal” in the sense of not having experienced anything other Georgian citizens would not have experienced in those times (cf. Chapter 6).

43 For carefully elaborated accounts of how situated identification is constructed through narrative cf. Archakis / Tzanne (2005, 2009).

44 For further elaboration cf. Edwards (2000).

45 One can ascribe behaviors or characteristics as typical for a category by describing the behavior or characteristics of one of its members.” My translation.

III. Context

Categorization and positioning, and thereby identification and boundary (un)making may happen at various levels of context. The question is ultimately how societal relations are traceable in the data, how participants use them as resources and position themselves *vis-à-vis* these broader contexts and, finally, how much knowledge – ethnographic or otherwise – the analyst may bring to bear on the data at hand.

Earlier, I stressed the importance of analyzing data sequentially, since positions may shift and change during an ongoing interaction. We have now seen that narratives insert another layer of context into the interaction, namely that of the story told. Sequentiality is the basis of the analysis and has to be taken seriously: the same consultant may position categories differently at different points in the same interview interaction. Following the frequently assumed distinction between micro, meso and macro levels of context (cf. Barth 1994; Bucholtz / Hall 2005), Arendt (2011) proposes to label the sequential contexts *nano context*. While I do consider contexts at different scales, I will still write about sequences rather than nano contexts. The only context that is immediately traceable is the interaction, which in the case of the present corpus is retained in recordings and detailed transcripts. This is often referred to as the micro context, with the meso context usually given as the *communal level* of group-making activities and the macro context as mostly national or sometimes global (Arendt, 2011; Barth, 1994; Bucholtz / Hall, 2005). Depending on the topic, consultants do of course position themselves on greatly varying levels: ranging from their family to their work place, the village, the district, the region, the nation state, the post-Soviet space etc., with “the community” and the category membership they might make relevant varying accordingly. Usually these references, if they are explicit rather than simply inferred, are not neatly layered but depend on the positioning needs of consultants, which are often – but not always – invoked through my questions. Instead of arbitrarily deciding whether the analysis should view them as referencing meso or macro levels of context in these instances,⁴⁶ I will instead restrict myself to explicating the respective positions and their context.

While this may avoid establishing hierarchies where they are not made relevant, the challenge of including context into the analysis remains. From the perspective of Conversation Analysis, the answer is straightforward: the

46 For a scorching critique cf. Callon / Latour (2006).

analyst has at her disposal only the context that is explicitly observable in the interaction (Deppermann, 2000; Kesselheim, 2009; Schegloff, 1997; Stokoe, 2012). Historically, this has been an important precaution against foregrounding the analyst's categories, and has taught us a great deal about the organization of conversation and meaning-making within it. This precaution, however, renders at least some interactional sequences opaque, if not unintelligible:

In many cases, identities are implicitly indexed and ascribed; even explicit [membership categorization] and attribution of category-bound activities presuppose stocks of knowledge needed to understand the ramifications and allusions tied to the invocation of explicit categorizations. Thus knowledge of cultural discourses is often needed for noticing and almost always needed for a full understanding of how participants display and negotiate identities in talk. (Deppermann, 2013a, p. 83)

What is missing, in short, is *ethnographic knowledge* that is quite often necessary to understand the larger context of an interaction:

Not only does ethnography support and extend the conversation-analytic commitment to understanding interaction from the point of view of those who participate in it, but it also ensures that researchers view talk not as a chunk of text removed from any broader context but as a dynamic interactional process embedded in and inseparable from the social and cultural world from which it emerges. (Bucholtz / Hall, 2008, p. 153)

This precarious but necessary balancing act is further complicated by the absence of well developed ways of integrating ethnographic knowledge into conversation analysis (Deppermann, 2000, 2013a).⁴⁷ In elucidating the context necessary to understand the processes of identification, belonging and boundary (un)making, I will therefore proceed as cautiously as possible and as boldly as necessary. A certain boldness will indeed be required to uncover the historical traces that, as per Green (2009), might help us make sense of how, for example, consultants evaluate the importance of speaking Standard Modern Greek for GREEK category membership (cf. Chapter 5). When I use the term *discourse* in those instances, I refer to the (shared) knowledge produced in and by the respective socio-historical power constellations, i.e. to the knowledge relevant in the historically situated social context beyond the

47 This is only a balancing act from the point of view of CA, however, with (Critical) Discourse Analysis, for instance, being traditionally much less encumbered by worries of over-interpretation (cf. Dijk, 1987; Reisigl / Wodak, 2001). For careful analyses that do not explicitly draw on ethnographic knowledge cf. contributions in de Fina et al. (2006).

immediate interaction.⁴⁸ A similar boldness is required in extending the scope of the *omnirelevant device* (Sacks, 1992) beyond the immediate interactional context (cf. Fitzgerald et al., 2009; Fitzgerald / Rintel, 2013), i.e. using the term to refer to shared knowledge about the world. I will introduce this in the analysis of excerpt 2 (Chapter 5) and discuss its applicability to RELIGION and ANCESTRY as omnirelevant category sets in this corpus in Chapter 7.

To sum up, in this Chapter I have argued for an approach to processes of identification, belonging and boundary (un)making that takes them as interactional constructs achieved by all participants. With this background, the next step is to explicate the corpus on which this book is based.

48 For linguistically oriented introductions to this notoriously complicated topic cf. Blommaert (2005); Fairclough (1995); Spitzmüller / Warnke (2011); Wodak / Meyer (2001).

Chapter 4: Data collection and analysis

The anthropologist creates a doubling of consciousness. Therefore, anthropological analysis must incorporate two facts: first, that we ourselves are historically situated through the questions we ask and the manner in which we seek to understand and experience the world; and second, that what we receive from our consultants are interpretations, equally mediated by history and culture. Consequently, the data we collect is doubly mediated, first by our own presence and then by the second-order self-reflection we demand from our consultants (Rabinow, 1977, p. 119).

It is not enough to keep this “double mediation” of data in the backs of our minds when interviewing, analyzing data, writing about data and reading other people’s studies. It is also necessary to make the situatedness of the collected data transparent and to reflect the position(s) of the researcher in all interactions.

This Chapter introduces the *what* and *how* of the research process. In Section A. I will discuss the type of semi-structured interview I used and briefly introduce the topics discussed in the interviews. In Section B. I will introduce theoretical and practical considerations regarding the sample. In Section C. I will clarify how I found people to interview and reflect on the way any researcher constructs the field and changes it simply by being there. Finally, in Section D. I will explain the process of transcription, annotation, analysis, and written presentation of the interviews.

A. *The semi-structured interview*

Anthropological and ethnographic accounts have always put great emphasis on *participant observation*, which – like no other method – can lead to a holistic understanding of the community or situation in question. This is what Geertz (1973) has famously called “thick descriptions”, i.e. accounts that situate whatever they describe in the lifeworld of the consultants and communities written about. While it is theoretically possible to record many encounters during a participant observation, this would lead to a corpus of nearly unmanageable size, containing perhaps only a few instances of the type of material the researcher needs to answer her research questions. Although this can be countered by collecting a number of more structured interviews in addition to the participant observation, the main difficulty with this method

is that it is very time consuming. A further difficulty lies in the fact that the researcher significantly alters the social setting of all encounters observed or participated in, at least until she has “truly” become a part of the observed community – and it remains debatable whether this is actually possible (cf. Fox 2014; Rabinow 1977). The “unnaturalness” of interview situations is therefore not necessarily avoided. Furthermore, while everyday sense-making happens in and through everyday practices, this does not automatically make them easier objects of analysis (Kern, 2000, p. 21). A final problem for the present study arises from the multilingualism of the community in question. As mentioned before, the members of Georgia’s Greek community speak a large variety of languages in their daily lives – ranging from Urum or Pontic Greek, to Russian, Standard Modern Greek (SMG) and Georgian. An analysis of such “natural” data would have therefore been limited by my personal language competences, which include Russian and some Georgian but neither SMG nor Urum or Pontic Greek.

Although interviews have long been one of the core means for eliciting information in all kinds of disciplines and on a host of topics, they are increasingly seen as the least preferred option in terms of gathering information on people’s everyday life, perceptions and (self-)representations; particularly in ethnographic settings and in conversation analysis. This is mainly because interviews are a very special conversational context, and one that allows consultants to adopt different roles and to take different stances from those they might take in other, less formal, more familiar, everyday contexts. The “well reflected” and non-prejudiced persona a consultant may present to an interviewer, for example, may (or may not) contradict her (verbal) behavior in everyday interactions. Therefore, the focus has shifted to settings that more readily form part of consultants’ daily lives: accounts of quotidian community activities (Kesselheim, 2009), dinner table conversations (Ochs / Taylor, 1995), classroom talk (Rellstab, 2014), doctor-patient interactions (Spranz-Fogasy, 2014), encounters in civil service institutions (Kesselheim, 2009; Rosenberg, 2014), all manner of workplace settings, and so on.

Still, interviews enable the elicitation of comparable and recorded data in a manageable span of time. Crucially, consultants can be asked to explain otherwise implicit structures of knowledge that guide their everyday presumptions and interactions (Rabinow, 1977). A conversation analytical focus on the interaction between the participants in the special conversational setting that is an interview can help to mitigate the danger of drawing “wrong”, merely content-based inferences from the data (Deppermann, 2013b, p. 60).

In view of the previous Chapter's approach, an interview type encouraging consultants to tell bigger and smaller stories is paramount. Semi-structured interviews are ideal for this purpose for a number of reasons. The researcher complies with the expectations many consultants have regarding the interview situation as one where one person typically asks questions and another person answers them (cf. Wengraf 2001). The framework is both structured enough to elicit comparable information, and open enough to allow a "real" (if at least gently steered) conversation to take place with all the detours, cross-references, explanations, and jokes this may entail. The challenge is that the interviewer has to remain open to all the possible routes the interview may take on the way to covering all topics, and be quick-thinking and skillful enough to make use of the openness this approach allows (Flick, 2007, p. 223f.).¹

In the interviews, we discussed (not necessarily in this order):

- Narratives of how "the Greeks" first came to Georgia, how the consultant's grandparents had lived in their youth, how life was during the Soviet Union, the changes in the years since the end of the Soviet Union and Georgia's independence;
- Whether there had been any discrimination on ethnic grounds during the Soviet Union or after;
- Explanations for the massive Greek emigration out of Georgia and personal and family experiences thereof;
- The (conflict prone) internal migration to Ts'alk'a in the early 1990s and the situation there today;
- Language competence, use and evaluations of the consultants, in their families, their community and "the society";
- The consultant's sense of belonging and perception of inter- and intra-communal boundaries; and
- The consultant's and the community's religious and cultural practices.

Interviews generally started with attempts to elicit narratives in a roughly chronological order and then moved to the more abstract topics aiming for more detail about the construction of belonging. The interview was followed by a sociolinguistic survey covering and clarifying those variables not touched upon in the preceding conversation.

1 It is therefore not wholly surprising that Marcus (2009, p. 3) speaks of anthropologists as "participating in a culture of craftsmanship", thereby stressing that such "craftsmanship" has to be acquired.

B. *Who to speak to?*

Two main considerations helped me decide who to interview. The first is the oft-mentioned divergence in language use, which led me to label one “group” as *Urum Greek* and the other as *Pontic Greek* (cf. Chapter 1). In order to establish whether any differences exist between these two putative groups or whether the difference lies in the researcher’s assumptions, I had to treat them separately in the process of data collection. The second consideration is the importance of location that emerged clearly from previous research on the Georgian Greek community (Höfler, 2011; Sideri, 2006). I therefore treated rural and urban contexts as distinct sites with potentially differing experiences leading to divergent needs in establishing belonging to a certain community. Besides these considerations, age has proven to be an important factor (Höfler, 2011; Zoumpalidis, 2013). I tried to cover all ages starting from 18, but finding consultants under 30 proved challenging. Gender did not play a major role in my previous study, but I tried to balance the interviews. I also strove to cover a wide range of educational backgrounds and socio-economic positions, in order to get “extreme” as well as “typical” cases (Wengraf, 2001, p. 102f).

I envisaged a total of 40 interviews: 10 Urum Greeks in Tbilisi, 10 Urum Greeks in Kvemo Kartli (Ts’alk’a and Tetrts’q’aro region), 10 Pontic Greeks in Tbilisi and 10 Pontic Greeks in rural Ach’ara. While there were no problems finding enough Urum Greeks in Tbilisi and especially in the Ts’alk’a region, Batumi had to be exchanged for Tbilisi as the urban centre for Pontic Greeks. There are almost no Pontic Greeks living in the Ts’alk’a region anymore (there used to be three villages: Santa, Gumbati and Khareba), but quite a few still live in the Tetrts’q’aro region, with whom we managed to establish contacts. There are, thus, six unplanned interviews with Pontic Greeks in Kvemo Kartli. I did not interview fewer Pontic Greeks in rural Ach’ara because I expected the experiences of Georgian Greeks to be similar in Kvemo Kartli across the languages used and to differ from rural Ach’ara, where migration from the Ach’arian highlands to lower lying villages had occurred in far smaller numbers. However, I counted the four interviews with self-identifying Pontic Greeks in the isolated village of Tsikhisjvari in Samtskhe-Javakheti together with the seven of rural Ach’ara. Again, this followed the assumption that those villages, which had received much less, and less sudden, in-migration would provide similar environments and that accounts of out-groups would be comparable.

I interviewed a total of 49 self-identifying Georgian Greeks. 23 of them still speak or have a family history of speaking Urum as heritage variety. The interview locations break down into 10 in Tbilisi and 13 in the Ts'alk'a region of Kvemo Kartli. The age range is 19-77, with an average age of 43.9. 13 consultants were female, 10 male. 26 consultants still speak or have a family history of speaking Pontic Greek. Interviews were conducted in the following places: 6 interviews in the Tetrits'q'aro region of Kvemo Kartli, 9 interviews in Batumi, 1 interview in Tbilisi and 11 interviews with Pontic Greeks in the villages Dagva, K'virike and Ach'q'va in rural Ach'ara and the village Tsikhisjvari in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The age range for Pontic Greeks is: 19-81, with an average age of 50.5. 14 consultants were female, 12 male. Depending on the talkativeness of the consultants, interviews lasted 30-90 minutes.

All interviews were collected during two field trips: Four months in Spring 2013 and two months in Spring 2014, followed by a month-long trip to Greece and Cyprus. Map 4.1 shows the research sites, a table with sociolinguistic metadata on all consultants is found in Appendix A. I extended my second research trip with a stay in Thessaloniki, Greece, and Nicosia, Cyprus, because I felt compelled to see and feel for myself what life in Greece for Georgian Greek immigrants might be like. The informal conversations I had with Georgian Greeks and Greek Greeks in my three weeks in Thessaloniki and one week on Cyprus completed the picture.

C. Constructing and entering the field

Wherever researchers deal with empirical data that is not collected in some kind of a laboratory, they consider themselves to be “doing fieldwork”. While this seems straightforward and unproblematic in geology or biology, it becomes at least a little odd when the research centers on the lifeworlds of fellow human beings. What exactly constitutes “the field” is in most cases entirely up to the researcher and not to the communities that have “research done to them”. In the present case, the construction of the places I went to in order to “do fieldwork” is particularly striking: Without my poking around and asking questions about their language use, people that I labeled “Urum” for the sake of keeping two speech communities separate in my head and on these pages would not have been made aware that some academics with little knowledge about their lives were referring to them by this label (cf. Chapter 1). They certainly did not need yet another label emphasizing that



Figure 4.1: Research Sites. Map compiled by Nika Loladze (Loladze, 2019, p. 12).

the Greekness they claim for themselves may strike outsiders as a little odd and even cause them to come to their villages and “do fieldwork” on them. This is not to say I was not welcome. Quite the contrary, apart from the oddness I personified as someone with no family ties to the community or even to Georgia who still wanted to find out more about their way of life and seeing the world, the vast majority of my consultants appeared happy or even proud about this interest. In this Section, then, I want to make as transparent as possible what happened during my trips to the cities and villages that I consider to be “my field”, how I encountered people to interview and how we collaboratively established the communicative event interview.

The single most beneficial factor for my research was my participation in the VolkswagenStiftung (VW) funded research project *The impact of current transformational processes on language and ethnic identity: Urum and Pontic Greeks in Georgia* led by Konstanze Jungbluth and Stavros Skopeteas. In addition to the many useful contacts it made available to me and the almost constant exchange on preliminary findings, difficulties and inspirations, it allowed me to work, travel, collect data and think together with Nika Lo-

ladze, a human geographer working on the various Greek migrations in the project (cf. Loladze 2016, 2019). Our collaboration enriched this study in the following ways:

- My questionnaire was designed to make consultants explain many contexts to me, the outsider, in a thorough way. This outsider status also established the need to explain more complex socio-political processes. Having an “ethnic Georgian” participate in the conversation, who shares consultants’ understanding of the local contexts at least to a certain point, made them trust that I would not end up with the “wrong picture”.
- Our consultants always had someone of their own gender they could turn to in order to be “understood”.²
- Nika speaks Georgian, Russian and English either as native language or at a very high level, which helped balance my insecurities in Russian and especially in Georgian.
- Having grown up in Georgia, Nika was also far better than I in complying with the cultural norms stipulating how and when to approach potential consultants and how to approach and assess difficult topics or conversational situations. Again, there were topics I could address more easily without causing offense.

Employing the friend-of-a-friend or snowball method to encounter potential consultants has some disadvantages, for example that the researcher can never be sure whether she has covered “the field” broadly enough or whether the opinions represented are only those of a rather small circle of acquaintances (Flick, 2007; Wengraf, 2001). In every setting, we therefore used a variety of “entry points”.

In Tbilisi, Violeta Moisiidi was the enabler of the majority of interviews. Others were found via the Greek department at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU) and the *Federation of Greek communities of Georgia*. In Ts’alk’a, due to the large number of Urum Greeks still living there, it was comparatively easy to encounter potential consultants. Our first point of entry was with employees of the district administration. We then had the luck of finding an incredibly knowledgeable and helpful taxi driver. He turned into something of a professional: if we asked him to speak to an Urum Greek woman of not more than 30 years, he would know which village to take us to and who to talk to. For me, his way of stopping in front of a house in a

2 Apart from this potential orientation to putatively shared understanding on the basis of shared gender, gender was not usually made relevant in our conversations.

tiny village, beeping the horn of his car until someone came out and then starting a conversation that would last up to two hours with an *erti ts'uti* 'one minute' went against any politeness norm I had so far internalized in my life. Surprisingly few people turned down his request to talk "to these young students" "writing a book", though, and the ensuing interviews invariably turned out to be very interesting.

In Beshtasheni in the Ts'alk'a area, in Tsikhisjvari and in the Ach'arian villages (K'virike, Dagva and Ach'q'va) we often went into the (sometimes only) shop and asked where it would be good for us to start. In Batumi, a representative of the local Greek federation was our vital first entry point, while Nino Inaishvili of Batumi's Shota Rustaveli University and our Batumi host in 2014 provided us with contacts to Pontic Greeks who did not even know of the federation's existence.

A question arises concerning the motives of the people supporting us in finding interview partners. I did (and still do) take displayed helpfulness as exactly that: people trying to help us find somebody that would be interesting for us to talk to, combined with us providing a welcome distraction and perhaps lending some air of importance to our intermediary. Relying on others to introduce us requires, in turn, establishing who exactly would be interesting for us and quite a few of our contacts' ideas differed markedly from our own. Unsurprisingly, we were often directed first to the older and "more knowledgeable" people in the community, and to the ones that were felt to be "representative" in a positive way, and expected to make a good impression on us. A notable instance of the former occurred in Batumi in 2013, where we were initially directed to speak with a 93-year-old woman. She was delightful, showed me all the important photographs on display in the living room, made sure I always had enough food and drink, and the like. However, it was next to impossible to engage her in a more structured conversation. She either did not understand the question or could not find an answer, and I also found her Russian very hard to understand.³ In 2014, I spoke again to the contact who had recommended me to speak to the elderly lady and she was taken aback by the fact that I had not "properly" interviewed her: the old lady was so knowledgeable, she said, it was a crime not to use her information. To save face, we quickly settled on the old lady not having

3 In keeping with the firmly established gender roles common in Georgia, Nika Loladze was at that point smoking with the men and witnessing my being fed and led around the room with growing amusement.

been too well over the past year, which would have made the conversation too difficult for her.

There was, of course, a bias towards those people that had enough time on their hands to talk to us.⁴ We tried to balance this by conducting interviews whenever it would suit our consultants. Still, especially in the villages further out, we would be there mainly during the daytime. Additionally, both interview collection trips took place in spring, a time when most young men living in Ach'arian villages are engaged in seasonal migration to Turkey or Greece.

The interviews were held mainly in Russian with some in Georgian, if consultants felt more comfortable in Georgian. The main choice of language lay with the consultant and if they did not have a preference, we spoke Russian, due to my personal language constraints. Depending on their competence in Georgian, consultants who had chosen Russian as the main interview language switched more or less frequently. In more monolingual communities, this variety of languages could be interpreted as potentially inhibiting the consultants' (self-)presentation and -positioning. In dealing with such multilingual communication communities where two or three languages are routinely used, however, it is fairly safe to assume that my consultants all had the necessary experience of negotiating these issues in the languages they chose for the interview context.

There are important concerns about the *communicative hegemony* (Briggs, 1986, p. 90) asserted by the interviewer on her consultants by setting the topics and deciding at which point to move on. At the same time, unless the interviewer adopts the adequate manner of speaking in relation to the norms of the community, she may not get answers to her questions, unless she learns to phrase them "correctly". Communicative competence in the variety of the community is, therefore, paramount (Briggs, 1984, p. 21). Briggs (1984;

4 Negotiating suitable times for interviews was another thing I mostly left up to Nika Loladze and (in Tbilisi) Violeta Moisi, especially after one memorable interview in the beginning of my first trip in spring 2013. Violeta had told Nika and me that there was a lady we could speak to, but only in the morning and only until a certain time because she would be busy afterwards. To me, the time span offered appeared much too short for a relaxed interview and I was very reluctant to agree to it. By the time I turned on the recorder after tea, sweets and pleasant small talk, there was only about half an hour left – much too little time for the interview. Nobody else seemed particularly troubled by this lack of time, so I chose to see where the situation would take us. Two hours later we finally finished the interview and neither our consultant nor her husband had either voiced a lack of time or appeared in any way hurried.

1986) relates how he only got the information for which he had come to New Mexico after a lengthy process of becoming part of the community. In my case, this was somewhat alleviated by the fact that most interviews were conducted in Russian which, even though it still serves as a *lingua franca* in many contexts, is not usually mastered to perfection by its speakers on Georgian soil. This means that most of the time I was the only person troubled by my level of Russian. Everybody else would try to guess what I was on about and be as supportive as possible in answering my questions.

The age of the individual consultant would usually determine whether they tried as hard as they could to find out what exactly it was we wanted to know and frequently inquire whether they were helpful; or whether they would proceed in a more expert-like fashion to lecture “the naïve young girl from outside” on “what’s what” and what topics I *should* be interested in. Unsurprisingly, the former were usually younger consultants and the latter usually our older consultants. Most of the time, they merely emphasized things that interested me anyway or preempted a question I had planned to ask. Therefore, I was more than happy to be treated like a naïve adolescent, as this ensured I would get lengthy explanations on everything I wanted to know.⁵ Being put in the conversational role of treating them as experts on how they navigate their social world also made it even easier to ask for clarifications and explanations of certain points. Furthermore, their detours back to topics previously discussed at length merely underscored the importance of some topics to them, which is exactly what I need to analyze issues such as the importance of language competence for their sense of belonging.

D. From interview data to written analysis

After the mostly enjoyable fieldwork, the researcher’s task then turns to the transcription, annotation (or coding) and analysis proper of the corpus, the latter demanding reflection on how to (re-)present consultants when writing up the analysis. Importantly, analyzing does not begin only after annotation but is already present in the decisions one has to make about the transcription and is part and parcel of the process of annotating or coding (Glaser / Strauss, 2007; Lucius-Hoene / Deppermann, 2002; Wengraf, 2001).

5 Cf. Faubion (2009, p. 146) on the importance of “a considerable thickness of skin” necessary for any type of fieldwork.

Interviews were transcribed in the *Partitur Editor* of the software package EXMARaLDA, since it supports not only the transcription but also the subsequent annotation, comes with a corpus manager and an elaborate search tool (Schmidt / Wörner, 2009). Note that in this book, Russian is the language most often used in the excerpts. Segments in Georgian or SMG are marked by putting (kat) or (ell) after the speaker abbreviation.

As explained in the previous Chapter, an analysis of identification, belonging and boundary work in interaction relies on a detailed transcription of the interaction in question. To repeat the fundamental tenet once again, every utterance is ultimately co-constructed within the interview situation:

narrative interviews are ultimately interactional data in which the researcher is very much part of the narrative telling, and his/her role should be not just reflected upon but also all contributions by the researcher, whether verbal or non-verbal, should be fully transcribed. (Fina / Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 382)⁶

After completing *finely grained transcripts* following the convention and levels of elaboration laid out in the *Gesprächsanalytische Transkriptionskonvention 2* (GAT 2) (Selting et al., 2009) of seven interviews and the note-taking and reflection this involved,⁷ I narrowed the parts I finely transcribed down to those parts that appeared more directly relevant to my research questions.

Annotation and the development of (initially content based) categories started on the basis of the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, the semi-structured questionnaire discussed in Section A., and the observations and notes taken during the interview and transcription process. This accommodates the main focus of the study and precludes any pretensions that the researcher were without presuppositions. It is, however, crucial to *reflect on* and test one's assumptions on the data (Geertz 1973, p. 28; Wengraf 2001). In order to allow for the emergence of issues relevant to consultants, one must constantly ask: could it be different? What did I not take into account? For instance, in about half the interviews I was told, without having asked, that the ancestors of Georgia's contemporary Urum Greek community were made to "choose" between keeping either their language or their religion without having asked about it. This points to the importance of this narrative

6 Non-verbal material is excluded here, apart from a very select few instances.

7 Detailed step-by-step introductions are given in Lucius-Hoene / Deppermann (2002); Wengraf (2001).

for how members of Georgia's Greek community trace their identification through this mythical "answer" (cf. Chapter 5).⁸

Writing up the analysis poses a number of challenges in terms of (re-)presenting the material and consultants. The first concerns how to name consultants in the excerpts. Assigning random names is a difficult task, unfortunately, as both forenames and surnames are highly coded for national affiliation in the Southern Caucasian context. My consultants' first names are drawn from a number of sources: some consultants have very Georgian (Giorgi, Nugzar, Ani, Lika, Nana, Rimma), some very Greek (Akhiles, Aida, Elena, Afina, Violeta, Ioanis), some very Russian (Igor, Evgenia, Iveta, Iuriy, Ksenia, Fyodor, Ol'ga, Pavlik), some "international" Christian (Maria) names. In the Georgian context, there is no such thing as a neutral name – especially when assigned by an outside researcher. Whatever names I would have chosen, I would have portrayed my consultants "as something". Also, choosing a "corresponding" name, i.e. a "Greek" name if the consultant's actual name is "Greek" was not really feasible, both due to my possibly wrongly attributing a certain name to a certain tradition and due to there being many names whose "belonging" is not as easily established as with Sokratis or Giorgi. I therefore chose to assign random acronyms to consultants, putting them on equal footing with Nika Loladze (NL) and myself (CH) in presenting the interview excerpts.

The second challenge of (re-)presentation lies in how to adequately represent all consultants in citing interview excerpts. The goal is, of course, to make as many voices as possible read, and to draw a complex and perhaps ambiguous picture about the positions taken by members of Georgia's Greek community. This challenge is one of quantity as well as "quotability". Quantitatively, it is impossible to relate everything every consultant has said – hence the analytical task of condensing positions and drawing conclusions for the reader. In terms of "quotability", consultants vary in expressivity, e.g. finding illustrative examples, or coming up with punchy conclusions to their argument. It is, of course, always easier to quote and analyze these clearest and most memorable excerpts. Throughout the analysis, I do try, however, to let the less eloquent consultants be read as much as possible without compromising the clarity of the analysis.

8 Technically, I wrote an xml-stylesheet, which ensured that the categories I used were the same across the corpus, and allowed for fast and type-free input of the categories into added annotation lines in the transcription file.

I found some parts of the analysis difficult to write, sometimes surprisingly so. These mostly concern moments where I felt I had to protect consultants from rash generalizations and inadequate ascriptions by readers: of great divides between Pontic and Urum Greeks, for instance, of being read as racist and Islamophobic, of being viewed in an essentialist vein and/or as monolithic entity, i.e. not a diverse set of individuals. Difficulties also arose in writing about moments and events that were painful for consultants: the end of the Soviet Union, the civil war and turmoil of the early 1990s in Georgia, experiences of being left behind by emigrating relatives (Chapter 6), or having to deal with perceived and real injustices over land and/or belonging in Ts'alk'a and Greece (Chapter 7). The very first step in dealing with these difficulties was to acknowledge these emotions as relevant for my position as researcher and writer of these pages.⁹

There are two ways in which my emotional concerns are written into this book. Firstly, where I felt the need to protect the people that so generously allowed me an insight into their life and perception of the world, I took great care on the one hand to relate the breadth of positions held in the community rather than generalize the “majority opinion” – while on the other hand making sure this breadth would be recognizable not only to the most well-intentioned readers. This effort enabled me to stop myself from policing interview excerpts. Instead of excluding certain excerpts that I felt might “expose” consultants unfavorably, the awareness of this protectiveness made me question my choices of excerpts and include some I might otherwise have not.

Secondly, in beginning to write about the profound transformations discussed in Chapter 6, I became aware of a method of evasion I had already noticed many consultants using back in 2010. It consists of saying as little as politely possible and/or referring to common knowledge about “that time”, usually the early 1990s in Georgia, then changing the subject.¹⁰ In writing

9 Emotions and affects on part of the researcher have long been viewed as at best suspicious, if not a danger to achieving an “objective” analysis. In recent years this has been increasingly questioned and particularly anthropologists have started to develop approaches that make the researcher’s affects productive not only in the reflection of the fieldwork but also in the analysis of the data (Stodulka, 2017; Stodulka et al., 2019).

10 Self-identifying members of Georgia’s Greek community are not alone in this, many of my friends and acquaintances of a certain age speak – or rather: do not speak – about this period in exactly the same manner, referring to the knowledge they ascribe to me about “that time”. It is their children, now in their late-twenties to late-thirties who have been very eager to provide me with most of the ethnographic knowledge I

about that time, I acknowledged the unexpected emotional challenges this posed not only to many of my consultants but evidently also to myself. Taking inspiration from Nobel Laureate Svetlana Alexievich, in whose powerful literary collages of interviews people narrate their lives in the Soviet Union and afterwards (Alexievich, 2016), I then set out to explore these liminal phases. These must be analyzed with great care, as so much of how members of Georgia's Greek community position themselves and their community today hinges on these events and their traces in contemporary Georgia. The emotional charge of these sequences, even or especially in their brevity, demands great attentiveness, since explicating links to larger societal discourses and "common" knowledge is paramount. Recognizing and countering my urge to "move on quickly", I instead focused on these sequences in detail, which turned out to be very productive. In this way, awareness to my own emotional reactions have led me to write a more nuanced and thicker analysis of identification and belonging in Georgia's Greek community.

have about what it meant to live in Georgia at that time, many times without me even asking them about it. Cf. also Mishler (2006) for people choosing not to speak about the more difficult events in their lives.

Chapter 5: “Language” as a resource for positioning

Why start an analysis of identification and belonging by investigating how the languages spoken in a community are evaluated and used as resources for positioning? Beyond linguists’ disciplinary preoccupation with language-related topics (use, perception, competence, attitudes, evaluations...), the present research offers two further convincing reasons. The first is the close relationship between language (use) and identification, as elaborated in Chapter 3. The second emerges here from a particular feature, namely the perceived mismatch between the Turkish variety spoken by the Urum Greek members of the community, and their Orthodox Christian religious affiliation, in an area where **TURKISH**¹ is linked to **ISLAM**, whereas **GREEK** is linked to (ORTHODOX) **CHRISTIANITY**. Interactional elaborations on language competence, language use within the family, and language evaluations, thus take us straight to the heart of what is going on in the community in terms of identification, boundary (un)making, and the transformations of the last 25 years. The choice, therefore, is also a narrative one: I start from the most apparent question of national affiliation, because it is so closely linked to language (and ancestry, and religion, depending on the circumstances) in the frame of the modern nation state. The different power relations some of my consultants’ experienced in Georgia and Greece makes the investigation of discourses around **LANGUAGE** especially fruitful.

Before I proceed, a word on *attitudes*, since much of the analysis in this part is concerned with what traditionally would fall under the header *language attitudes*. Positivist traditions from Katz / Stotland (1959) onward tend to conceptualize attitudes as comprised of three interacting components: *cognitive*, *evaluative*, *conative* (action oriented). Attitudes serve specific functions (Deprez / Persoons, 1987; Garrett, 2010), and are understood as stable over time and therefore accessible to scientific examination (Garrett, 2010, p. 20).

There are two immediate objections to this approach. Firstly, it is still not quite clear how these three components interact, even though some find-

1 As introduced in Chapter 1, categories emerging in the analysis as relevant and methods used frequently by consultants are set in **SMALL CAPS** throughout the analysis. Note that this does not comprise my reference to my consultants, including labeling them as Urum Greeks and Pontic Greeks.

ings suggest that cognitive and affective (evaluative) components are more closely linked to one another than to the behavioral component (Garrett, 2010). Indeed, research on language use rather consistently finds a mismatch between professed and observable language use and/or perceptive competence. One early striking investigation of such a mismatch led to insights about how language varieties are used by speakers to position themselves (Le Page / Tabouret-Keller, 1985). This “inconsistency” between evaluation and behavior should lead to “confusion and doubt” (Deprez / Persoons, 1987, p. 127) on part of such an “imbalanced” consultant – which is not borne out empirically.² Arendt (2011) therefore proposes to distinguish between *linguistic behavior*, *reaction to linguistic perception*, and *expression of language attitude* and to take these three together as *language attitude*. Helpfully, this approach does not task metacommunicative expressions of language attitudes with explaining linguistic behavior. One would instead need to examine all three components to get at the “real” language attitude “behind” them (Arendt, 2011, p. 138). While this may help us grasp the mismatch between attitude expression and linguistic behavior, it does not yet explain how they are related.

Secondly, the purported stability of attitudes to language was by the late 1980s shown to be questionable, if not untenable (Potter / Wetherell, 1987), sharing some of the theoretical difficulties dogging views of personal identification as stable or at some point “finalized” (cf. Chapter 3). The conceptual problem remains even if attitudes are only attributed a “degree of stability” (Garrett, 2010, p. 20): how can one distinguish empirically between an evaluation leading to action, and a more “stable” attitude (over what period of time? in the face of how many challenges?)? And how do inconsistencies fit into the picture? Is inconsistency between “attitude” and behavior on its own enough to disqualify it from being an “attitude”? None of this is to say that research into language attitude might not be a productive endeavor once these and other conceptual ambiguities are resolved.³

To clarify my approach: instead of grappling with hard-to-define notions of attitudes, I will examine how my consultants interactively deal with the *communicative problems* (Hausendorf, 2000) that appear when speaking

2 Cf. Garrett (2010) for more examples that are not language related, including the dental check-up which many of us would only too happily find excuses for, the cognitive imperative on its advisability notwithstanding.

3 Cf. Soukup (2014) for an ambitious approach taking attitudes as produced in interaction and accessible to both quantitative and qualitative research, as opposed to Potter/Whetherell’s (1987) solely qualitative approach.

about languages. This involves investigating how and precisely what categories are established, how they are filled, how they are evaluated and how my consultants link them to other categories they make relevant for their identification and belonging, how these may have changed over time, and how they are used in boundary work. In keeping with the approach developed in the previous Chapters, I will be examining not only the evaluations but also the larger societal contexts on which consultants draw, the *interactive devices* used in speaking about LANGUAGE, and how they are used to position consultants and their community in their spatial, temporal, and social contexts.

In the terms of coupling and decoupling (Karafillidis 2009, 2010; cf. Chapter 3), this Chapter focuses on the former, exploring what consultants make relevant for identification and belonging. Of course, by stipulating the terms of belonging, those who do not comply are excluded. While the excerpts in this Chapter offer rich insights into processes of boundary-making, I will in many cases only hint at them in the analysis and will focus on the “cultural stuff they enclose” in Barth’s (1969) dictum. Chapter 7 will then focus more specifically on how these boundaries are drawn.

The individual Sections will deal with the heritage varieties Urum and Pontic Greek (A.), with Standard Modern Greek (B.), and with Russian and Georgian (C.). In each Section, I will first outline the competence consultants claim in the respective language before exploring how they speak about them, evaluate them, and use them as a resource to position themselves and their community. Perhaps the most important finding is that consultants vary in whether they consider LANGUAGE to be a central category-bound predicate, i.e. whether it is necessary to speak a certain language to be able to claim membership in said category, or whether they instead perceive LANGUAGE as a more marginal MEANS OF COMMUNICATION. In the latter case, centrality is usually given to RELIGION and/OR ANCESTRY.

A. *Heritage varieties*

There are two varieties spoken in Georgia’s Greek community that can be analyzed as heritage varieties. One of them is what linguists have chosen to call *Caucasian Urum*, a Turkish variety linked closely to Anatolian Turkish (Skopeteas, 2014), spoken as heritage variety in the rural areas of Ts’alk’a and Tetrts’q’aro as well as in Tbilisi. The other is the Greek variety *Pontic Greek* spoken in rural Ach’ara, Tetrts’q’aro, the village of Tsikhisjvari and

historically in three villages in Ts’alk’a as well as the sea side city of Batumi. For the purpose of the present study, I will consider as *heritage variety* those varieties that members of the community used in their family and everyday interactions at the time they left the Ottoman Empire. This definition excludes Russian, which became the language of inter-ethnic communication at the latest during the Soviet Union, as well as Georgian, which for some (mostly urban) families is slowly becoming the family language. It also excludes Standard Modern Greek, which in some cases is conceptualized as *rodnoy yazyk* the “native language” of GREEKS but has no proven history as a long-term family language in Georgia’s Greek community.⁴

In this Section, I will first explore consultants’ self-assessed competence in their respective heritage variety and whether they pass it on to their children (I.) and then investigate how they speak about and evaluate the two varieties (II.). Section III. summarizes the findings, focusing on the interactive methods consultants use to talk about and evaluate both varieties.

I. Competence and everyday language use

The first point of departure is to examine more closely what consultants say about their own competence in their respective heritage variety, and whether and where they use this variety in their everyday communications. Importantly, I did not carry out any type of assessment test. The following relies on how consultants assess themselves and their community in our semi-structured interview conversations. Furthermore, in terms of everyday language use, I also rely on my observations from living with an Urum Greek family in 2010 and 2013 and observing everyday routine interactions while spending time in the villages. Given the absence of any large-scale studies on this community, the following investigation should be seen as exploratory.

Table 5.1 shows self-assessed language competence.⁵ Note that consultants claiming proficiency in either heritage variety also indicate speaking it at

4 It is widely attested for minority languages in the post-Soviet space that consultants give as *rodnoy yazyk* not their strongest language or the one they speak at home but the language that is seen as pertaining to their national or ethnic affiliation (Grenoble, 2003, pp. 28-31). This is discussed for the Greek community in the Northern Caucasus in Zoumpalidis (2012, 2013).

5 If consultants had not explicated their language competences previously, I usually introduced the topic by asking *na kakikh yazykakh vy govorite* “which languages do you speak?”

Table 5.1: Self-assessed competence in the respective heritage variety

	competent		no/little comp.		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Urum rural	12	100	0	0	12	100
Urum urban	8	72.7	3	27.3	11	100
Pontic rural	16	100	0	0	16	100
Pontic urban	4	40	6	60	10	100
Total	40	81.6	9	18.4	49	100

least in the family (in urban contexts) or in routine daily interactions outside the home (in rural contexts). The above-mentioned periods of taking part in family and village life suggest that consultants probably did not greatly exaggerate their language competence and use. Note also that the difference between rural and urban spaces for both heritage varieties points to differences between these spaces, which will be addressed later in this Chapter.⁶ Crucially, while it does look as if urban Urum Greeks had or reported a higher proficiency in their heritage variety than their urban Pontic Greek counterparts, this cannot be generalized to the whole community, as the sample size is simply too small. What we can confirm based on this table is that both heritage varieties are still widely spoken in Georgia's rural areas.

Table 5.2 shows responses, from consultants who are competent in their respective heritage variety, to the question of whether they transfer(ed) their heritage variety to their children (or imagine doing so in the future, in the case of consultants who did not have children at the time of the interview).⁷ Apart from the fact that more Pontic Greek consultants did not answer that question, what becomes apparent is that more competent Urum speakers state that they have not, are not, or will not be transferring Urum to their

6 The difference between rural and urban spaces that we begin to see here is also widely attested in studies on language change (Nordberg, 1994; Vandekerckhove, 2010).

The specific context of internal migration to rural Kvemo Kartli, especially Ts'alk'a, will be the topic of analysis in Chapter 7.

7 In most interviews, this was covered in the conversation following the question *c kem vy govorite na etikh yazykakh* "with whom do you speak these languages?" In case consultants did not bring up their children themselves, I would usually ask *i s detmi* "and with (your) children?" If they did not have children, I would usually ask *budete li vy govorit' na* [heritage variety] *s vashimi detmi* "will you speak in [heritage variety] with your children?"

Table 5.2: Transfer of respective heritage variety to children (competent speakers)

	yes		no		no answer		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Urum rural	9	66.6	2	16.6	2	16.6	12	100
Urum urban	6	75	1	12.5	1	12.5	8	100
Pontic rural	12	75	0	0	4	25	16	100
Pontic urban	2	50	0	0	2	50	4	100
Total	29	72.5	3	7.5	8	20	40	100

children. For two of them – AM in Tbilisi and IK in Ts’alk’a – pragmatic considerations of how useful a language will be for their children play an important role. Both concede that their children will probably pick up at least some Urum: IK’s hypothetical children by growing up in rural Ts’alk’a and AM’s children are attested to have a solid passive grasp on the language in the interview with her husband MA. In their reasoning, we already see one pervasive line of conceptualizing and talking about LANGUAGE, namely as a MEANS OF COMMUNICATION that can be more or less useful, depending on its spread and status. This view also permeates the evaluation of other languages spoken in the community, as we will see below. It is furthermore attested as a driver of language change and loss in other (post-)Soviet small speaker communities (Grenoble, 2003; Pavlenko, 2008).

Summing up, both heritage varieties are widely spoken, especially in the rural communities and transferred with surprising frequency to the next generation, even by our younger consultants.⁸ The well-known formula of language loss over three generations where grandparents are competent speakers, parents speak it with their parents but not with their children, and children have at best a passive competence appears not to be borne out extensively in Georgia’s Greek community – or at least not by our consultants,

8 Note that neither Eleni Sideri’s nor my own consultants reported awkwardness in speaking either heritage variety in the family. Sideri reports difficulties when consultants were forced to label themselves: “Awkward moments arose when they had to define their ‘mother tongue’ in strict terms and they felt that this definition would express their national and political allegiance” (Sideri, 2006, p. 176).

and/or not yet.⁹ These varieties appear to be afforded a measure of importance, although not one without complications, as the next Section will show.

II. Speaking about and evaluating the heritage varieties

This Section is structured as follows: I will first summarize how consultants label the varieties they speak and, secondly, how they respond to the very direct question of whether their respective heritage variety is important to them personally. Section 1. will explore the narrative of Urum Greeks being forced to choose between keeping their language or their religion and choosing the latter, establishing RELIGION as the central category-bound predicate for being GREEK. Section 2. will examine how consultants speak about and evaluate the respective other heritage variety. Sections 3. and 4. will then investigate how consultants speak about and evaluate their own heritage language.

For Urum Greek consultants, their heritage variety is predominantly labeled as “Turkish” (12 speakers), and comes in various nuances of LANGUAGE, mostly as a *dialekt* ‘dialect’ or *narechie* ‘vernacular’, and PURITY, mostly *ne chisto* ‘not pure’. Seven consultants refer to it as “Urum” mostly after I have used that label first, or after more exposure to our wider documentation and research endeavors. EC makes this etic labeling very clear when she refers to it as: *urum kak vy govorite* “Urum as you say” (EC, 0:43:28). This underscores the potentially (problematic) groupness building capacity of what outsiders do “academically” with/for a community. Staying with the potential mismatch of etic and emic categories, two consultants refer to their heritage variety as *pontiyskiy* “Pontic”. This shows once more that for these consultants the geographical area of origin – the Pontos – is what labels their heritage variety rather than its language family. This is also a claim to the unity of the Greek community (“we’re all Pontic Greeks”) and a reminder that outsiders’ (linguistic) categories might not be the ones relevant to the community.¹⁰ It is only once labeled as an *inostranny yazyk* “a foreign

9 On the scale developed by Lewis / Simons (2010) of the *ethnologue* (Eberhard et al., 2019) and based on my non-representative interviews, the community would thus be placed on the threshold between “vigorous” and “threatened”, corresponding to the transition from “safe” to “vulnerable” on the UNESCO scale (cf. Moseley 2010).

10 For a striking example from a very different context, namely the Guatemalan Highlands, cf. Vallentin (2019).

Table 5.3: Personal importance of heritage variety

	yes		no		no answer		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Urum rural	5	41.7	6	50	1	8.3	12	100
Urum urban	8	72.7	0	0	3	27.3	11	100
Pontic rural	11	68.8	0	0	5	31.2	16	100
Pontic urban	4	40	1	10	5	50	10	100
Total	28	57.2	7	14.3	14	28.5	49	100

language” (VE, 0:23:00), pointing towards the perception of difficulties and the mythical forced choice between language and religion (cf. Section 1.).

Speakers of both heritage varieties refer to their respective variety as *nash/svoi* (*yazyk/dialekt*) “our/own (language/dialect)” – emphasizing a habitual closeness and perhaps also how constitutive these varieties are for their everyday interactions. It does not seem particularly juxtaposed to other varieties that are not *svoi/nash*, suggesting that its identificatory potential is realized more to express belonging than to draw boundaries. Interestingly, among the Urum Greeks, *nash* and its variants is used more frequently by urban than rural consultants, pointing again to a difference in how the identificatory potential of this variety is perceived.¹¹

Pontic Greek consultants label their heritage variety *grecheskiy* ‘Greek’, *pontiyskiy* ‘Pontic’, or *etot grecheskiy* ‘this Greek’. The demonstrative in the latter underlines the perception that this is somehow a special kind of Greek, different from the unmarked and thereby “standard Greek”. Note that many consultants use the terms *grecheskiy* and *pontiyskiy* interchangeably – at least until I ask them whether they also speak SMG.

Table 5.3 shows how consultants answer the question *i govorit’ na* [heritage variety] – *eto vazhno dlya vas?* “and is speaking [heritage variety] important to you?” Again, more Pontic Greek than Urum Greek consultants do not answer this question. Of those who do answer, most consultants state that speaking their heritage variety is important to them. Only in rural Ts’alk’a, a surprisingly large number of Urum Greek consultants answer negatively. The one urban Pontic Greek consultant who does not afford her heritage variety

11 Note that this does not preclude a strong feeling of belonging to that community, perhaps best traced through the frequent reference to members of the in-group through the use of *nashi* (*greki*) “our (Greeks)” in all interviews.

much personal importance is KP, who has the above-mentioned pragmatic approach to languages: she is fluent in six languages (Pontic Greek, SMG, Russian, Georgian, English, Turkish) and establishes them as being mostly MEANS OF COMMUNICATION (KP, 0:32:52).

In addition to showing how consultants speak about their heritage varieties and analyzing how they use them as a resource for identification, the following Sections aim to determine what leads rural Urum Greeks to talk so differently about their heritage variety (which they speak well and pass on to their children) than urban Urum Greeks and Pontic Greeks in general. I will argue that this is at least partly due to challenges to their self-identification as GREEKS, arising from the socio-political context in Ts'alk'a which forces them to position themselves differently, and to problematize their heritage language in the interview situation.

First, however, I will look at some evaluations that are shared across both linguistic communities and across both rural and urban spaces. Many consultants evaluate their respective heritage variety as a highly valued family language¹² that is also useful in a number of ways. Being useful usually has to do with their heritage variety's closeness to either standard Turkish or other Turkic languages, or SMG in the case of Pontic Greek. Outside of Ts'alk'a, Georgian Greeks also talk about their respective heritage varieties in terms of maintaining the link to their ancestors, and express normative beliefs about "keeping one's language", as in the following excerpt:

(1) One should speak one's language (ND, 0:12:04-0:12:11)

- 1 ND: *vot lyuboy chelovek dolzhen (-) znat' svoy yazyk (-) lyuboy*
 well any person should to_know own language any
 2 *chelovek*
 person
 'Well, any person should know their own language, any person'

In expressing a normative belief, ND, a 59-year-old Urum Greek male consultant from Tbilisi, also voices the belief that for every person there is (at least) one language that is somehow linked to them. Without making it explicit, the fact that he voices this belief in relation to Urum allows the inference that this particular ownership of a language is transferred through ancestry. Since ancestry takes this central role in transferring belonging, it is not so surprising that ND does not consider competence in SMG to be a necessary

12 AK (0:28:27-0:28:24), for instance, explains how it is "impossible to forget" the heritage language: *potomu chto tebya roditeli vospitali na etom yazyke s pelėnok* "because your parents raised you in this language from your diapers".

characteristic of a GREEK person (ND, 0:12:29, cf. the discussion of SMG in Section B.).

1. The “Choice” between language and religion

How did the Urum Greeks come to speak the Turkish variety linguists decided to call *Urum*? While this was not the first question that came to my mind as an outsider from Germany (assimilation over time due to trade relations and/or living in proximity to Turkish-speaking communities appears to be a plausible contender, cf. Chapter 1; Eloeva 1994; Sideri 2006), this turns out to be an important topic for my consultants. Although I never asked why Urum Greeks (used to) speak this variety, almost half of our consultants raise this issue at some point in the interview, either in passing or elaborately.¹³

This story can be told in at least two ways: from a mostly Urum Greek perspective, at some time during Ottoman rule the TURKS gave them the choice of exchanging their (Pontic) Greek language (which they purportedly spoke at that time) for Turkish, or giving up their Orthodox Christian faith and converting to Islam. Because religion was so important to them (the implication being that this is still the case today), they chose to keep their faith and change their language. Some consultants strongly imply or even explicitly state that the Pontic Greeks may have given up their religion to keep the Pontic Greek language (IL, VD, OK).¹⁴ In most other cases, this implication is entirely absent and the narrative is used solely to explain the divergent language use among Urum Greeks. The other way of telling the story of forced choice tends to come from a Pontic Greek perspective, sometimes suggesting that a person who changes their language might also consider changing their faith (OA, 1:01:00, states this very explicitly). The other position holds that since the threat of losing one’s faith is no longer relevant, Urum Greeks should consider changing “back” to “Greek”, or at least speak Russian or Georgian but not the “language of the enemy” (IP, 0:57:44-1:00:00, cf. also Section 2. below).

Different reasons are given as to why Pontic Greeks did not lose their language: this forced choice was their reason to flee to Georgia (NP, 0:02:47),

13 This narrative is also told to Sideri (2006, p. 151); Zoumpalidis (2012, 2014) refers to it as “a popular myth” for the Greek community in the Northern Caucasus.

14 *i my dazhe sami greki schitali chto mY na mnogo pravoslavnee chem vot kotorye yazyk ostavili* “and we, even Greeks themselves, considered that we are much more Orthodox than those who kept the language” (OK, 0:5:51).

General Paskevich¹⁵ saved the Pontic Greeks but not the Urum Greeks from this choice (IS, 0:29:49), or they somehow managed to keep both language and religion in the face of adversity (IP, AK) – presumably through exceptional bravery but this is never stated explicitly.¹⁶ Based on historical and ethnographic knowledge it is highly implausible that the ancestors of the Greek community in Georgia today were ever predominantly anything but Orthodox Christians (cf. Chapter 2).

There are cases where Pontic Greeks tell this story and praise Urum Greeks for having kept their faith – which in their eyes distinguishes them from Georgian Muslims in Ach'ara who kept the Georgian language but converted to Islam (AT, 0:21:11). In the same vein, perhaps the strongest reproach Urum Greeks in Ts'alk'a make against Georgian Muslim internal migrants from Ach'ara is that they kept the Georgian language but lost the Christian faith over the centuries of Ottoman rule. This becomes very clear in the following excerpt from the interview with DP, a 31-year-old Urum Greek woman living in a small village in Ts'alk'a with her husband FP:

(2) We only lost our language (DP, FP 0:20:02-0:20:49)

- 1 CH: *i na kakikh yazykakh vy govorite* (2)
and on which languages you speak_2PL
- 2 DP: *gruzinskiy tozhe znaem*
Georgian also know_we
- 3 FP: *[my veru ne poteryali yazyk poteryali]*
we faith not lost_PL language lost_PL
- 4 CH: *[(laughes)] [mhm]*
- 5 NL: *[da]*
yes
- 6 FP: *[v turtsii]*
in Turkey
- 7 DP: *[my my ran'she] chto v turtsii byli nashi kogda tu_eti turki*
we we before that in Turkey were ours when Tu_these Turks
- 8 *poymali*
caught_PL
- 9 CH: *da*
yes

15 Paskevich is credited also by some of my consultants for helping Christians leave the Ottoman Empire, cf. Fonton (1840) and Chapter 2.

16 Fotiadis (1998, p. 63) plausibly suggests that geographical conditions played a role, with the majority of Greeks who preserved the Pontic Greek variety living in the more mountainous regions on the Southeastern coast of the Black Sea.

- | | | |
|----|-----|--|
| 10 | DP: | <i>nashikh</i>
ours |
| 11 | CH: | <i>[da]</i>
yes |
| 12 | NL: | <i>[da]</i>
yes |
| 13 | DP: | <i>oni skazali (-) vera ili yazyk (-)</i>
they said_PL faith or language |
| 14 | CH: | <i>[da]</i>
yes |
| 15 | NL: | [hm] |
| 16 | DP: | <i>adzharov tozhe oni poyma[li]</i>
Ach'arian also they caught_PL |
| 17 | CH: | [mhm] |
| 18 | DP: | <i>(-) adzhary (-) veru poteryali</i>
Ach'arians faith lost_PL |
| 19 | NL: | mhm |
| 20 | CH: | [mhm] |
| 21 | DP: | <i>yazyk derzhali [a] my net my veru ne der_ne poteryali</i>
language kept_PL but we not we faith not kep_not lost_PL |
| 22 | NL: | <i>[da]</i>
yes |
| 23 | DP: | <i>[tol'ko] yazyk poteryali</i>
only language lost_PL |
| 24 | CH: | mhm |
| 25 | DP: | <i>vera u nas (sho) grecheskiy vera idët</i>
faith at us Greek faith goes |
| 26 | CH: | <i>da</i>
yes |
| 27 | DP: | <i>khristianskiy vera u nas</i>
Christian faith at us |
| 28 | NL: | <i>[da]</i>
yes |
| 29 | CH: | [hm] |
| 30 | DP: | <i>a adzhary net oni [veru poteryali tol'ko] yazyk oni</i>
and Ach'arians not they faith lost_PL only language they |
| 31 | | <i>vzyali</i>
took_PL |
| 32 | CH: | [hm hm] mhm |
| 33 | NL: | [mhm] |
| 34 | DP: | <i>[po-]gruzinski razgovorivayut</i>
in_Georgian talk_they |
| 35 | NL: | <i>[da (-)]</i>
yes |

- 36 CH: [da (-)]
yes
- 37 FP: *chto ran'she e: khristiany byli eti [adzhary]*
what earlier Christians were these Ach'arians
- 38 DP: [oni ran'she] [ran'she]
they before before
- 39 NL: [oni da]
they yes
- 40 DP: *ran'she gruz[iny byli] ran'she*
before Georgians were before
- 41 CH: [ran'she]
before
- 42 NL: *da oni ran'she*
yes they before
- 43 DP: *kak nashikh poymali tak ikh poymali*
as ours caught_PL so they caught_PL
- 44 NL: *to zhe samoe bylo [kak u grekov (xxx)]*
that again same was as at Greeks
- 45 DP: [da (-) prosto oni veru] poteryali
yes only they faith lost_PL
- 1 CH: and which languages do you speak?
- 2 DP: we also know Georgian
- 3 FP: we didn't lose the faith, we lost the language
- 4 CH: [[[laughs]]] [mhm]
- 5 NL: yes
- 6 FP: [in Turkey]
- 7 DP: [we, earlier] when ours were in Turkey, these Turks caught
- 9 CH: yes
- 10 DP: our people
- 11 CH: [yes]
- 12 NL: [yes]
- 13 DP: they said faith or language
- 14 CH: [yes]
- 15 NL: [hm]
- 16 DP: Ach'arians too they [caught]
- 17 CH: [mhm]
- 18 DP: Ach'arians lost their faith
- 19 NL: mhm
- 20 CH: [mhm]
- 21 DP: they kept the language, but we didn't, our faith we didn't kee_ we didn't
- 22 lose
- 22 NL: [yes]
- 23 DP: [only] the language we lost

- 24 CH: mhm
25 DP: our faith (sho) we have the Greek faith
26 CH: yes
27 DP: we have a Christian faith
28 NL: [yes]
29 CH: [mhm]
30 DP: but Ach’arians don’t, they lost the faith, they only took the language
32 CH: [hm hm] mhm
33 NL: [mhm]
34 DP: [they] speak Georgian
35 NL: [yes]
36 CH: [yes]
37 FP: so before they were Christians, these [Ach’arians?]
38 DP: [they before] [before]
39 NL: [yes they]
40 DP: before they [were Georgians] before
41 CH: [before]
42 NL: yes, before they
43 DP: like they caught ours, they also caught them
44 NL: it was exactly the same [as for the Greeks (xxx)]
45 DP: [yes, only that they] lost their faith

Before this excerpt, DP asked me about the languages I speak. An elderly lady enters the kitchen and briefly changes the topic, asking whether I was married and had children. I bring our joint attention back to the topics I had planned for the interview and ask them about their language competence (line 1). DP picks up the thread of my not speaking any Georgian and (a little triumphantly) states that they also speak Georgian (2), which I acknowledge by laughing (4).

Interestingly, the question about their language competence – which for me was one of ticking boxes, expressing my deep admiration for my usually multilingual interlocutors, before then moving on to how they evaluate the many languages they speak – is no ordinary or “easy” question for FP. Rather than listing the languages he speaks competently (Urum and Russian),¹⁷ he explains how they did not lose their faith but their language “in Turkey”, i.e. when their ancestors were living in the Ottoman Empire (3-6). DP elaborates this story, and in doing so points out the main difference she perceives between “Christian” GREEKS and “Muslim” ACH’ARIANS, between people who care about their religion (GREEKS) and those who cared more about their language than their religious affiliation (ACH’ARIANS). She narrates how “in

17 Since he converses with NL and myself in Russian and with DP, their children and other guests in Urum, it is contextually clear that he speaks at least these two languages.

Turkey” *eti turki poymali nashikh* “these Turks caught our people” (7-10) and put the fatal question before them: *vera ili yazyk* “faith or language” (13). Her husbands earlier contribution (3-6) having set the stage, there is no chance NL or myself might come to the wrong conclusions half-way through her story. This allows DP to start her comparison (16-23) by slowly and pointedly¹⁸ elaborating on the choice she attributes to the ACH’ARIANS: to keep the language and lose the faith (16-21). In lines 21-23 she then contrasts this with her in-group’s choice of not losing faith but *tol’ko* “only” the language. Again, LANGUAGE is portrayed as a somehow more optional feature of belonging, whereas RELIGION appears to be at its core – at least for the in-group.¹⁹

DP goes on to explain which faith she attributes to her in-group: *grecheskiy vera* [sic!] the “Greek faith” (25), and more generally *khristianskiy vera* [sic!] “Christian faith” (27). Especially in the Georgian context, it is striking that she uses the categories GREEK and CHRISTIAN rather than the often used *pravoslavnyy* ‘rightly believing’ “Orthodox”. What is even more remarkable is that the national category GREEK appears to be inextricable from the religious category CHRISTIAN. This link becomes even stronger further on: in lines 30-34, she repeats her ascription of choices to the ACH’ARIAN out-group: they lost the faith and “took” the language, which she finally specifies: *po-gruzinski razgovarivayut* “they speak Georgian” (34).

This, in turn, surprises her husband, who requests clarification on whether “these Ach’arians” were really “Christians” at some point in the past (37). One key to understanding much that goes on in Ts’alk’a can be found in DP’s utterance in line 40, where she states that ACH’ARIANS *ran’she gruziny byli* “were Georgians before”. Again, a national category – GEORGIAN – is so closely linked with a religious one – CHRISTIANITY – that if a perceived collective is not CHRISTIAN anymore, they either cease to be GEORGIAN or their GEORGIANNES would have to be extensively argued for. In line 43, DP

18 She speaks slowly in this sequence, with many pauses (13, 18), making time for and requesting supportive backchannel behavior from Nika Loladze and myself.

19 This perfectly corresponds with how she answers the question about the personal importance of her heritage variety: *vazhno ne vazhno eto yazyk [...] da chto delat’* “important, not important, it’s a language [...] yes, what to do?” (DP, 0:24:07), and her answer to the question whether SMG is important to her: *my i tak greki ne obyazatel’no chtoby znali ne znali etot yazyk glavnoe chto khristianye glavnoe chto veru derzhim eto (glavnyy) (x)* “we’re Greeks anyway, it’s not necessary that we would know or not know that language, the main thing is that we’re Christians, the main thing is that we keep the faith, that’s (important)” (DP, 0:26:04).

once more compares the two groups’ “capture” and portrays these experiences as identical, is supported in this description by NL (44), and finally repeats it a third time, emphasizing once more that ACH’ARIANS lost their faith in making their choice (45), before we go back to discussing their language competence and use.

The categories juxtaposed in this excerpt relate (quasi-)national and religious ones. First, we have the contextually clear categorization of the in-group as GREEK, which is opposed to the quasi-national category ACH’ARIANS. Both of these categories are then confronted with a (quasi-)national and religious power, namely the TURKS, who have the power to put a choice to them and enforce its realization. What is not said – because it is clear in this context – is that the category TURKS comprises a national²⁰ and a religious element, namely ISLAM. Note that neither here nor in the excerpt as a whole is “Islam” explicitly mentioned as a religious category²¹ – apparently it is so salient that it does not have to be named. Here we may extend the concept of *omnirelevance* borrowed from Ethnomethodology and Membership Categorization Analysis where it refers to a device ordering the roles of the immediate participants of an ongoing interaction – participants in a group-therapy session, say (cf. Sacks, 1992). In the present context, an omnirelevant device is also capable of ordering categories beyond the immediate context of the interaction. In excerpt 2 and in many instances throughout the corpus, the relationship between ISLAM and CHRISTIANITY, and the nationalities associated with these religious categories very clearly fit Sacks’ definition:

Things may be going along, the device isn’t being used; at some point something happens which makes it appropriate, and it’s used. And when it’s used, it’s the controlling device, i.e., there is no way of excluding its operation when relevant. (Sacks, 1992, p. 314)

Thinking about religion as an omnirelevant device helps understand not only the ease with which (quasi-)national categories are linked with religious ones, but also how they can become so closely linked that one loses the national affiliation to GEORGIA if one exchanges CHRISTIANITY for ISLAM. Crucially,

20 Note that while the Ottoman Empire was indeed historically followed by the (very much nationalizing) Turkish nation state, it was clearly not a national enterprise at the time these narrations are set (Barkey, 2008; İçduygu et al., 2008; Mackridge, 2009) (cf. Chapter 2).

21 And “Muslims” only twice in the whole interview, even though the boundary DP and FP constantly draw and strengthen is the one between ISLAM and CHRISTIANITY (cf. Chapter 7).

however, changing one's language use does not change the national category (cf. Chapter 7).

Thus, the narrative of one's ancestors being forced to choose between their language and their religion serves a number of conversational purposes. Firstly, it offers a common explanation for language use that is perceived to be somehow "deviant". As we will see in Sections B. and C. of this Chapter, SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY through *my ne vinovaty* "we're not guilty" is an interactive device primarily used to excuse "shortcomings": speaking a Turkish variety, not speaking SMG, and/or speaking Georgian only poorly. Secondly, the in-group is positioned as a RESILIENT²² and faithful CHRISTIAN community, even in the face of adverse conditions. They are therefore "good Greeks", since national and religious categories are perceived as inseparable. In a nutshell, this is DP and FP's claim to being GREEK. Thirdly, the ACH'ARIAN out-group is portrayed as having made a different, inferior choice of language over religion. They are thereby positioned not only as a "threat" through the behavior attributed to them in the present (as in the many other stories told about them, cf. Chapter 7), but the narrative traces a sense of wrong-doing all the way back to a time when the ancestors of both "groups" had to make a choice – and ACH'ARIANS chose LANGUAGE over "Christian virtue". Fourthly, if speaking the Georgian language is not seen as enough link ACH'ARIAN to the Georgian national category, and if "we" "only lost the language" (excerpt 2, line 22), LANGUAGE cannot be a very important indicator of belonging to any collective. Instead it appears to be conceptualized (at least by parts of the community, not by others, cf. Section B.) as somehow more MARGINAL to belonging than RELIGION. While excerpt 2 is a particularly poignant example of this narration, remember that the story was either explicitly told or alluded to, without being asked, in about half of the interviews with both Pontic and Urum Greeks. And while the differentiation between Ts'alk'ian GREEKS and ACH'ARIANS is not always constituted by telling this particular story, religious differences play a crucial role in establishing these categories and drawing a firm boundary between them (cf. Chapter 7).

22 RESILIENCE is a category-bound predicate that we will encounter again throughout this book, especially in Chapter 6.

2. Speaking about the respective other heritage variety

In this Section I will investigate how consultants speak about and evaluate the heritage variety that is not or was not spoken by them or their families. Strikingly, although none of my consultants is a competent speaker of the respective other heritage variety, consultants do attribute (some) competence in the other heritage language to their parents or grandparents,²³ or more generally to the time when there were still three Pontic Greek villages in the Ts’alk’a region before the emigration in the 1990s. This lack of language competence is primarily explained by a lack of contact (at least since the early 90s), by Urum Greeks acquiring SMG rather than Pontic Greek in Greece, and by Pontic Greeks not having much use for a Turkish variety spoken nowhere else.

Consultants with a background of Urum as heritage variety evaluate Pontic Greek positively overall. It is seen as being somehow related to SMG, either in terms of LINGUISTIC PROXIMITY (whether as closely or very distantly related), in terms of AGE (older than SMG), or in terms of PURITY. The latter can mean either that Pontic Greek is an “impure” version of SMG (EA, 0:15:20), or conversely that Pontic Greek is “older” and therefore somehow “more properly Greek” (AM, 0:33:35). Some consultants with a Pontic Greek-speaking background share this evaluation (cf. Section 3.). On the other hand, as seen in positions from the previous Section, “having kept the language” – which in this view is indicated by speaking Pontic Greek today – might be evaluated negatively in terms of religious loyalty.

Consultants with a background of Pontic Greek as heritage variety do not usually evaluate Urum as a heritage variety “worthy” of a Greek community (SM, 0:22:08). As we have seen, however, this might not prevent them from admiring the Urum Greek community for their “bravery” in having kept their Orthodox faith in the face of adversity. Usually, this negative evaluation rests on equating Urum with TURKISH, although many Urum Greek consultants do as well. This category evokes negative evaluations that are not linked to the language *per se* but to other characteristics and practices ascribed to it. The following indicative example is from IP, a 61-year-old, Pontic Greek, university-educated shop keeper in a small, mostly Pontic Greek village in Western Georgia, and his best friend TV, who is Georgian and is said to speak Pontic at the same level of competence as his Pontic Greek neighbors.

23 Interestingly, none of my consultants in the oldest age bracket claim this competence for themselves.

The two friends state that they converse either in Pontic Greek, Russian or Georgian.²⁴

Before the excerpt, I ask whether they see any differences between “Greeks here” (in the village) and “Greeks in Ts’alk’a”, apart from the different heritage languages. IP explains that he feels a little “colder” towards the (Urum) Greeks from Ts’alk’a due to the *yazykovoy bar’er* “linguistic barrier”.

(3) They speak Turkish in Greece (IP 0:57:10-0:58:20)

- 1 IP: *u menya est' dvoyurodnye brat'ya dvoyurodnyy brat*
at me is once_removed brothers once_removed brother
- 2 *tsalkinskogo proiskhozhdeniya*
Ts'alk'ian origin
- 3 CH: *da*
yes
- 4 IP: *materi u nas e sēstry (1) i tam vstrechayutsya govoryat*
mothers at us sisters and there meet_they speak_they
- 5 *po-turetski (1.7) nu (1) nu kak-by tak istoricheskiy tak*
Turkish well well somehow so historically so
- 6 *poluchilos' chto eto yazyk kak-by vrazheskiy [°h]*
turned_out that this language somehow hostile
- 7 CH: [hm]
- 8 IP: *(-) kotoryy unichtozhil vsë nashe*
who destroyed_M everything ours
- 9 TV: *kho da da*
yes yes yes
- 10 IP: *vsyu gretsiyu (-)*
whole Greece
- 11 CH: hm
- 12 IP: *dovelo do (2) nu kogda-to gretsiya chto-to [eshchē]*
led_N to well sometime Greece something more
- 13 CH: [hm]
- 14 IP: *v istorii chto-to sh: chto-to ot sebya predstavlyala*
in history something something from self represented_F
- 15 NL: hm
- 16 IP: *oni eë prevratili (-) v rukhlyad'*
they her turned_into_PL in junk
- 17 CH: hm (1.5)

24 IP speaks Georgian with no accent, and so well that when we first met, Nika Loladze took this to be his first language, and was very surprised when IP offered himself as a potential Greek consultant.

- 18 IP: *oni turki-zhe eto sdelali chetyresto let pod igom turtsii*
they Turks this did_PL four_hundred years under yoke Turkey
- 19 *byli vot poslednie*
were_PL here last
- 20 NL: mhm
- 21 IP: *kogda oni osvo_ v tysyachu vosem'sot shestdesyatom godu*
when they free_ in thousand eight_hundred sixtieth year
- 22 *oni osvobodilis' v pyatdesyatom ili kakom godu (I) vot (-) oni*
they freed_PL in fiftieth or which year well they
- 23 *tam poekhali eti tsalkinski i tam razgovarivayut po-turetski*
there went_PL these Ts'alk'ians and there speak_they in_Turkish
- 24 CH: hm (1.3)
- 25 IP: *a: govori na drugom yazyke ru_ russkiy znaesh'*
talk_2SG on other language Ru_ Russian know_2SG
- 26 *russkoyazychnym byl zdes' [e stol'ko]*
Russian-speaking was_M here so_many
- 27 TV: *[vsyu zhizn']*
whole life
- 28 CH: [hm]
- 29 NL: [hm]
- 30 IP: *poltora veka*
one_and_a_half century
- 31 CH: hm
- 32 IP: *i tam vsë ravno po-turetski govoryat*
and there all equal in_Turkish speak_they
- 33 TV: *znachit eto ego (rodnoy yazyk)*
means this his (native language)
- 34 IP: *ya ne znayu*
I not know_I
- 35 TV: *naprashivaetsya (—)*
suggests_itself
- 36 IP: *ne znayu vot v etom otnoshenii kakuyu-to*
not know_I well in this regard some_kind_of
- 37 TV: *ya nikogda natsionalistom [ne byl no vsë-taki]*
I never nationalist not was_M but nevertheless
- 38 IP: *[otchuzhdënnost'] [chuvstvuyu]*
alienation feel_I
- 39 CH: *[da]*
yes
- 40 IP: *nu (-) obidno dazhe*
well offensive even
- 1 IP: I have cousins, a cousin from Ts'alk'a
- 3 CH: yes

- 4 IP: our mothers are sisters, and when they meet there, they speak Turkish,
5 well, well somehow, it's historical that it so happened that this
6 language is somehow the enemy's
7 CH: hm
8 IP: who destroyed everything that was ours
9 TV: yes, yes, yes
10 IP: all of Greece
11 CH: hm
12 IP: it led to, well, at some point Greece something [more]
13 CH: [hm]
14 IP: in history, something, stood for something
15 NL: hm
16 IP: they turned her²⁵ into trash
17 CH: hm
18 IP: it's the Turks who did this, four hundred years they were under the
19 Turkish yoke, well, the last
20 NL: mhm
21 IP: when they, in 1860 they were freed, in the fiftieth or whichever year,
22 well they went there, these Ts'alk'ians and speak Turkish there
24 CH: hm
25 IP: speak in another language, you know Russian, here was
26 Russian-speaking [for so many]
27 TV: [whole life]
28 CH: [hm]
29 NL: [hm]
30 IP: one and a half centuries
31 CH: hm
32 IP: but there they speak Turkish anyway
33 TV: that means it's his native language
34 IP: I don't know
35 TV: it suggests itself
36 IP: I don't know, well, with regards to this
37 TV: I was never a nationalist [but still]
38 IP: [there's some kind of alienation] [I feel]
39 CH: [yes]
40 IP: well, I find it even offensive

IP starts by explaining that he has family ties to Ts'alk'a in the form of his cousin in lines 1-4, thereby assuring us that his knowledge is first-hand, and therefore (more) credible. He then ascribes a certain behavior to this out-group – which includes some of his relatives – namely that they speak Turkish *tam* “there”, which in the context of the conversation so far refers to

25 *eë* ‘her’ refers to Greece.

Greece (4). In lines 5-6 he begins to explain why this might be problematic: for “historical reasons” it so happened that this language pertains to “the enemy”. This “enemy” is named as *turki* “the Turks” explicitly only much later (18) but in the context of the interview and having spoken already for almost an hour about the Greek community in Georgia, the reference is clear. He goes on to explain that this “enemy” *unichtozhil vsë nashe* “destroyed everything of ours” (8), even “all of Greece” (10) and turned “Greece”, which at some point in history had “stood for something” into “junk” (12-16). In line 18, he finally refers to the perpetrators of this downfall and explains how their ancestors were for four hundred years *pod igom turtsii* “under Turkey’s yoke”²⁶, again (as did DP) using TURKEY as a stand-in for the Ottoman Empire.²⁷ He then approximates the date when Greece “was freed” (21-22) and repeats his reproach, that *eti tsalkinskii* “these Ts’alk’ians” went “there”, the reference again being Greece, and speak “Turkish” “there” (22-23).

The implication of IP’s brief history lesson is that it might be better not to speak “the enemy’s language” in a place that, like Greece, has undergone a long history of “oppression” and where, therefore, that language might not elicit positive feelings. The repeated ascription of this behavior shows IP to be rather incredulous at what he perceives to be a lack of sensitivity. He therefore proceeds to address an imaginary member of the TS’ALK’IAN community directly, employing the generalizing second person singular, and telling this generalized addressee to speak in a different language – possibly any different language – reminding his addressee that “you know Russian” (25). Apparently, having lived for a long time in an area where Russian is the language of inter-ethnic communication makes it the most plausible language of choice. As he attempts to illustrate how long *zdes’* “here” has been *russkoyazychniy* “Russian-speaking” (25-26), he is supported by his friend TV, who specifies that this has been the case for their “whole life” (27). IP then specifies that it has been even longer: *poltora veka* “a century and a half” (30), i.e. the whole time he knows Greeks to have lived in the territory of today’s Georgia. Following IP’s third repetition of TS’ALK’IANS speaking TURKISH “there” (32), TV offers an explanation, namely that this could be *ego (rodnoy yazyk)* “his (native language)” (33). This is quite a harsh insult in the context of the post-Soviet space, where *rodnoy yazyk* was taken to be the

26 This is a key phrase very regularly used by my consultants when describing their ancestors’ life under Ottoman rule – and Greek history more generally.

27 Similarly, GREECE is often referred to in the corpus as contiguous with ancient Greece and/or the Byzantine Empire.

language of the “nationality” or *narod* “people” one belonged to rather than the strongest language one spoke or the language one grew up with (Grenoble 2003, cf. Chapter 2). Hence, if TURKISH were their *rodnoy yazyk*, they could not be considered GREEKS but would have to be categorized as TURKS. IP distances himself from this strong accusation by claiming ignorance (34), TV presses on by stating that this interpretation suggested itself (35). After IP distances himself a second time (36), TV clarifies that he was never a nationalist (37),²⁸ positioning himself as someone who does not easily draw such conclusions, thus lending greater weight to his statement. IP carefully approaches his own evaluation of the behavior he ascribes to the TS’ALK’IANS by saying that he feels *kakuyu-to otchuzhdënnost’* “some kind of alienation” (36-38), before evaluating this language use as *obidno dazhe* “offensive even” (40).

IP’s argument, then, is mostly historical. Because he, and GREEKS in Greece according to him, associate the Turkish language with atrocities perpetrated by the TURKS over a very long period of time, it is unacceptable to speak this language as a GREEK person, especially in Greece. This is even worse if the person in question has recourse to another language, in this case Russian. And he suggests that the Urum Greek community *eti tsalkinskie* “these Ts’alk’ians” do not have just some competence but a very comprehensive, habitual and strong link to the Russian language.

Note that the sentiment which IP eloquently and directly expresses here is shared by some, but not all, of his Pontic Greek community members (three other consultants apart from IP explicitly). Numbers are difficult to come by, as the question I asked usually centers on whether there are “differences apart from the language”. This is to say, I never asked them to evaluate the other heritage language directly – also because I was very conscious of my role in perhaps inadvertently strengthening the perception of differences and boundaries.

3. Speaking about Pontic Greek

When it comes to speaking about Pontic Greek as heritage variety, some Pontic Greek consultants do this through characterizing it as older, and

28 This is borne out by how TV positions himself throughout our conversation. I read his contribution here in terms of intense support for his friend, who is our main interview partner. This does not make the allegation any less strong, of course.

sometimes therefore as somehow more “authentically” Greek than SMG. This corresponds to many Urum Greek consultants’ evaluation of Pontic Greek, as discussed above. I will now turn to another excerpt of the interview with IP. He ends his narrative of “how the Greeks came to Georgia” by concluding that they now live happily in Georgia in a village with Georgian neighbors to whom he attributes a competence in Pontic Greek almost at his level. Together, IP and TV introduce a differentiation between *pontiyskiy* “Pontic” and *ellinskiy* “Hellenic” (SMG), and his Georgian neighbor recounts how he was categorized as *pontiets* “Pontic” in Greece because he was a competent speaker of this language.

(4) Pontic Greek (IP, 0:07:27-0:08:14)

- 1 IP: *kto vladel etim yazykom my nazvali etot yazyk*
who possessed_M this language we named_PL this language
- 2 *nazvali pontiyskim yazykom [eto staro-grecheskiy yazyk]*
named_PL Pontic language this old-Greek language
- 3 TV: *[nu v smysle tak i est' eto ot starogo ostalos']*
well in sense so and is this from old stayed
- 4 CH: *da (-)*
yes
- 5 IP: *staro-grecheskiy kotoryy °h a: s drevnim grecheskim imeet*
old-Greek which with ancient Greek has
- 6 *bol'she*
more
- 7 CH: *mhm*
- 8 IP: *svyaz'*
connection
- 9 NL: *da*
yes
- 10 IP: *chem [novogrecheskiy]*
than new_Greek
- 11 NL: *[chem ellinskiy da da]*
than Hellenic yes yes
- 12 CH: *da*
yes
- 13 IP: *etot yazyk ne razvilsya*
this language not developed_M
- 14 CH: *hm*
- 15 TV: *[yazyk vizantiyskom slovom tak skazhu]*
language Byzantian word so will_say_I
- 16 IP: *[ostalsya po-staromu]*
stayed_M old_way

- 17 CH: [hm]
 18 IP: [po-staromu] etomu: stilyu skazhem
 old_way this style will_say_we
 19 CH: [hm]
 20 IP: [kak] upotrebyalos' °h e: tysyachu let tomu [nazad]
 how used_N thousand years this ago
 21 NL: [da]
 yes
 22 IP: bol'she skhozhe [chem] s novogrecheskoy
 more similar than with new-Greek
 23 CH: [hm]
 24 NL: da
 yes
 25 IP: °h nu novogrechskiy on (-) tozhe my ponimali [skazhem
 well new-Greek he also we understood_PL will_say_we
 26 schët]
 account
 27 CH: [hm]
 28 NL: [mhm]
 29 IP: i mot vsë bo_me_me mnogie [slova ochen']
 and all many words very
 30 TV: [nu osnova yazyk] [odna]
 well base language one
 31 NL: [da]
 yes
 32 CH: [da]
 yes
 33 IP: [odinakogo] korni vsë odinakogo °h nu stil' razgovora drugoy
 same roots all same well style of_speech other
 34 CH: [hm]
 35 NL: [da]
 yes
 36 IP: my eshchë prikhvatili s soboy (—) °h v zapase slov (-)
 we more grabbed_PL with self in reserve words
 37 russkie gruzinskie
 Russian Georgian
 38 NL: ((chuckles)) [turetskie da]
 Turkish yes
 39 TV: [turetskie]
 Turkish
 40 IP: [turetskie] i vot adzhapsandal
 Turkish and well Ajapsandali

- 1 IP: those who knew this language, we called it, we called this language
2 Pontic language [it’s the old Greek language]
3 TV: [well, in the sense that how it is, it stayed from the old times]
4 CH: yes
5 IP: old Greek, which with ancient Greek as a closer
7 CH: mhm
8 IP: connection
9 NL: yes
10 IP: than [Modern Greek]
11 NL: [than Hellenic, yes, yes]
12 CH: yes
13 IP: this language did not develop
14 CH: hm
15 TV: [language with Byzantine words, is how I call it]
16 IP: [it stayed in the old way]
17 CH: [hm]
18 IP: [in the old] style, let’s say
19 CH: [hm]
20 IP: [how] it was used a thousand years ago
21 NL: [yes]
22 IP: more similar [than] with Modern Greek
23 CH: [hm]
24 NL: yes
25 IP: well, Modern Greek we also understood, [let’s say]
27 CH: [hm]
28 NL: [mhm]
29 IP: (roughly),²⁹ everything, many [words are very]
30 TV: [well, the foundation of the language] [is the same]
31 NL: [yes]
32 CH: [yes]
33 IP: [the same] roots, everything is the same, well the style of speech is
34 different
34 CH: [hm]
35 NL: [yes]
36 IP: we also grabbed us some words into our stock, Russian, Georgian
38 NL: ((chuckles)) [Turkish yes]
39 TV: [Turkish]

29 This *schët i mot* appears to be a case of playful partial reduplication, that in this corpus is usually used in more transparent forms like *kartoshka-markoshka* (*kartoshka* ‘potato’) or *kafe-mafe* (*kafe* ‘café’). In this context, this particular form is used to indicate that the in-group “roughly” understands “the gist” of what is being said in SMG. The base form *schët i mot* has so far proven obscure to native speakers of Russian, Georgian, Turkish and SMG. On reduplication cf. Rubino (2013); Stolz et al. (2015).

40 IP: [Turkish] and so, it's Ajapsandali

IP starts by explaining how this variety came to be labeled *pontiyskiy* “Pontic”: by those speaking it deciding to refer to it in this way (line 1). Importantly, this is a self-chosen label, rather than one imposed from outside – for instance, as we shall see in Chapter 7, by the societal majority in Greece where this naming of membership categories is by no means uncontested or free of (perceived and real) discrimination. Being able to choose a name for one’s language is a sign of confidence, and one that sets Pontic and Urum Greeks apart. IP then explains that it is, in fact, *staro-grecheskiy* “old Greek” (2). TV chimes in affirmatively and clarifies that it has stayed “the old way” (3). IP goes on to voice the fairly common claim that PONTIC, this *staro-grecheskiy*, is more closely connected *s drevnim grecheskim* “with ancient Greek” than MODERN GREEK (5-9). NL supports him, referring to SMG with *ellinskiy*, the label earlier introduced by our consultants. Note that the comparison is between Pontic and SMG, not between “ancient Greek” and SMG, i.e. it is about which variety is closest to the prestigious ANCIENT GREEK, rather than which variety Pontic is closest to. The latter comparison is introduced afterwards by saying that the Pontic language had *ne razvilsya* “not developed” but stayed *po-staromu* “the old way” (13-16). TV supports this by connecting PONTIC with “Byzantine” times (15). IP demonstrates quite how old the “style” of PONTIC is by stating that it is still used *kak upotrebyalos’ tysyachu let tomu nazad* “how it was used a thousand years ago” (18-20), before comparing “Ancient” and “Modern” Greek and concluding that PONTIC is closer to the former (22).

This does not stand in the way of their access to “Modern Greece”, however, as they “understood [Modern Greek] as well” (25). TV reminds us that *osnova yazyk odna* “the foundation of the language is the same” (30) and IP goes on to explain where he sees similarities and differences: *korni vsë odinakogo* “the roots are the same”, but *stil’ razgovora drugoy* “the style of speech is different” (33). The difference is thus somehow dissolved into a matter of style rather than substance – while the claim to antiquity remains. Another – more humorous – difference is that *my eshchë prikhvatili s soboy* “we also grabbed us” loanwords from other languages (36): Russian and Georgian, which NL acknowledges with a chuckle and all three Georgian citizens chime in together to add “Turkish” (38-40). IP then delivers his final verdict *i vot adzhapsandal* “so, it’s Ajapsandali” (40) – a tasty Georgian stew with

“everything” thrown in.³⁰ By employing an image so commonly used in Georgia, he also positions himself as a knowledgeable participant in this larger social context and thereby also as BELONGING TO GEORGIA. It is very common for a member of Georgia’s Greek community to position themselves as BELONGING TO GEORGIA in this way, as we shall see below.

Overall, IP uses the classification of his heritage language to position his community (and himself) quite clearly in historical and linguistic terms as belonging multiply. We are still in the first 10 minutes of the interview, IP has just told us how his community came to be living in Georgia and then proceeds to elaborate on the language they speak to spell out their web of belonging. Firstly, PONTIC is linked to antiquity – and to Byzantium in TV’s contribution – by being closer to ANCIENT GREEK than can be said for SMG. Implicitly, this links its speakers to the ancient Greek civilization, the foundation of CULTURE itself, as some consultants remind us.³¹ Secondly, by being able to understand SMG and by speaking a language that shares “the same roots”, IP links his community inseparably to contemporary Greece. Thirdly, through their history of linguistic incorporation he positions the community as rooted in a particular historical narrative that involves the linguistic influences of the Ottoman Empire (Turkish incorporations), the Soviet Union (Russian incorporations), and finally contemporary Georgia. This final link is made particularly strong by displaying a Georgian incorporation and at the same time not drawing up a new image but instead using a conventionalized Georgian one in the conventional way. In the tradition of Le Page / Tabouret-Keller (1985), this is a very explicit act of identification.

Unlike those consultants who consider their heritage language Urum to be somehow “problematic”, IP fully “owns” both the heritage language and the communal history of speaking and changing it, and uses both as a powerful resource in positioning his community.

30 Note that this is not an instance of *code switching* but rather of *code mixing* in the sense used by Zinkhahn Rhobodes (2016), since IP uses Russian inflectional morphology rather than the Georgian nominative suffix -i.

31 Ten consultants do this very explicitly (regardless of heritage language or place of residence), without me ever asking about it. This corresponds interestingly to notions in Georgian national discourse that imagine Georgians as “the oldest Europeans” (cf. Maisuradze, 2018).

4. Urum as a “Problematic” heritage variety

From the discussion so far, Pontic Greek appears to be a heritage variety that consultants take to be linked fairly straightforwardly to their self-identification as GREEK. This does not appear to hold for Urum as a heritage variety, however. In addition to the discussions in the previous Sections, three points deserve to be examined in more detail. The first is how consultants place Urum and other varieties in a hierarchical order of languages and varieties, both in terms of LANGUAGENESS and USEFULNESS. We will come back to these qualities when discussing other varieties spoken in the community. The second point concerns how linguistic and religious categories are made relevant for identification (as GREEK or GEORGIAN) and how this question relates to struggles of belonging in Ts’alk’a, especially regarding the very palpable questions of local land ownership (rights). The third point is the difference between evaluations of Urum in urban Tbilisi and rural Ts’alk’a, apparent in Table 5.3.

First, then, I will take a detailed look at how categorizing the the heritage variety is done. MP is a 34-year-old taxi driver, who was born in Ts’alk’a and has lived there all his life. His Georgian wife³² has learnt Russian and some Urum. They speak Georgian with their small children, but MP hopes his children will pick up both Urum and Russian as they grow up. In the 30 minutes previous to this excerpt, everybody involved in the interview has referred to his heritage variety as “Turkish” repeatedly. I have also called it *urum-dili* “Urum language” in Turkish/Urum, which MP repeats and then everybody chuckles (MP, 0:30:35). After this, his answer to the question of the heritage variety’s personal importance is a little surprising:

(5) Establishing hierarchies (MP, 0:32:19-0:33:07)

- 1 CH: *i govorit’ na (-) turetskom urum eto vazhno dlya vas*
and to_speak on Turkish Urum this important for you
- 2 MP: *hm (3) na turetskom vazhno mne govorit’ li*
on Turkish important me to_speak whether
- 3 CH: [mhm]
- 4 NL: [mhm]

32 She migrated from Ach’ara and converted from Islam to Orthodox Christianity, we are told later. To MP, marrying a Muslim was not a problem at all, she had to be “re-baptized” however, in order to have their children baptized (MP, 0:38:00). This is a reminder that Ts’alk’ian Greeks do not all share the same views on who exactly the out-group is, and how clear-cut and durable a boundary has to be drawn (cf. Chapter 7).

- 5 MP: *net konechno*
no of_course
- 6 CH: ((chuckles)) po_
- 7 MP: *a chto vazhno* (—) [*<< smiling > eto ne moy yazyk >*]
and what important this not my language
- 8 ((chuckles))]
- 9 CH: [((chuckles))] (-) *h eto urum-dili (-) ne vazhno dlya vas*
this Urum-Dili not important for you
- 10 MP: *no eto ne urum-dili (—) eto ne grecheskiy yazyk (1)*
but this not Urum-Dili this not Greek language
- 11 NL: e:
- 12 MP: *urum eto grek*
Urum is Greek
- 13 CH: *[da]*
yes
- 14 NL: *[da] my nazyvaem urum-dili etot e dialekt e:: chto vy govorite*
yes we name_we Urum-Dili this dialect that you speak_2PL
- 15 *po-turetski eto karsinskiy dialekt*
Turkish this Karsian dialect
- 16 MP: *eto ne (yazyk) eto*
this not language this
- 17 NL: *chto greki govoryat*
what Greeks say_they
- 18 MP: *[da eto n eto ne grecheskiy yazyk]*
yes this this not Greek language
- 19 CH: [((chuckles))] *da*
yes
- 20 NL: *[da da da]*
yes yes yes
- 21 MP: *[dazhe eto ne pontiyskiy yazyk]*
even this not Pontic language
- 1 CH: and is it important to you to speak Turkish Urum?
- 2 MP: whether it's important to me to speak Turkish?
- 3 CH: [mhm]
- 4 NL: [mhm]
- 5 MP: of course not
- 6 CH: ((chuckles)) wh_
- 7 MP: so what's important (about it) – it's not my language
- 9 CH: this Urum-Dili is not important to you?
- 10 MP: but this isn't Urum-Dili, it's not Greek language
- 11 NL: e:
- 12 MP: Urum means Greek

- 13 CH: yes
 14 NL: yes, we call Urum-Dili this dialect, how you speak Turkish, this
 15 Karsian dialect
 16 MP: it's not a language, it's
 17 NL: that Greeks speak
 18 MP: yes, that's not, it's not Greek language
 19 CH: [((chuckles))] yes
 20 NL: [yes, yes, yes]
 21 MP: it's not even the Pontic language

MP very slowly and deliberately first clarifies whether he understood the question correctly (line 2), before stating *net konechno* “of course not” (5) – which in the context of the previous conversation only follows for him as unsurprising. I show surprise by chuckling and starting to ask why (6), MP adds the rhetorical and slightly confrontational *a chto vazhnogo* “what’s important (about it)”, before adding that he does not consider TURKISH to be his language (7). He acknowledges the effect of surprise by uttering this smilingly and laughing a little afterwards (7-8), showing himself to be enjoying the confusion. I align myself with this by chuckling, and then try again, asking whether this *urum-dili* is not important to him (9). Already having introduced “Urum-Dili” before and in the first question (line 1), this appears like an attempt to reference something like “that language you speak in your community” rather than TURKISH, which was unsuccessful in getting said reference before. MP, however, clarifies the reference by stating that this language *eto ne urum-dili* “is not Urum-Dili” because *eto ne grecheskiy yazyk* “it’s not (the/a) Greek language” (10), and finally *urum eto grek* “Urum means Greek” (12). So far, then, TURKISH is not “his language” and it is also not “Urum-Dili” because that would make it a Greek language – which Turkish, quite rightly from a linguistic point of view, is not.

NL attempts to clarify that “we”, the outsiders, use *urum-dili* differently, using it instead to refer to *etot dialekt chto vy govoryte po-turetski eto karsinskiy dialekt* “this dialect, how you speak Turkish, this Karsian dialect” (14-15).³³ The heritage variety is thus labeled a “dialect” for the first (and only) time in the interview in NL’s search for a way to reference “how you speak Turkish”, which ends in him giving the geographical origin of the variety spoken as “Karsian” (from Kars). MP retorts that “this is not a language” (16). NL does not give up his attempt to find a way to refer to the variety spoken in the community with *chto greki govoryat* “that Greeks speak” (17). MP

33 “Karsian dialect” is the label another consultant (ME) had used in our interview with her a few days earlier.

is unconvinced and repeats that this is not a Greek language (18), which I acknowledge by chuckling and agreeing (19). MP then moves to his final verdict on his heritage variety: *dazhe eto ne pontiyskiy yazyk* “it’s not even (the/a) Pontic language” (21), which NL aligns himself with by agreeing repeatedly (20). NL’s attempt at clarifying what “we” mean by *urum-dili*, then, allows MP to evaluate his heritage variety as “not a language” (16), “not a Greek language” (18), and finally “not a Pontic language” (21).

Thus, MP establishes a hierarchy that poses the variety spoken at the very bottom as “not my language”, “not a language”, “not a Greek language”, and culminates in “not even Pontic”. The first verdict is perhaps the strongest, denying the variety which he speaks both importance and ownership – it stays somehow MARGINAL. Note how this contrasts with him wanting to teach it to his children. It appears to be the question of (personal) *importance* that establishes a different frame for evaluating his heritage variety, and thereby triggers a different evaluation. Urum “not being a language” takes up NL’s classification as a “dialect”, it not being a “Greek language” his previous clarification what *urum* refers to. The final verdict “it’s not even (the/a) Pontic language” is interesting, as it places the different varieties in relation to each other. The emerging hierarchy poses GREEK (in this context SMG) as the CORRECT language to use for GREEKS, with PONTIC being the second best option for those GREEKS who do not have access to SMG. PONTIC is therefore still linked to being GREEK, which cannot be said for the heritage variety, which turns out to be not a language for a GREEK person to speak and to refer to as “mine”.³⁴

A similar rejection of Urum as a VALUABLE variety is found in the interview with IK, a 28-year-old university-educated employee of the district administration. He also refers to his heritage variety as a DIALECT and *kak-by ne polnotsennyy yazyk* “somehow not a full-fledged language” – which is the reason he gives for not wanting to speak it very much (IK, 0:43:58).³⁵ He does not merely evaluate the heritage variety as lacking in terms of LANGUAGESS. Instead, he rates it in terms of its USEFULNESS, which he discounts: even in his own family he can speak and be understood in other languages (Russian and Georgian). Furthermore, he perceives it as being so different from Turkish, that it would not serve him much as a communicative device in Turkey or Azerbaijan (0:42:45-0:44:33). Again, this dismissal follows the question of personal importance. IK also states that he has nothing against

34 On labeling this variety (Caucasian) Urum for academic purposes, see Chapter 1.

35 This corresponds with his comparison of Georgian and Russian in excerpt 13 below.

the variety as such and that while he will not teach it to his children due to its “uselessness”, he is not against them learning it. Given the linguistic situation in rural Ts’alk’a, they are very likely to acquire at least some Urum. The point here is that Urum is evaluated as lacking in terms of both *LANGUAGE*NESS and *USEFULNESS* for some consultants in rural Ts’alk’a, who do not evaluate it as “personally important”.

The second point, regarding linguistic and religious categories, has already come up in excerpt 2, where DP explains how the difference between *GREEKS* and *ACH’ARIANS* is that the former gave up “only” their language (thereby staying *GREEK*), whereas the latter gave up their religion and in her eyes thereby lost their affiliation with the category *GEORGIAN*, despite having kept the language associated with that category. Another strong excerpt comes from the interview with EM, a 65-year-old, Urum Greek retired surgical nurse living in Ts’alk’a (excerpt 30, EM, 0:39:33-0:40:01), which I will analyze in more detail in Chapter 7. EM very clearly expresses her feeling of “being treated unfairly” by “having to speak” the “un-Christian” and therefore somehow “wrong” language, while *MUSLIM ACH’ARIANS* are “allowed” to speak the *CHRISTIAN LANGUAGE* Georgian.

Finally, we need to look at the different evaluations of Urum as a heritage variety in rural and urban spaces. However, it is important to remember that Urum is by no means a problematic heritage variety for all consultants, as another glance at table 5.3 will remind us. So far, I have focused on the evaluations of those six consultants in Ts’alk’a who do not take Urum to be “important” to them personally. These cases show how speaking a *TURKISH* variety might be established as problematic for a *GREEK* community – as well as how consultants deal with these potential challenges to their (self-)identification. In contrast, excerpt 1 stresses the importance of the heritage variety, as do speakers who evaluate Urum as a link to their ancestors and their community, as being useful in numerous ways, or as rooting them in Ts’alk’a (for the latter: DL, 0:39:11). So for the majority of Urum Greek consultants, the relation to Urum as a heritage variety is positive and unproblematic. This is in line with their high levels of competence, their speaking the language at least in the family if they are competent speakers, and with passing it on to their children and even to their non-native Urum-speaking spouses. This is particularly striking in the case of LP and MP in Ts’alk’a, who do not see Urum as “personally important” to them.

Nevertheless, there are obvious differences between rural and urban spaces in evaluating the “personal importance” of Urum as heritage variety. The question seems to trigger positionings that differ between urban competent

Urum speakers and their rural counterparts. One interpretation would be that for the urban Greek consultants the heritage language evokes feelings of belonging and rootedness, especially in terms of family relations (both dead and alive), while neither their being GREEK nor their belonging to Georgia is usually challenged in their everyday interactions.³⁶ There might also be a perception of Urum being a lesser used variety and therefore somehow special to them, their families and their community. It is also possible that, in the context of documentation efforts undertaken by project members, they perceive this language as being what makes them of interest to me; in this light, positive evaluation and stress on its importance for belonging might be viewed as a “good position to take”.

Quite differently, in Ts’alk’a the documentation project was not as well known at the time of the interviews. More importantly, the language is an integral part of rural Greek consultants’ everyday life and interactions, not only within the immediate family. This might not make it feel like an “endangered” language. Nevertheless, it is in Ts’alk’a that their being GREEK is challenged due to their language use, even as their belonging to Georgia is challenged due to the “accusers” being “real Georgians”. The latter is, as we have seen, questioned by some rural Greek consultants on religious grounds. I will discuss Ts’alk’a and the boundaries drawn there in detail in Chapter 7.

Finally, it is safe to assume that both rural and urban Urum Greek consultants either have first-hand experience of discrimination in Greece related to their speaking a TURKISH language, or have heard of such discrimination via stories of (close) family members or friends (cf. Chapter 7). These experiences possibly add to the struggle for economic survival, belonging and recognition of (self-)identification in Ts’alk’a in a way that makes at least some consultants lack the aplomb with which IP, for example, positions himself and his community in a Pontic village (cf. excerpt 4).

III. Preliminary summary

The main finding here is that for such a small community, a high number of consultants still claim competence in their respective heritage variety and that competent speakers pass these languages on to their offspring. This is

36 While there are narratives of discrimination experienced for not speaking Georgian in public during Gamsakhurdia’s presidency, as in excerpt 20 (cf. Chapter 6), these are invariably about speaking Russian in public, never about Urum (or Pontic Greek).

in contrast to what Zoumpalidis (2012) reports regarding declining heritage variety use in the Northern Caucasus. In terms of positioning the speaker and their community, historical narratives are used to show “how things came to be the way they are”. Excerpt 4 shows this for Pontic Greek, as do Sections 1. and 2. for both heritage varieties. Importantly, it appears that Urum has more potential to be problematized as a heritage variety than Pontic Greek, by both heritage speakers and people with no family history of speaking that language – although Pontic Greek is also problematized by some Urum Greek consultants.

In-group members problematize Urum only in Ts’alk’a, which I take to be largely a factor of the very different social context. Because of the continuing challenge to their self-identification in Ts’alk’a (and in Greece), GREEKS have to position themselves and the language they speak differently. They cannot simply treat it as the language of their ancestors, to be valued and cherished. As Sideri (2006) also observes, it is not a problem to *speak* Urum and to pass it on to one’s children, or to speak about this variety linking individuals to their community and – in Ts’alk’a – their place of residence. It becomes problematic, however, when outsiders either challenge their being GREEK, i.e. turn their language use into something “deviant”, or as interviewers ask a question about “importance”, which is apparently interpreted as linking heritage variety to national identity. The latter might not be a “strong” or direct challenge, but it appears that some consultants in Ts’alk’a still interpret it as questioning how to fill the category GREEK. Overall, we can see here how larger discourses of what matters for identification (in this case communal boundary work in the Ts’alk’a region) influence how consultants can make use of the languages they speak as a resource in positioning themselves – or else how they are something they have to negotiate in the daily struggle over (self-)identification and belonging (cf. Chapter 7).

On the level of interactive devices employed by speakers, four main ways of doing identification and belonging emerge. The first is to evaluate a variety regarding its USEFULNESS and LANGUAGENESS and to then put effort into having one’s children learn a variety that ranks highly in both. The second is to understand a language as indicative of social belonging: for heritage varieties this might be in historical, communal (ancestral), or religious terms. This might force one to deal with “mismatches” if, for example, a language is perceived to stand for a particular religion that one does not want to be associated with. One way of coming to terms with this is to SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY, for instance through narrating how this situation came to be. Narration is the third device. It may be used broadly to establish the historical trajectory of

one’s community, or to explain a perceived “mismatch” between category membership and language use. The fourth device, finally, is to perceive a particular variety as a link to spatial belonging, rooting a speaker and her community in a particular village, city, region, country or an even larger and less tangible space – the “post-Soviet” one, for example. All four methods will come up again in more detail throughout the analysis.

B. Standard Modern Greek

Investigating how consultants make use of Standard Modern Greek as a resource for positioning themselves as GREEK is a particularly interesting case, since without this language one cannot identify as GREEK in contemporary Greece (Hionidou 2012; Kaurinkoski 2010; Sideri 2006, cf. also Chapters 2 and 7). It is also a challenging case, since far from all members of the community are competent speakers of this language, something consultants have to come to terms with in our interview conversations. In speaking about SMG, consultants follow three broad lines of argument: first, they may wholeheartedly embrace the notion that SMG is an integral part of being GREEK, which I will discuss in Section II.. Second, they may discount the identificatory potential of SMG and highlight ancestry and religion (Section III.). Or, third, they may evaluate competence in SMG as “desirable”, thus reconciling their evaluation of SMG as important with the language situation within the community (Section IV.).³⁷

First, however, I will in the next Section ground these conceptualizations in some numbers about competence in SMG and consultants’ evaluations of its importance.

I. Competence in SMG and evaluating its importance

Table 5.4 summarizes my consultants’ self-assessment of language competence in SMG.³⁸ As with the heritage varieties, I did not carry out any type of assessment test. Crucially, just over a third of both Urum (34.8%) and Pontic Greeks (38.5%) state high levels of competence, roughly a third state

37 I have explored the first two lines of argumentation in Höfler (2016), the third in Höfler (2018a).

38 In this Section, I rely extensively on the statistical analysis published in two papers on evaluating SMG (Höfler, 2016, 2018a).

Table 5.4: Self-assessed language competence in SMG

	competent		some comp.		little comp.		no comp.		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Urum	8	34.8	1	4.3	8	34.8	6	26.1	23	100
Pontic	10	38.5	5	19.2	2	7.7	9	34.6	26	100
Total	18	36.7	6	12.2	10	20.4	15	30.6	49	100

little to some competence and the final third no competence whatsoever. The difference between both communities is only noticeable in the range from “little competence” (34.8% Urum vs. 7.7% Pontic) to “some competence” (4.3% Urum vs. 12.2% Pontic), which I will conflate in the following analysis. It may appear surprising that so many Pontic Greek consultants assert their incompetence in SMG, as these two varieties are not mutually unintelligible *per se*. As has become apparent in excerpt 4 above, both varieties are, however, perceived to be different enough to warrant being defined as different LANGUAGES in the community. In addition, Pontic Greek consultants who claim incompetence in SMG may either lack the exposure to SMG that would be necessary to realize the proximity of both varieties, or they may not be competent speakers of Pontic Greek themselves. The latter may be especially true for Pontic Greek consultants in urban settings (recall Table 5.1). A final point is that (heritage) speakers of Pontic Greek are not exempt from discrimination in Greece based on their less-than-flawless competence in SMG (cf. Chapter 7).

The potential split between rural and urban spaces, which became apparent in evaluating Urum as heritage language (cf. Section A.) is not so pronounced in terms of competence in SMG. Again, consultants in rural Ts’alk’a profess slightly higher levels of competence (5 out of 12 or 41.7%) than their urban counterparts (3 out of 11 or 27.3%). For Pontic Greeks, competence in SMG is given as almost equal across rural and urban contexts: 6 out of 16 consultants (37.5%) assess themselves as competent speakers in rural areas, and 4 out of 10 in the urban settings of Tbilisi and Batumi.

Age correlates with competence in SMG, as becomes evident from a comparison of Tables 5.4 and 5.5. Recall that “competence”, “some competence” and “no competence” in SMG are distributed fairly equally in the sample overall. In relation to age, this is true for the category “some competence” but not for the other two. The youngest cohort – consultants under 30 years of

Table 5.5: Age and self-assessed language competence in SMG

	competent		some competence		no competence		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Under 30	5	50	3	30	2	20	10	100
30-55	9	40.9	8	36.4	5	22.7	22	100
Over 55	4	23.5	5	29.4	8	47.1	17	100
Total	18	36.7	16	32.7	15	30.6	49	100

age – have the highest level of competence at 50%, with levels of competence declining with age. This distribution is similar to what Zoumpalidis (2013, p. 240) reports for the Greek community in the Northern Caucasus. In light of general patterns of language change, this is an indication that language competence is shifting. As we will see in Section C., language use in the community is so complex that it is very dubitable that the Greek community in Georgia will ever speak SMG as a widespread family language. Note also that a comparison of the results in Table 5.1 with Table 5.4 shows that levels of competence in the respective heritage variety are self-assessed to be much higher overall than in SMG. Interestingly, consultants’ level of education does not correlate with competence in SMG: of the 18 competent speakers, exactly half went to university, which corresponds with education levels in the sample as a whole.³⁹ Neither does gender predict competence in SMG.

The next question is whether competence in SMG is perceived to be an important feature of being GREEK by Georgian Greek consultants – as it is by the societal majority in Greece. The question I asked to establish this was *nuzhno li govorit’ po-grechესki chtoby schitat’ sebya grekom?* “is it necessary to speak Greek in order to consider oneself Greek?” Having usually just discussed potential differences between SMG and Pontic Greek as well as the situation in Greece where relevant, the possibility of consultants taking this question to refer to Pontic Greek rather than SMG is minimal.

Table 5.6 shows how consultants answered that question. Importantly, the clear “yes” or “no” answers include consultants who elaborated on the ques-

39 Overall, our consultants’ level of education is very high in comparison to the last census of the Georgian population as a whole (Geostat, 2016). Note that this is in line with consultants’ self-understanding of their community as very well educated, certainly until the end of the Soviet Union.

40 First published in Höfler (2016, p. 220).

Table 5.6: Is competence in SMG necessary in order to consider oneself Greek?⁴⁰

	yes		desirable		no		no answer		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Urum	4	17.4	8	34.8	10	43.5	1	4.2	23	100
Pontic	10	38.5	3	11.4	10	38.5	3	11.4	26	100
Total	14	28.6	11	22.3	20	40.7	4	8.2	49	100

tion for some time and in this process “talked themselves” to a clear answer, even if they may have started out rather unclearly. As I have argued in Höfler (2016, 2018a), the category “desirable” arises from an open examination of the data (cf. Glaser / Strauss, 2007). Rather than representing the “middle point” between “yes” and “no”, something else is at stake here, namely articulating a certain degree of unsettlement, which I discuss in Section IV. below.

Looking at the results in Table 5.6, a surprisingly high number of both Pontic and Urum Greeks (10 each, 40.7% of the sample) negate a link between being GREEK and competence in SMG. There is a difference between Urum and Pontic heritage variety speakers: For Urum Greeks, the category “desirable” is much higher (34.8% of Urum Greek consultants vs. 11.4% of Pontic Greek consultants). Pontic Greeks apparently found it easier to arrive at a clear “yes” or “no” answer (both at 38.5%). Interestingly, all four “yes” answers by Urum Greeks were given in rural Ts’alk’a. It is also notable that for two of them (incidentally the two consultants without competence in SMG) evaluating SMG as important coincides with negative evaluations of their heritage variety Urum.⁴¹ For the first time in the analysis so far, this split in evaluation between rural and urban settings is shared by Pontic Greek consultants, with half of rural Pontic Greek consultants considering competence in SMG to be important, compared to only 2 out of 10 urban Pontic Greek consultants.

41 For different reasons, however: as discussed in Section A., for EM the “mismatch” between CHRISTIANITY and TURKISH plays a role, whereas for IK considerations of USEFULNESS are more important.

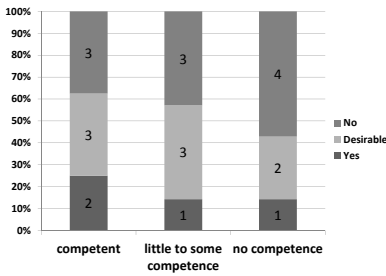


Figure 5.1: Urum Greeks: Competence in and evaluation of the necessity of competence in SMG.

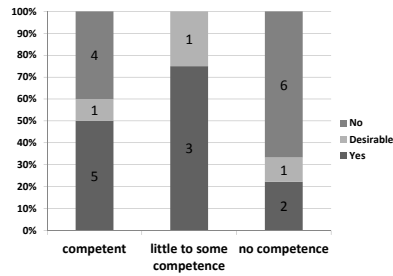


Figure 5.2: Pontic Greeks: Competence in and evaluation of the necessity of competence in SMG.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show the distribution of competence in relation to whether SMG is seen to be important for Greekness.⁴² Interestingly, while in the answers of Pontic Greek consultants there is a slight correlation between a consultant’s own competence and the evaluation of SMG as important for being GREEK, for Urum Greeks the speaker’s own competence apparently had no influence on how they answered that question. In line with this, age does not play a role here. So, while younger Georgian Greeks are overall more likely to speak SMG well, they are not more likely to consider this competence important for belonging to their community. Neither do older consultants consider this competence to be more important, regardless of their own competence.⁴³ Taken together with the high number of speakers evaluating competence in SMG as “desirable”, this distribution might point to something other than slowly changing patterns of competence within the community. I will argue in Section IV. that we might be witnessing a community shifting their evaluation as a whole in response to the challenges posed to their self-identification as GREEK in contemporary Greece. This challenge might still be felt strongly by those who stayed in Georgia due to numerous and close contacts with their emigrated relatives and friends,

42 Both were first published in (Höfler, 2016, p. 222). The 4 instances of “no answer” have been omitted from the figures.

43 This is different to what Zoumpalidis (2013, p. 240) reports for the Northern Caucasus, where his older consultants were less likely to be competent speakers of SMG but more likely to attribute high importance to this competence.

and explains why personal experience of migration⁴⁴ is also not a factor predicting the evaluation.

Summing up, age plays a role in predicting competence in SMG, whereas heritage variety, settlement space and education do not. The community is divided in terms of whether this competence would be important for being GREEK, with many disagreeing. Neither competence nor age correlate with this evaluation. However, speakers of both heritage languages living in rural areas are more likely to answer this question affirmatively.

II. Tracing belonging through competence

This is the first of three Sections investigating how consultants speak about evaluating SMG as (un)important for their own and their community's being GREEK. Intriguingly, arguments framed as “objective facts” or “facts of nature” are given as strongly for as against considering competence in SMG essential for being GREEK. This can be best explained by linking these lines of argument to broader discourses on the prerequisites for belonging to any national category. Contemporary citizens of Georgia have discursive access to two ideal types of framing national belonging: the “imperial” type, which preceded the modern nation state and traced belonging through religious affiliation and ancestry, and the “modern” type, associated with contemporary nation states, wherein religious and ancestral ties are not always prerequisite and language plays a much greater role, especially in everyday interactions.⁴⁵ As outlined in Chapter 2, the latter dominates discourses on belonging in contemporary Greece (Hionidou, 2012; Kaurinkoski, 2010; Sideri, 2006) and is also present in contemporary Georgia (Suny, 1994). In Georgia, however, tracing national belonging through religious affiliation, especially one

44 21 consultants (43%) professed personal experience of some type of migration, including seasonal labor migration.

45 Most current theoretical approaches to nations and nationalism connect the emergence of the modern nation state with the emergence of a standardized national language that serves both as an “administrative vernacular” (Anderson, 1991, p. 41) and as a unifying symbol for the (young) nation (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983). These processes have played a major role in shaping language policies in the post-Soviet space, as discussed *inter alia* in Feldman (2000); Hogan-Brun (2006); Korth (2005); Pavlenko (2008). Globalization and post-modernity pose great challenges to this concept of the nation state, yet discourses about national affiliation – at least in Europe, including Georgia – remain steeped in “modern” narratives and exigencies.

that involves the Byzantine Empire, is still a powerful discursive resource (Fuchslocher, 2010).⁴⁶

Let us now examine how AL argues for LANGUAGE as important for national belonging. AL is a Pontic Greek woman in her late 50s who is a competent speaker of SMG and lives in a small village in rural Tetrīts’q’aro. She was unemployed at the time of the interview, having previously been employed in the local administration.

(6) No belonging without language (AL, 0:19:26-0:19:46)⁴⁷

- 1 CH: *obyazatel’no li govorit’ po-grechski chtoby schitat’*
necessary whether to_speak the_Greek_way so_that to_consider
 - 2 *sebya grekom (—)*
self Greek
 - 3 AL: *°h chtoby sebya schitat’ h° toy natsii ne tol’ko [grekom]*
so_that self to_consider of_that nation not only Greek
 - 4 CH: [mhm]
 - 5 AL: *[gruzin]om russk[im] obyazatel’no nado znat’ yazyk*
Georgian Russian necessarily must to_know language
 - 6 NL: [hm]
 - 7 CH: [mhm]
 - 8 NL: [hm]
 - 9 AL: *ya tak schitayu h° bez yazyka ty ne n: ty ne etoy*
I so consider_I without language you not you not of_that
 - 10 *natsii*
nation
 - 11 NL: hm
 - 12 AL: *°hh da (1) nuzhen yazyk*
yes needed language
-
- 1 CH: is it necessary to speak Greek in order to consider oneself Greek?
 - 3 AL: in order to consider oneself of that nation, not only [Greek]
 - 4 CH: [mhm]
 - 5 AL: [Georgi]an or Russ[ian] it is necessary to know the language
 - 6 NL: [hm]
 - 7 CH: [mhm]
 - 8 NL: [hm]
 - 9 AL: I think that without language you’re not, you’re not a part of that nation
 - 11 NL: hm
 - 12 AL: yes, language is necessary

46 That this is also a contested discourse can be seen in Ts’alk’a (cf. Section A. and Chapter 7).

47 Excerpt and analysis adapted from Höfler (2016, p. 224f.).

In excerpt 6 AL very clearly, and without signs of hesitation or efforts at mitigation, states that she considers LANGUAGE to be a vital component of belonging to any national category. Extending the scope of her argument beyond the realm of being GREEK, she further lists “Georgian or Russian” (5) as examples, thereby alluding to a general rule of how national affiliation works. In lines 9-10 she delivers her verdict, slightly hedged by restricting her statement to the sphere of her personal consideration (*ya tak schitayu* “that’s how I see it”), that *bez yazyka* “without language” *ty ne etoy natsii* “you’re not part of that nation”. She closes her contribution by answering the question I posed (in line 1) with a calm *da (I) nuzhen yazyk* “yes, language is necessary” (12).

Most consultants arguing for a close link between language competence and national belonging do this in a similarly clear and unmitigated way. Given the discursive prevalence of the modern nation state in Europe, this is also perhaps not the most interesting case, as the discourse linking national affiliation with the use of a particular (standardized) language has become so pervasive. What is interesting, though, is how consultants arguing for this principle deal with their own and/or their community’s linguistic “shortcoming”. Two closely connected lines of reasoning come up in the corpus: firstly, consultants might mention their own efforts to “remedy” the situation on a personal level by investing time in learning the language and keeping their level of competence as high as possible. This might happen either by taking classes in SMG that could be provided by the *Greek Federation of Georgia* (AT, ED) or at university level, where some consultants decided to specialize in Greek philology (VD). The second stance would be to deplore the lack of Greek language education in Georgia and cite historical reasons for why Greeks in Georgia do not speak Greek (IK, EM). The responsibility for this “shortcoming” is thereby shifted to forces beyond the community, like state provisions for minority schooling. This communicative device of SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY away from the speaker and/or their community is even more widespread in arguing for the category “desirable”, as we will see in Section IV.. It is also a common account for why Georgian Greeks may not be proficient speakers of Georgian, as discussed in Section C..

Interestingly, none of the ten consultants arguing for the close connection between competence in SMG and national belonging explicitly draw the conclusion that parts of their community could or should not be considered “properly” GREEK.

III. “We are born Greeks”: Tracing belonging through ancestry and religion

The other very clear line of reasoning takes LANGUAGE to be something rather MARGINAL and not a fundamental part of belonging. In this line of argument, ancestry and/or religion, official documentation like passports, or the consultant’s self-identification may provide the crucial link to their being GREEK.⁴⁸ In this view, LANGUAGE might be conceived of as a MEANS OF COMMUNICATION instead of, as above, a MEANS OF IDENTIFICATION. The former is prominent especially when consultants tell me that it is important to speak as many languages as possible regardless of the specific languages, or display the already-introduced attitude of evaluating languages in terms of their USEFULNESS.

I will address, in turn, each of the ways in which consultants foreground features of belonging not connected with LANGUAGE. The first, and perhaps the strongest, argument is ancestry. Thus, EC, a 37-year-old, Urum Greek housewife who speaks SMG and lives in Tbilisi, very clearly states why she self-identifies as GREEK: *greki my rozhdamsya* “we are born Greeks” (EC, 0:47:20). Similarly, SC, a 71-year-old, Urum Greek retired police officer lives seasonally in both Greece and Georgia, and is competent in SMG, but denies a close connection between LANGUAGE and national affiliation.⁴⁹ He dismisses my question whether his heritage language, Urum, is important to him by drawing on the proverb that every language one speaks makes one worth the equivalent of one monolingual individual. In this, the specific languages spoken are not as important as their sum total, and he proudly tells me *ya shest’ chelovek* “I’m [worth] six people” (SC, 0:46:30-0:46:47). I go on to ask whether competence in SMG is important in order to consider oneself Greek. He dismisses that notion by explaining that he knows many Greeks in Russia who do not speak SMG, making the Georgian Greeks less of an exception. He adds that it would not be a problem in Greece either, since the Greek government provided Greek language courses for post-Soviet Greek

48 Another reason is given by two Pontic Greek women in Batumi (NA and LV), who argue that the language of the PLACE one inhabits is paramount. I explore this reasoning in detail in Section C. of this Chapter.

49 He might be read as a “textbook example” of a person from his generation, with a successful career in the Soviet Union and little reason to question values commonly attributed to (citizens of) the Soviet Union. This is also apparent in how he constructs the Soviet Union as a FAMILY in excerpt 19 discussed in Chapter 6.

immigrants, thus preparing them for life in Greece (SC, 0:46:47-0:47:13). He concludes:

(7) You have to be born Greek (SC, 0:47:14-0:47:50)

- 1 SC: *tak chto: eto ne problema °h (—) lyuboy (-) ne znaya svoy*
so that this not problem anybody not knowing own
- 2 *rodnoy yazyk eto ne znachit chto on dopustim ne russkiy*
native language this not means that he suppose_we not Russian
- 3 *[ili]*
or
- 4 CH: *[mhm]*
- 5 SC: *ne grek ili on ne gruzin (1.5) gruzin gruzin ne ne*
not Greek or he not Georgian Georgian Georgian not not
- 6 *obyazatel'no znat' yazyk*
obligatorily to_know language
- 7 CH: *mhm (1) khorosho (6)*
good
- 8 SC: *a chtoby gordit'sya (-) chto nado delat' znaete (-)*
and so_that to_be_proud what necessary to_do know_2PL
- 9 *chtoby gordit'sya gor[dost' znaete chtoby gordit'sya]*
so_that to_be_proud pride know_2PL so_that to_be_proud
- 10 CH: *[hm hm]*
- 11 SC: *chto nado delat' znaete (1)*
what necessary to_do know_2PL
- 12 CH: *net*
no
- 13 SC: *nado grekom rodit'sya [((chuckles))]*
necessary as_Greek be_born
- 14 CH: *[((chuckles))]*
- 15 NL: *[((chuckles))]*
- 1 SC: so it's not a problem, if anybody doesn't know his native language, it
- 2 doesn't mean that he, let's say, isn't Russian [or]
- 4 CH: [mhm]
- 5 SC: Greek or he's not Georgian, a Georgian is a Georgian, it's not
- 6 obligatory to know the language
- 7 CH: mhm (1) alright (6)
- 8 SC: but in order to be proud, you know what you have to do? in order to be
- 9 proud? you know pri[de? in order to be proud]
- 10 CH: [hm hm]
- 11 SC: you know what you have to do? (1)
- 12 CH: no?
- 13 SC: you have to be born Greek! [((chuckles))]

14 CH: [((chuckles))]

15 NL: [((chuckles))]

In excerpt 7, SC concludes his preceding explanation by first stating that based on the examples he gave (Greeks in Russia not speaking SMG, the Greek government providing language courses), not knowing *svoy rodnoy yazyk* “one’s native language” does not mean that a person would cease to be “Russian, Greek or Georgian” (1-6). The adjective *rodnoy* “native” is used here in the (post-)Soviet way, referring to the language associated with the national category one was born into, rather than one’s strongest language (cf. Chapter 2, Grenoble 2003). Even though there are apparently linguistic categories associated with these national categories, competence in the respective language is not obligatory to retain or prove this national affiliation: *gruzin gruzin ne ne obyazatel’no znat’ yazyk* “a Georgian is a Georgian, it’s not obligatory to know the language” (5-6). I agree (7), and after a substantial pause of six full seconds, SC returns to the question of NATIONALITY, which for him is apparently linked with “pride”, asking whether his addressees know what one would have to do *chtoby gordit’sya* “in order to be proud” (8-9). This seems to be so important to him, that he, knowing I have a less-than-fluent grasp on Russian, explicitly asks to make sure I understand the word *gordost’* ‘pride’ (9). Having ensured my full comprehension and attention with this build-up, he repeats his question (9-11) and waits for my negation (12). Only then does he deliver the punch-line of his joke: *nado grekom rodit’sya* “you have to be born Greek” (13), which achieves the desired effect, with all three of us laughing. This joking emphasis on national affiliation *qua* birth is even more surprising and thereby “funnier” in the context of the whole interview, since SC has always stressed that NATIONALITY is not a category he pays much attention to, nor considers a relevant and reliable predictor of someone’s personality.

Closely connected to this emphasis on ancestry for national affiliation is the Soviet way of recording nationality in internal passports. This practice further served to set NATIONALITY as a hereditary category unencumbered by “marginal” characteristics like linguistic competence.⁵⁰ IS, a Pontic Greek competent SMG speaker and farmer in rural Tetrits’q’aro, is the only consultant who refers to this explicitly when asked about the importance of SMG for being GREEK. He answers that his documents are fully sufficient to identify

50 For an analysis of the nationalizing impact of Soviet passport policies, cf. Arel (2003); Brubaker (1996); Slezkine (1994); Suny (1993) and the discussion in Chapter 2.

him as GREEK (IS, 0:34:33).⁵¹ A similar notion, if not explicitly stated, may underpin TS' *yazyk voobshche ne imeet znachenie* "language has no meaning whatsoever" (TS, 0:14:16).

As I have discussed in Chapter 2, the Soviet passport policy retained the national categories that were used by preceding Empires (in this case the Ottoman and Russian Empires), while "emptying" them of at least some of their content – e.g. religion – for at least some people. This may be why some consultants encounter argumentative difficulties when answering the question of whether competence in SMG is a prerequisite for being GREEK. Like NB in excerpt 8 below, they are sure they belong, but lack the calm and the conviction displayed by consultants arguing for both positions in the excerpts above (6 and 7), who needed no further rationale to justify their belonging.⁵²

For NB, reconciling her incompetence in SMG with considering herself undoubtedly GREEK seems to require some conversational effort. She is a university-educated, Urum Greek woman in her late 20s, and at the time of the interview lives in Tbilisi and looks after her two small children.

(8) I'm Greek in my soul (NB, 0:40:09-0:40:42)⁵³

- 1 CH: *e nuzhno (-) em: govorit' (-) po-grechესki (-) em chtoby byt'*
must to_speak the_Greek_way so_that to_be
- 2 *grek (1) chto ty думаеш' (-)*
Greek_M what you think_2SG
- 3 NB: *net ne obyazatel'no (-)*
no not necessarily
- 4 CH: *ne obyazatel'no (-)*
not necessarily
- 5 NB: *ty m: (-) ya i tak grechanka [ya v dushe]*
you I and so Greek_F I in soul
- 6 CH: *[da]*
yes
- 7 NB: *grechanka*
Greek_F
- 8 CH: *mhm*

51 A similar reliance on official documents for reassurance of national affiliation became important for Georgian Greek immigrants to Greece (cf. Chapter 7).

52 As discussed in Section D., this may also be because SMG is not afforded much importance unless an outsider asks about it.

53 Text in Georgian is marked with (kat) at the beginning of the turn. Excerpt and analysis adapted from Höfler (2016, p. 225ff.).

- 9 NB: *a esli ya ne znayu grecheskogo yazyka eto ne znachit chto ya*
and if I not know_I Greek language this not means that I
- 10 *ne grechanka*
not Greek_F
- 11 CH: mhm
- 12 NB: *ya lyublyu i gretsiyu i grekov i pontitsev ya vsekh lyublyu*
I love_I and Greece and Greeks and Pontics I all love_I
- 13 CH: [mhm]
- 14 NB: *[ya grech]anka v dushe tak chto mne ne nado (-) ne*
I Greek_F in soul so that me not necessary not
- 15 *obyazatel'no znat' grecheskiy chtoby (-) vot ty nemka da*
obligatory to_know Greek so_that here you German_F yes
- 16 CH: [mhm]
- 17 NB: *[esli ty ne] znaesh' nemetskogo (-) chto ty ne nemka*
if you not know_2SG German what you not German_F
- 18 *poluchaetsya*
turns_out
- 19 CH: *[((chuckles)) da]*
yes
- 20 NB: *[ty zhe nemka vsë] ty znaesh' chto ty nem[ka]*
you same German_F all you know_2SG that you German_F
- 21 CH: [mhm]
- 22 NB (kat): *morchá*
finished
-
- 1 CH: is it necessary to speak Greek in order to be Greek, what do you think?
- 3 NB: no, not necessarily
- 4 CH: not necessarily
- 5 NB: I'm Greek even so, [I'm in my soul]
- 6 CH: [yes]
- 7 NB: Greek
- 8 CH: mhm
- 9 NB: and if I don't know Greek, it doesn't mean that I'm not Greek
- 11 CH: mhm
- 12 NB: I love Greece, Greeks and Pontics, I love them all
- 13 CH: [mhm]
- 14 NB: I'm Greek in my soul and that's why I don't need to know Greek, like,
- 15 you're German, right?
- 16 CH: [mhm]
- 17 NB: [if you didn't] speak German would you then not be German?
- 19 CH: *[((chuckles)) yes]*
- 20 NB: [you're still German, that's all,] you know that you're Ger[man]
- 21 CH: [mhm]
- 22 NB (kat): that's all

NB first very clearly negates the question (3) before she starts to defend her being GREEK with or without competence in SMG in line 5.⁵⁴ She locates being GREEK within herself, more specifically *v dushe* “in (my) soul” (5). It thereby turns into an essential part of her, unaffected by her language competence, which she states clearly in lines 9-10 and repeats in 14-15. Before the repetition, she expresses her love for Greece and Greeks both in Greece and abroad (12). She explicitly refers to the Greeks not residing in Greece with *pontitsev* “Pontics”, which includes those living in Georgia, as this is the label she generally uses for members of her own community. Through this emotional declaration, she shows that being GREEK is not only an essential part of herself but that she also has the “correct” feelings that are thereby established as the central attribute for category membership and contribute to this “Greek core”.

In the following part of her argument, she switches attention away from herself and uses my own national affiliation as an example to prove her point. That she firstly re-establishes my Germanness, which she is very much aware of as we had known each other for some time before the interview, really brings this affiliation to the foreground of the conversation and thereby our joint attention (15). Her rhetorical question whether I would somehow suddenly lose this affiliation if I did not speak German (17-18) is thus even stronger and readily acknowledged by me with a chuckle. She first closes this sequence with *ty zhe nemka vsë* “you’re still German, that’s all” (20), with *vsë* ‘everything’ “that’s all” functioning very much as the endpoint of her argument, similarly to an English speaker using *period* to signal their attempt to end a discussion. She strengthens this endpoint even further by first appealing to my knowledge about my belonging (20) and finally closing the topic by switching to Georgian with *morcha* ‘finished’ “that’s all” (22). This is the only time in the interview that she switches to Georgian when talking to me. So, she not only repeats the closing element *vsë*, she repeats it in a language that is highly marked in this context.⁵⁵ In establishing a GENERAL RULE for her evaluation that language competence is not central to national affiliation, NB thus draws on the resources afforded by the interview context –

54 Her first defense *ya i tak grechanka* “I’m Greek anyway” is a line other consultants use as well, notably DP (0:26:05).

55 She is very aware of my Georgian competence (or rather my lack thereof at the time of the interview) and during the interview uses Georgian only when talking to her husband and children, thereby making Russian the “interview language” and Georgian the “non-interview language” for our conversation.

my national affiliation – to show that this rule applies not only in her specific case but more generally.

The final way to discount linguistic competence relies on RELIGION as identifier, as discussed in exploring evaluations of the heritage languages (Section A.), boundaries in Ts’alk’a (Chapter 7), and specifically in the analysis of excerpt 2. Unsurprisingly, DP draws on RELIGION again when I pose the question of SMG’s importance for being GREEK: *my i tak greki ne obyazatel’no chtoby znali ne znali etot yazyk glavnoe chto khristiany glavnoe chto veru derzhim eto (glavnoe) (x)* “we’re Greeks anyway, it’s not necessary that we know or don’t know that language, the main thing is that we’re Christians, the main thing is that we keep the faith, that’s (important)” (DP, 0:26:04).

As discussed above, consultants arguing for a close link between competence in SMG and being GREEK refer to a generally valid rule according to which national affiliation is inexorably tied to competence in the LANGUAGE linked to this national category. In denying that competence in SMG has any importance for being GREEK, consultants rely on a different set of GENERAL RULES that define belonging: ANCESTRY (whether recorded in official documentation or not) and RELIGION provide links perceived to be somehow verifiable. NB, who at the time of the interview does not make use of either category as a resource for positioning herself as GREEK, uses her own “correct” feelings as a resource for claiming belonging to the category GREEK. She also establishes a contextually relevant rule of how national affiliation works by adducing me as an example and generalizing from this.

IV. Competence “Desirable” – uncertain evaluations

The third answer, that competence in SMG would be DESIRABLE, relates how consultants reconcile believing LANGUAGE to be an important factor in national affiliation with their own “shortcoming” in terms of competence in SMG. This category is very different from either viewing LANGUAGE as a central attribute of category membership or conversely evaluating it as MARGINAL to belonging. Consultants in this third group either express uncertainty on how to evaluate this issue, or voice a preference for the first option while taking into account – and sometimes explaining – their own and/or their community’s perceived shortcoming when evaluated in this light.

The main argumentative method employed in order to communicatively come to terms with this complexity is to SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY to socio-

historical context, whether distant or more recent (6 of 11 consultants). The former centers on their ancestors having lived in the Ottoman Empire, the latter mostly on the education system in Georgia.⁵⁶ ME, a 51-year-old manager in the local district administration in Ts'alk'a, thus explains her ancestors' not speaking SMG by referring to the political situation in the Ottoman Empire: *u nikh takoe obstoyatel'stvo bylo v tot moment* "that were their circumstances at that moment" (ME, 0:49:32). She states very clearly that this should not be held against them or be taken to imply that they are not GREEK: *nashi predki ne vinovaty byli chto oni ne znali yazyka °h no eto ne znachit chto oni ne byli grekami* "it wasn't our ancestors' fault that they didn't know the language, but it doesn't mean that they weren't Greek" (ME, 0:49:26). She then locates being GREEK *v dushe* "in the soul" (ME, 0:49:43), like NB in excerpt 8, and goes on to say that one can learn any language one wishes to (ME, 0:50:02-0:50:10). Again, LANGUAGE is seen as somehow MARGINAL, something which can be learnt or lost and which does not affect national affiliation in any way. SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY is a pervasive argumentative device, used to excuse all manner of perceived shortcomings, especially linguistic ones, within the community (cf. Section D.).

Two other lines of argumentation are used: OK makes the place of residence relevant, claiming that speaking the Georgian language is much more important if one lives in Georgia (OK, 0:58:47). AK also uses SC's proverb about the advantages of speaking many languages, and sees SMG as one of many desirable languages (AK, 0:26:38). A similar line is taken by MI, a 19-year-old Urum Greek living in Tbilisi and studying towards her BA in Greek studies at the time of the interview. She ascribes "untenable" positions to unspecified others, from which she then proceeds to distance herself:

(9) It's not so serious (MI, 0:35:40-0:36:09)⁵⁷

- 1 CH: *nuzhno li govorit' po-grechესki chtoby schitat' grekom*
must whether to_speak_in_Greek so_that to_consider Greek_M
2 (1.5)
- 3 MI: *m.: net (-) [ya ne schitayu chto eto ochen' tak °h] ob"yazatel'no*
no I not consider_I that this very so necessarily
4 *chtoby e [m]*
so_that

56 Note that this latter reason is also used to explain some Georgian Greeks' only very basic Georgian skills, even though responsibility is in this case transferred to the Soviet Union (cf. Section C.).

57 Excerpt and analysis adapted from Höfler (2018a).

- 5 CH: [(chuckles))]
6 NL: [hm]
7 MI: *nu esli ty grechanka ty dol'zhna znat' grecheskiy °h*
well if you Greek_F you should_F to_know Greek
8 MI (kat): *nu anu: (-) q'opila egeti raghats ro utkviat [magram]*
well or was such thing that said_they but
9 *seriozulad ara*
seriously not
10 CH: [hm]
11 NL: hm
12 MI (kat): *magram kho utkviat kholme egre magram nu ekhla*
but yes said_they sometimes so but well now
13 NL (kat): *shen rogor tvli tviton*
you how think_2SG self
14 MI (kat): *me tviton a_ar vtvli (—) m:: (-) unda vitso_ unda*
me self not think_I must would_kno_ must
15 *vitsode k'aia ro vitsode magram ese ara [radgan]*
would_know_I good_is that would_know_I but so no because
16 *berdzeni var ras hkvia ar vitsi kartuli]*
Greek am what called not know_I Georgian
17 NL: [mhm mhm]
18 MI (kat): *da ese k'at'egoriulad ara magram °h ekhla mometsa*
and so categorically not but now is_given_to_me
19 *sashualeba da ekhla vsts'avlob ar aris [problema amaze]*
opportunity and now learn_I not is problem this_about
20 NL: [hm]
21 MI (kat): *°h chemtvisats ara akvs dzaan iseti seriozuli dat'virtva da °h ar*
me_for_too not has very such serious meaning and not
22 *mivichnev ro radgan berdzeni var rat'o ar vitsi da [isa]*
consider_I that as Greek am why not know_I and that
23 NL (kat): *[mara k'argi] ikneboda ro itso[de kho]*
but good would_be that would_know_2SG yes
24 MI (kat): *[k'i k'argi] ikneboda ro m:: vtsa'vlob [da] << smiling >*
yes good would_be that learn_I and
25 *vitsode>*
would_know_I
26 NL: [hm]
27 MI (kat): *[k'i]*
yes
28 NL: [hm]
- 1 CH: is it necessary to speak Greek in order to consider (oneself) Greek?
3 MI: no [I don't think that is very] necessary in order to [m]
5 CH: [(chuckles))]

- 6 NL: [hm]
 7 MI: well, if you're Greek you should know Greek
 8 MI (kat): well, there were cases where they said that [but] not seriously
 10 CH: [hm]
 11 NL: hm
 12 MI (kat): but yeah, they have said things like that sometimes but, well, now
 13 NL (kat): how do you think personally?
 14 MI (kat): I personally don't think I must know, it would be good to know but
 15 not like [because I'm Greek, what's it, I don't speak Georgian]
 17 NL: [mhm mhm]
 18 MI (kat): and not so categorically/strictly, but now I have the opportunity and
 19 I learn it, it's not [a problem]
 20 NL: [hm]
 21 MI (kat): for me it's not so important and I don't think that because I'm
 22 Greek, how can I not know it and all [that]
 23 NL (kat): [but] it would be good [to know, right?]
 24 MI (kat): [yes] it would be good that I would learn it [and] that I would know
 25 it
 26 NL (kat): [hm]
 27 MI (kat): [yes]
 28 NL (kat): [hm]

MI starts her answer in line 3 with a number of hesitating moves, ranging from (filled) pauses to lexical mitigations: she reduces the scope of her answer to her personal considerations (*ya ne schitayu* “I don’t think”), thereby claiming nothing like a “general” scope for her answer and hedging her “not necessarily” even further: *ochen' tak ob'yazatel'no* ‘very necessary’. In line 7 she then gives an uncharacteristically straight answer that appears to echo normative-deontic statements from the community: *nu esli ty grechanka ty dol'zhna znat' grecheskiy* “well, if you’re Greek, you should know Greek”. She then switches to Georgian (8-9) to explain how this is what “they used to say” but how they were not being *seriozulad* “seriously”. This switch is only half marked: Throughout the interview I had asked the main questions in Russian and in her answers she would at some point switch to Georgian as that is the language she felt more comfortable with. Even so, it is remarkable that she delivers this first “community statement” still in Russian and only afterwards switches to Georgian.

In line 12 she repeats the back and forth between stating a clearer *magram kho utkviat kholme egre* “but they did say this sometimes” and wanting to qualify it with further hedges *magram nu ekhla* ‘but well now’, when NL steps in to ask what she personally thinks (13). In line 14 she continues hesitatingly, starting to say that for her it would be good to know Greek

(15) and then distances herself from another, unhesitatingly carried, strong “community statement” (15-16), namely that because she is Greek she does not – in the sense of should not – know Georgian. That she probably does not ascribe this statement to her own community but to other minorities in Georgia will be discussed in more detail below. Speaking SMG, then, *k’aia* “is good” (15), but she distances herself from positioning herself overly *k’at’egoriulad* “categorically” (18), as that would be a position limiting the number of languages “a Greek” should know apart from Greek. Being given the opportunity to learn SMG is, however, also not “a problem” for her (18-19). She then repeats, yet again, that for her personally it is not so important (21) that she should speak SMG (22). Interestingly, *radgan berdzeni var rat’o ar vitsi* “as I’m Greek why do I not know it?” again echoes the first “community position” according to which belonging and LANGUAGE go hand in hand. NL again clarifies that it is desirable that she speaks SMG (23), which she smilingly affirms (24).

Overall, MI positions herself at a distance from what she portrays as being the “community line” on the question: That a Greek person should speak SMG (7, 22) and not Georgian (15-16). She thereby positions herself outside of what she perceives to be perhaps an “outdated” way of positioning oneself that equates – exclusive – language competence with belonging, by being more cosmopolitan and taking opportunities that present themselves, but not putting more emphasis on SMG than “necessary”. That a GREEK should not speak Georgian is, in fact, a position that none of our consultants held and will be discussed in Section C. below. Whether MI here alludes to a position that is so outdated that nobody would claim it or whether this has to do with a native Georgian taking part in the interviews is hard to say. From the overall positions and perspectives related by consultants of the Georgian Greek community, however, it seems highly unlikely that a substantial part of the community would hold such a view. On the contrary, one common interactional method is to underline how speaking many languages is positive. A more likely interpretation is that she is citing positions presumed to be held by members of the Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities – over which there is a substantial political and mediatized debate in Georgia (Nilsson / Popjanevski, 2009; Wheatley, 2009). It is this stance which she perceives as a stark and unwarranted exaggeration of the “community position” from which she distances herself. Her position here is actually in line with that of many Georgian Greek consultants who in certain contexts portray themselves as “better minorities” in terms of “integration”, political allegiance to the Georgian state, etc.

The following excerpt 10 reveals an even greater uncertainty as to how exactly the ideal that equates language competence with national belonging might fit into the specific Georgian Greek context. In light of consultants' age not correlating with how they answer the question about the importance of SMG for being GREEK, this might point to an analysis of shifting evaluations within the community more generally, i.e. without younger community members leading the innovation. Among the factors aiding this shift, the most relevant is probably the non-recognition experienced by emigrating community members in Greece and Cyprus.⁵⁸

Excerpt 10 again shows how a consultant without clear “factual reasons” for his position – i.e. “objective facts” – interactively strives to establish it on a foundation that will be convincing enough in the interview context. Since we tried to align and agree with our consultants as much as possible, making a point “convincing enough” in the interview may not have been very difficult whatsoever. Consultants did not know this from the start, however, and their reaction to some questions lead me to argue that they sometimes perceived them on a continuum from “non-threatening” to “threatening”.⁵⁹ The following excerpt from the interview with MA, a 53-year-old, unemployed, Urum Greek man from Tbilisi, is a case in which a consultant appears to perceive the question as slightly more threatening.

(10) Do I stop being Greek? (MA, 0:35:40-0:36:09)⁶⁰

- 1 CH: *em °h nuzhno li govorit' po-grechski chtoby stat'*
must whether_to_speak Greek so_that to_become
- 2 *grech_*
Grech
- 3 VM: *grekom*
Greek_M
- 4 CH: *grekom*
Greek_M

58 Consultants do not need to have personally endured these negative experiences for them to be relevant. As Tilly (2004) elaborates, the narratives established on either side of a boundary about the boundary and “the Others” are powerful by themselves. This assumption is borne out in the interviews when consultants relate their own, or their relatives' and friends' experiences of being excluded.

59 Cf. excerpt 2, where the question about DP and FP's language competencies in general is answered by explaining how the responsibility for their speaking Urum lies with the Ottoman Empire.

60 Excerpt and analysis adapted from Höfler (2018a).

- 5 MA: *net (chto znachit grek) nu esli ya ne znayu grecheskogo*
no what means Greek_M well if I not know_I Greek
- 6 *yazyka chto ya ne perestayu byt' grekom [chto li]*
language what I not cease_I to_be Greek_M what whether
- 7 NL: [hm]
- 8 CH: *((laughs)) sprashivayu [((laughs))]*
ask_I
- 9 MA: *[net net konechno] ne obyazatel'no no zhelatel'no ya eshchë raz*
no no of_course not nessessary but desirable I another time
- 10 *govoryu*
say_I
- 11 CH: mhm
- 12 MA: *takogo vot chto e:: (-) postavlyu k stenke i rass[trelyayu za to*
such here that will_put_I at wall and will_shoot_I for this
- 13 *chto ty ne znaesh']*
that you not know_2SG
- 14 NL: [((chuckles))]
- 15 MA: *svoego yazyka net konechno no (—) nu eto normal'no esli*
own language no of_course but well this normal if
- 16 *[chelovek] znaet svoj yazyk vot i vsë (-)*
person_m knows own language here and all
- 17 CH: *[mhm] da*
yes
- 18 MA: *naverno*
probably
- 19 CH: *da da*
yes yes
- 1 CH: is it necessary to speak Greek in order to be Grech_
- 3 VM: Greek
- 4 CH: Greek
- 5 MA: no (what do you mean by Greek), well, if I don't know the Greek
- 6 language, what, I stop being Greek [or what?]
- 7 NL: [hm]
- 8 CH: *((laughs)) I'm asking [((laughs))]*
- 9 MA: [no, of course not], it's not necessary but desirable, I repeat
- 11 CH: mhm
- 12 MA: of course I won't put you against the wall and sho[ot you because you
- 13 don't know]
- 14 NL: [((chuckles))]
- 15 MA: your language, of course not, but, well, it's normal if a [person] knows
- 16 their language, that's all
- 17 CH: [mhm] yes
- 18 MA: I guess

19 CH: yes, yes

In excerpt 10 MA oscillates between humorous exaggerations that ridicule the question posed and the idea that each person has “their language”. He first questions my definition of “Greek” with *chto znachit grek* “what do you mean by Greek” (5), thereby questioning my authority to define what it means to be GREEK. He then poses the rhetorical question whether he would stop being Greek if he stopped speaking the language (5-6). The answer is foreclosed: of course, in this view, one does not stop belonging to a particular national collective by losing something as MARGINAL as a language. Up to this point, MA appears to follow the second line of argument introduced above, with language not being evaluated as necessary for belonging and even somehow MARGINAL to belonging. The exaggerated negation of the question is so strong, that there is no interactive way in which I could insist on the question and still save my own and MA’s face – which I acknowledge in line 8 by laughter and the mitigating *sprashivayu* “I’m asking” (cf. Brown / Levinson 1987). In line 9, MA first clearly negates the question with *net konechno* “of course not”, which he then balances by bringing in *zhelatel’no* ‘desirable’. With *ya eshchë raz govoryu* “I say again” (9-10) MA refers back to a similar statement he has made when answering the question about the importance of his heritage language Urum with *ne vazhno no zhelatel’no* “not important but desirable” (MA, 0:32:12). He then proceeds with an exaggerated image (12-15) by asserting that he would not put an imaginary interlocutor, whom he addresses in the second person singular, against the wall and shoot them for not knowing *svoego yazyka* ‘own language’ “your language” (15). Language competence, then, is “of course not” a matter of life and death warranting measures reminiscent of martial law. The strength of this exaggeration is visible in NL’s reaction, as he starts to chuckle halfway through the description of these actions (14) (cf. Holmes / Marra 2002).

Svoego yazyka already signals that there is something like an essential language pertaining to every person – even if not speaking it is not “a matter of life and death”. This assertion is made stronger in the following (15-16) with MA stating that a person would *normal’no* ‘normally’ have competence in *svoy yazyk* ‘own language’ “their language”. So there is not only something like a “natural” language pertaining to a person, it is also “normal”, i.e. to be expected, that they should be a competent speaker of it. This is further driven home by the closing phrase in 14: *vot i vsë* “that’s it”. After this closure, it would take some interactive effort on the part of the interviewer to reopen this particular topic and I show no signs of wishing to do so,

but agree instead (17). MA’s argumentation here is in contrast to the two humorous exaggerations, and fits much better with the “modern” discursive strand introduced in Section II.. In these lines (15-16), there is exactly one language and (national) community to which each person belongs and thus competence in that language is the norm and necessary. Intriguingly, MA does not finish after his closure (16) and my affirmation, but reopens the topic by qualifying the closure itself with *naverno* ‘probably’ (18). So, positioning himself in the “modern” discourse where language competence indicates belonging is not his final verdict and the discussion remains open. In a way, then, MA is not only torn between this ideal and the realities of language competencies he experiences in his community (he, his wife and his mother speak only some SMG), he is also torn between this ideal holding at all and the “imperial” discursive strand that traces belonging through religious affiliation and ancestry.

Comparing excerpts 9 and 10, MA appears to be somewhat uncertain as to how exactly competence in both his heritage language and SMG combine with his national affiliation – and reacts quite strongly to my returning to the subject. MI, on the other hand, establishes for herself an argumentative line that solidly confirms the choices she has made about her own language competences and defends them against “community positions” that nobody in the community may actually hold.

V. Preliminary summary

Exploring the position of SMG in Georgia’s Greek community, the most intriguing finding is that consultants’ personal level of competence in SMG does not necessarily correlate with whether or not they evaluate competence in this language to be important for GREEK category membership. In the following, I will summarize what has emerged so far about the interactive methods consultants use when relating their evaluations of SMG in the interviews. These methods will come up again in the analysis of Georgian and Russian in the following Section and will finally allow an explication of how consultants relate the five languages spoken across the community in a complex network in Section D..

The most striking device is the allusion to or explicit establishment of some GENERAL RULE about whether and how language competence and national affiliation are to be linked. Such a generalization goes beyond the particular case under discussion and makes Georgia’s Greek community less “special”

and more “normal” in “how things work”. This is used to evaluate LANGUAGE both as ESSENTIAL for national affiliation or as MARGINAL to it. Following the first line, consultants may draw on discourses of the modern nation state, which relies on being narrated in terms of the uniformity of its people and their language, the unity of its territory, and common symbols (Anderson, 1991; Hobsbawm / Ranger, 1983; Suny, 2001). Consultants arguing that language use is MARGINAL rely on discourses underscoring their ANCESTRY and/or RELIGION, both of which may be strengthened discursively by referring to official documentation. Notably, consultants are usually unwavering – at least for the duration of the interviews – in their position on whether or not LANGUAGE is important for belonging. DP, for instance, who argues strongly for RELIGION providing the most important link to her being GREEK and who does not consider her heritage language Urum to be important in this context, also later discounts the identificatory potential of SMG, referring again to the importance of RELIGION.

More interactional work is required if consultants are unsure in which discourse to position themselves (like MA in excerpt 10), or when they take the first position but either lack the required competence in SMG themselves or are aware that community members lack it. In these cases, consultants may deflect the question by emphasizing the benefits of speaking many languages, which ties in with considerations of USEFULNESS, as introduced in Section A.. Another method used is to SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY for the perceived “shortcoming” to actors outside the community – the Ottoman Empire or the school system in (post-)Soviet Georgia – rendering the speaker and/or their community *ne vinovaty* “not guilty”. This is also commonly used in speaking about Urum (cf. Section A.) and will come up again when consultants explain the relationship between their language competence in Russian and Georgian.

Further to the discourses on national belonging already introduced, a final point to consider is the fact that SMG is only one language in a web of at least five potentially meaningful languages in the Georgian context. Especially for those consultants not envisioning a life in Greece, it may therefore be more relevant to underscore their belonging as citizens of Georgia, which I investigate in the following Section.

C. *Shifting languages of (official) communication: Russian and Georgian*

Russian and Georgian have a complex history as official languages in Georgia, often perceived to stand for diverging and sometimes opposed political allegiances.⁶¹ Both languages are commonly spoken in the community and I did not specifically ask consultants to evaluate them in any way. Initially, this was done in order to leave more time for questions not obviously related to using LANGUAGE as a resource for positioning. Intriguingly, however, many consultants started to elaborate on the personal and communal importance of GEORGIAN, sometimes before I even asked about their language use. Elaborating on Georgian in more detail serves three purposes here: firstly, it accounts for how consultants make Georgian relevant. Secondly, it furthers an understanding of how community members position and give meaning to all the languages they speak in relation to each other, rather than dwelling only on those I was initially interested in. Thirdly, it serves as a necessary counterpoint to the focus on boundary work and difference by emphasizing the shared experiences and obligations necessary for belonging.

Discussing Russian and Georgian together in this Section accommodates the experience and perception of these languages being related in diachronic and synchronic terms. Georgian is seen as having “taken over” as official language in all domains, most visibly with the educational reform of 2005 and with the arrival of internal migrants from Georgian-speaking areas to Ts’alk’a (cf. Chapters 2 and 7). At the same time, being competent speakers of Georgian gives many of my consultants the possibility to position themselves as “good citizens of Georgia”.

I will first examine my consultants’ self-assessed competence in Georgian and Russian (I.). I then explore how consultants speak about Russian (II.), how Russian and Georgian are compared (III.), and lastly how Georgian is used to position consultants and their community as BELONGING TO GEORGIA (IV.).

I. Competence and everyday language use

As exemplified by the conversation leading up to excerpt 4, many Pontic Greek consultants emphasize their experience of living in close-knit village

61 This is reflected for instance in 19-year-old MI referring to the Soviet period as *am rusul periodshi* “in this Russian time” (MI, 0:11:29).

Table 5.7: Self-assessed competence in Georgian

	competent		some competence		no competence		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Urum rural	8	66.7	3	25	1	8.3	12	100
Urum urban	10	90.9	1	9.1	0	0	11	100
Pontic rural	12	75	3	18.8	1	6.3	16	100
Pontic urban	7	70	1	10	2	20	10	100
Total	37	75.5	8	16.3	4	8.2	49	100

communities in which Georgians speak Pontic Greek and *vice versa*. In light of this, it may be surprising that according to Table 5.7 not all rural Pontic Greek consultants profess a high level of Georgian competence. This disparity results from the statements of four Pontic Greek consultants living in the rural region of Tetrts'q'aro in Kvemo Kartli, who claim little to no competence in Georgian, whereas the very close relationships are emphasized in rural Samtskhe-Javakheti and Ach'ara.⁶² The district of Ts'alk'a, where rural Urum Greeks live, is also located in Kvemo Kartli. This region is geographically quite secluded; it has a history of high linguistic diversity, and Russian was used there as the language of inter-ethnic and official communication during the Soviet period.⁶³ As regards Urum Greeks in the district of Ts'alk'a, their self-assessed competence in 2013 is much higher than the percentage (8.5%) reported by Wheatley (2009, p. 8) for national minorities living in the district.⁶⁴

62 Note also that there are very remote and inaccessible regions in Ach'ara, which is where many internal migrants to Ts'alk'a come from. The villages inhabited mainly by Georgian Greeks are within very easy reach of the city Batumi and the town Kobuleti, though.

63 Note that GA, the only rural Urum Greek consultant who states no competence in Georgian, had at the time of the interview only recently returned from Cyprus where he had been living since 1997, i.e. before the educational reform of 2005 kick-started more extensive "Georgianization". The two urban Pontic Greeks stating no competence in Georgian are outliers, both in terms of still speaking Pontic Greek and in their not speaking Georgian.

64 Wheatley does not list Azerbaijanis, Armenians and Greeks separately, however, which might explain the difference. Census data similarly do not distinguish between the national minorities in terms of their language competence, nor do they list numbers of competent speakers for languages other than Georgian (Geostat, 2016).

I do not include a table on self-assessed competence in Russian since only two consultants do not profess high competence in this language. One of them is VD, a 21-year-old university student who had grown up mostly in Greece and had only fairly recently returned to Georgia for her studies, and who explains that the languages she speaks in her family are Georgian and SMG. The other exception, NA, is a 39-year-old professional working at the local TV-station. She professes the smallest linguistic repertoire in this sample, namely Georgian and “some” Russian competence and speaks neither the heritage variety Pontic nor SMG. Her explanation for this revolves around claiming “no talent” for learning languages (NA, 0:26:25).

Even though such a large number of consultants claim to be competent Russian speakers, four chose to conduct the interview entirely in Georgian. They thereby established that they were more comfortable giving an interview to outsiders in Georgian than in Russian. In another interview, I asked the questions in Russian and MI usually started her answer in Russian but switched fairly quickly to Georgian (cf. excerpt 9 for an illustration), or answered immediately in Georgian. Code-switching between Russian and Georgian occurred, with varying frequency, in most other interviews with consultants who also speak Georgian.

Since the educational reform that made Georgian a compulsory and intensively taught language in all schools had happened less than ten years prior to our interviews, it is instructive to assess how it has affected my consultants’ school career. Unfortunately, I only managed to collect this information in about half of the interviews. Russian as the sole language of instruction is in the lead again (14), which is not surprising given the extensive Russification and the possibilities of Russian language education in the Soviet Union, especially for minorities (cf. Grenoble 2003; Kirkwood 1989; Korth 2005; Kreindler 1989, cf. also Chapter 2). Only two younger (MI, 19; MC, 34) Urum Greek consultants completed their education, including university, solely in Georgian. Seven consultants report a mixture of both languages. This could be a Georgian kindergarten and a Russian school (NB), or schooling in Russian but university in Georgian (ED). Only one consultant cited difficulties in Georgian as a reason for not pursuing higher education (EC).

One question I asked aimed at tracing the importance of the languages in which consultants stated they were competent: *kakoy yazyk samyy glavnyy dlya vas (seychas)* “Which language is most important to you (now)?” I did not press consultants to choose only one language or to elaborate on their choice. Georgian comes out on top here, followed by Russian, the heritage varieties and finally SMG. In explaining their choice, consultants make use

of all the argumentative devices we have already encountered, and in some cases extend them, as we will see in the following Sections.

II. Speaking about Russian

The Russian language, as a topic, was addressed somewhat rarely in the interviews. Considering that Russian was in most cases the interview language, and is widely spoken both in the community and in Georgia as a whole, this is not entirely surprising: precisely because Russian is so pervasive, speaking about it might be considered as “stating the obvious”. Still, consultants do make it relevant in our conversations in two broad ways: they may evaluate Russian either in terms of their EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT to it, which is frequently linked to their own competence in the language; or in terms of its (international) USEFULNESS and thereby also as a resource allowing them to position themselves both as COSMOPOLITAN and at least in some cases as somehow (emotionally) close to the Soviet Union.

Consultants emphasizing their emotional attachment may do this exuberantly like IK in excerpt 13 in Section III. below. It can also be more matter-of-factly like GA, who had just returned from working in Cyprus. He first explains to me that his competence in SMG does not matter much to him personally (GA, 0:14:49-0:15:05) and concludes:

(11) My Russian (GA, 0:15:06)

- 1 GA: *dlya menya vazhnyy chto (1) svoy russkiy yazyk mogu skazat'*
for me important what own Russian language can_I to_say
'What's important to me? My Russian language, I can say'

GA is not a man of many words (at 26 minutes, the interview was one of the shortest), yet the fact that he refers to Russian as *svoy russkiy yazyk* “my Russian language” underscores his emotional attachment. Another method of rooting the importance of Russian in the person of the speaker is for consultants to elaborate on their proficiency. Consultants evaluated a high level of competence in Russian positively (AT, LV), and explained feeling comfortable due to their high level of competence in Russian, in some cases even telling me how proud they are of their skills (EV).

Moving to considerations of USEFULNESS, the ubiquitous “the more languages the better” argument also appears in evaluating Russian (KP, IS). The USEFULNESS of Russian is usually highlighted in referring to its potential as *lingua franca*. IS explains how in Kvemo Kartli rural Pontic and Urum

Greeks resorted to Russian, in order to communicate effectively and circumvent the difficulties posed by their speaking different heritage languages (IS, 0:30:49-0:31:07).⁶⁵

SC and his friend FD in Ts’alk’a remind us of the Soviet “brotherhood”⁶⁶ and the continuing importance of Russian as an international language. This excerpt immediately follows excerpt 7, which I analyzed in Section B. above.

(12) Russian connects nations (SC, 0:47:50-0:48:26)⁶⁷

- 1 CH: *°h i kakoy yazyk samyy glavnyy dlya vas (1)*
and which language most main for you_2PL
- 2 SC: *russkiy*
Russian
- 3 CH: *[russkiy]*
Russian
- 4 NL: *[russkiy]*
Russian
- 5 SC: *da (1.5) samyy glavnyy yazyk russkiy*
yes most main language Russian
- 6 CH: *hm (1) khorosho (-)*
well
- 7 SC: *ne tol’ko dlya menya a (1) v postsovetском prostranstve*
not only for me but in post-Soviet space
- 8 *gosudarstva chto byli vezde russkiy yazyk*
states what were everywhere Russian language
- 9 CH: *mhm*
- 10 FD: *nu eto kak vot kak vot kak angliiskiy (((incomprehensible 1.5)))*
well this as here as here as English
- 11 SC: *[svyazyvayushchiy yazyk e narod][y]*
connecting language nations
- 12 CH: *[da]*
yes
- 13 FD: *v postsovetском (-) etot gru_e russkiy byl mezhdunarodnyy*
in post-Soviet this Geo_ Russian was international
- 14 *[vse]*
everybody

65 IS is the only consultant who explicitly mentions how Urum and Pontic Greeks in Kvemo Kartli (encompassing the regions Ts’alk’a and Tetrts’q’aro) solved the communicative challenge of communicating with the “other Greeks”.

66 Indeed, *my kak bratya zhili* “we lived like brothers” is one of the most often heard characterizations of the Soviet Union by older consultants (cf. Chapter 6).

67 In Höfler (2019) I discuss this excerpt as an example of how Soviet traces are made relevant in the interviews.

- 15 CH: [mhm]
 16 FD: *vot seychas tozhe* (–) *priedet iz germanii dopustim v gruziyu*
 here now also comes from Germany suppose_we to Georgia
 17 *on po-russki govorit*
 he Russian speaks
 18 SC: [da]
 yes
 19 CH: [mhm] *da* (–)
 yes
 20 FD: *kto-to vot e:: negr priedet on tozhe po-russki govorit (1)*
 someone here Negro comes he also Russian speaks
 21 SC: *russkiy*
 Russian
- 1 CH: and which language is most important to you?
 2 SC: Russian
 3 CH: [Russian]
 4 NL: [Russian]
 5 SC: yes, the most important language is Russian
 6 CH: hm, alright
 7 SC: not only to me but in the post-Soviet space the existing states
 8 everywhere were Russian speaking
 9 CH: mhm
 10 FD: well, it's just like English [(incomprehensible 1.5)]
 11 SC: [the language connecting nation][s]
 12 CH: [yes]
 13 FD: in the post-Soviet (space) this Geo_ Russian was international
 14 everybody
 15 CH: [mhm]
 16 FD: now as well, let's say someone comes from Germany to Georgia, he
 17 speaks Russian
 18 SC: [yes]
 19 CH: [mhm] yes
 20 FD: someone, well, a Black guy comes, he also speaks Russian
 21 SC: Russian

SC answers my question (1) calmly with *russkiy* “Russian” (2), which Nika Loladze and I echo (3-4). SC repeats his answer in a full sentence (5). Notably, he does not take up the link to his personal situation or emotions which I had introduced with *dlya vas* “for you”, and to which the answering pair would have been *dlya menya* “for me”. His answer is thereby not restricted to this sphere, but rather references a more general hierarchy of “important languages”. This he makes explicit in lines 7-8, when he clarifies that Russian

is important *ne tol’ko dlya menya* “not only to me” but in the post-Soviet space as a whole, as *vezde* “everywhere” Russian was spoken. FD chimes in supportively, searches for an example and finally compares Russian to English (10). SC goes on to define Russian as a language “connecting nations” (11), thereby establishing a space of shared commonality exceeding mere possibilities of communication. This space is much larger than SC’s own community or any of the individual successor states of the Soviet Union, including Georgia. In creating a community of communication geographically congruent with the Soviet Union, SC positions himself squarely within the Soviet discourse of creating a Soviet community that supersedes national ones (cf. Chapter 2).⁶⁸

FD explains that *russkiy byl mezhdunarodnyy* “Russian was international” (13) with a slight slip of the tongue, when he starts to say *gru_* “Geo_” (target is *gruzinskiy* ‘Georgian’), before correcting himself to *russkiy*. The first example he gives for this still being the case *seychas* “now” uses a national affiliation present in the interview, namely my being German (16-17). His second attempt at explicating this “general rule” is to construct an “even more unlikely” example: a black person would also speak Russian when coming to Georgia (20). Here, as in other instances in the corpus, a consultant adduces a person perceived to be phenotypically “very different” in order to construct an “extraordinary” example. The implication is that if the characteristic (action) in question also holds for someone so “extravagantly different”, it must be “generally true”. This is the first but by no means last instance in the analysis of consultants establishing an *extreme case* in the sense used by Pomerantz (1986).⁶⁹

68 This analysis is supported by SC lamenting the breakup of the SOVIET FAMILY while the Georgian government “changes so often it doesn’t know what to do” (SC, 0:17:08) as discussed in excerpt 19 in the next Chapter.

69 This is not the only example where skin color is used in this way without overtly racist intention, as far as that is possible when using a label that is understood in so many other parts of the world to be so clearly racist. Precisely because it is used to mark an “extraordinary exception” that helps establish a GENERAL RULE, leaving it out would unduly gloss over consultants’ sense-making. In presenting the analysis I chose to deal with this by transcribing the words as they were uttered (*negr*), giving the direct translation ‘Negro’ in the gloss line, and putting this as “black guy” in my idiomatic translation and commentary, since this appears to be closest to the intended target meaning. Furthermore, in Russian *chërnyy* ‘black’ is in fact a racist slur that is commonly used in pejorative references to “black haired people” of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

SC finally closes the explanation of their joint elaboration by repeating *russskiy* (21), without commenting on FD's contribution, which in many cases in the interview had included very clear disagreement and lecturing FD. Overall, Russian is established in this excerpt as a UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE that "everybody" speaks (FD) and as the SOVIET LANGUAGE that has not lost its importance or validity – at least not to SC and FD. In excerpt 12, Georgian plays a role only in FD's slip of the tongue. This is to be expected, since Russian is constructed as the UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE, which does not need to be compared to other languages apart from English. Russian is thus placed on the top of a hierarchy of languages, ranked by importance. And of course, it is the interviewer who introduced the concept of hierarchically ordered languages in the first place, by asking about the "most important language".

III. Comparing Russian and Georgian

When consultants compare Russian to another language, it is compared to Georgian, with the exception of the excerpt just analyzed. This indicates that these two languages are the important ones when comparing widely used languages. While consultants often evaluate Georgian to be pivotal for their BELONGING TO GEORGIA – mostly without elaborating on Russian at all – the relationship is at least sometimes portrayed to be complex. Perhaps the most elaborated way of doing this is shown in the following excerpt from the interview with IK.

(13) Russian is more interesting to me (IK, 0:46:16-0:46:58)

- 1 CH: *°h i kakoy yazyk samyy glavnyy dlya vas* (–) *seychas* (–)
and which language most main for you_2PL now
- 2 IK: *gruzinskiy* (–)
Georgian
- 3 CH: *gruzinskiy*
Georgian
- 4 IK: *da*
yes
- 5 CH: hm
- 6 IK: *gruzinskiy i ya lyublyu ochen' russkiy yazyk*
Georgian and I love_I very Russian language
- 7 CH: [mhm]
- 8 NL: [mhm]
- 9 IK: *dlya menya on ochen' bogatyy i interesnyy [yazyk]*
for me he very rich and interesting language

Chapter 5: “Language” as a resource for positioning

- 10 CH: [mhm]
 11 NL: *da*
 yes
 12 CH: *da*
 yes
 13 IK: *ya rad chto ya znayu russkiy yazyk khorosho*
 I glad that I know_I Russian language well
 14 CH: ((chuckles))
 15 IK: *ya chitayus' ch_ch_ chital seychas*
 I read_I read_M now
 16 CH: mhm
 17 IK: *tak davno ne netu vremeni chitat'*
 so long not is_not time to_read
 18 NL: [hm]
 19 IK: [^oh] *vsegda na russkom ya knigi [potomu chto] mne bolee*
 always in Russian I books because that me more
 20 *interesno*
 interesting
 21 CH: [mhm]
 22 NL: mhm
 23 IK: *ka_chem na gruzinskom potomu chto [gruzinskiy] eto ne ne*
 than on Georgian because that Georgian this not not
 24 *ochen' bogatyy yazyk*
 very rich language
 25 NL: [*da*] hm
 yes
 26 IK: *no dlya menya vazhno znat' [e] gruzinskiy yazyk ^oh eta*
 but for me important to_know Georgian language this
 27 *moya rodina i vsegda budet moey rodinoy ne kakaya ne*
 my homeland and always will_be my homeland not such not
 28 *gretsiya*
 Greece
 29 CH: [mhm] hm
 30 IK: *ne drugye strany da [ya] zdes' zhivu znayu yazyk i ya*
 not other countries yes I here live_I know_I language and I
 31 CH: [hm] hm
 32 IK: *tol'ko znaya etot yazyk mogu v zhizni chego-to [dobit'sya]*
 only knowing this language can_I in life something to_achieve
 33 CH: [mhm]
 34 NL: [mhm]
- 1 CH: and which language is most important for you now?
 2 IK: Georgian
 3 CH: Georgian

- 4 IK: yes
 5 CH: hm
 6 IK: Georgian and I love Russian very much
 7 CH: [mhm]
 8 NL: [mhm]
 9 IK: for me it's a very rich and interesting language
 10 CH: [mhm]
 11 NL: yes
 12 CH: yes
 13 IK: I'm glad that I know the Russian language well
 14 CH: ((chuckles))
 15 IK: I read, I was reading just now
 16 CH: mhm
 17 IK: for such a long time there's no time to read
 18 NL: [hm]
 19 IK: [°h] I always in Russian, I (read) books [because] to me it's more
 20 interesting
 21 CH: [mhm]
 22 NL: mhm
 23 IK: than in Georgian, because [Georgian] is not, not a very rich language
 25 NL: [yes] hm
 26 IK: but for me it's important to know [e] the Georgian language, this is my
 27 homeland and it will always be my homeland, not such a, not Greece
 29 CH: [mhm] hm
 30 IK: not other countries, right, [I] live here, I know the language and
 31 CH: [hm] hm
 32 IK: only knowing this language can I achieve something in this [life]
 33 CH: [mhm]
 34 NL: [mhm]

IK clearly and calmly answers my question with *gruzinskiy* “Georgian” (2) and after I repeat it (3) confirms it (4). Instead of changing the subject, he repeats his statement and also declares his love for the Russian language (6). In line 9, he explains that this is because Russian is an *ochen' bogaty y interesnyy yazyk* “a very rich and interesting language”. *Bogaty y* ‘rich’ here refers to a voluminous lexicon, something not only IK appreciates about Russian, but part of a larger discourse in Georgia and beyond of evaluating a language’s ELABORATION. Perhaps in contrast to having expressed a certain level of shame for his incompetence in SMG in the conversation preceding this excerpt, he expresses great joy about speaking Russian well (13). He proceeds to present himself as someone who is an avid reader, albeit pressed for time (15-17), and then states that he reads *vsegda na russkom* “always in Russian” (19). In giving his reason *potomu chto mne bolee interesno*

chem na gruzinskom “because to me it’s more interesting than in Georgian” (19-23), he reintroduces Georgian again and begins his comparison of the two languages. In this process, we learn that being an “interesting language” results from being a “rich language”, since Georgian compares unfavourably as “less interesting” with Russian in being *ne ochen’ bogatyy yazyk* “not a very rich language” (22-23). NL’s agreement here (24) may not simply be a matter of accommodating our consultant, since I had previously heard him argue similarly, indicating the prevalence of this discourse.

Having thus ranked Russian higher in terms of its literary corpus and potential than Georgian and thereby shown himself to be someone educated in matters of literature, IK returns to the question of “importance”. Interestingly, he does not start with the mundane diagnosis of Georgian as necessary for his professional progress, but with his emotional attachment to Georgia as *moya rodina* “my homeland” (26-27). He proceeds to insist that this will stay this way *vsegda* “always”, with neither Greece nor *drugye strany* “other countries” ever being able to replace Georgia in this emotional contrast of belonging (26-28). This strengthens statements he had made earlier about not wanting to emigrate to Greece or anywhere else despite his dual Georgian and Greek citizenship. In lines 30-32 he delivers his final verdict: he lives *zdes’* “here”, he speaks the language and this language is crucial for the possibility *v zhizni chego-to dobits’ya* “to achieve something in life” (32). In his elaboration, Georgian is not simply a USEFUL LANGUAGE, but much more importantly a NECESSARY LANGUAGE, crucial for professional success.

Overall, IK creates a dichotomy between his aesthetically- and intellectually-motivated “love” for the Russian language and his “down to earth” belonging, rooted in a particular (national) territory and linked to the Georgian language for the sake of professional success. Both languages are thereby positioned as excelling in very different spheres of life, at least in the context of excerpt 13. It is important to bear in mind that in other moments of the interview, IK positions Russian as a very mundane everyday language he comfortably speaks in all family and community contexts. In these instances, it is presented as a more or less profane language of (inter-ethnic) communication accessible not only to educated and literate persons. He does, however, very clearly distinguish himself throughout the interview from those community members who depend on physical labor for their livelihoods.⁷⁰

70 This is, in fact, the strongest reason he gives for not having emigrated to Greece: that he could not imagine himself doing physical labor, for instance in the construction industry, like so many Georgian Greek emigrants.

IV. Speaking about Georgian

IK is not alone in talking about the importance of Georgian for his belonging to Georgia. Interestingly, establishing Georgian as a *USEFUL LANGUAGE* is not a method often used, apart from the aforementioned device that evaluates language competence in terms of “the more the better” (AT, KP). Instead, Georgian is spoken about in ways that underline its potential to belong to Georgia. As for IK in excerpt 13, competence in Georgian is perceived to be *NECESSARY* such that consultants who lack it feel the need to explain their “shortcoming” – once again by *SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY* to actors located outside of the consultant’s and their community’s influence.

For many consultants, *GEORGIAN* links them to Georgia in three closely connected ways: it roots them, spatially, in the national territory of Georgia; it links them, socially, as citizens to the Georgian nation state; and it connects them, temporally, to that nation state’s relatively recent independence. One excerpt linking *PLACE* and *LANGUAGE* comes from MP. When asked which language is most important to him, he answers *gruzinskiy* ‘Georgian’ and adds:

(14) This is my country (MP, 0:34:30)

- 1 MP: *ya v gruzii zhivu eta moya strana gruzinskiy khochu znat’*
 I in Georgia live_I this my country Georgian want_I to_know
 ‘I live in Georgia, this is my country, I want to speak Georgian’

MP explains “wanting to know Georgian” by linking the Georgian national territory with the state’s national language. Living in Georgia, which he considers to be more than just a “country of residence”, namely *moya strana* “my country”, thus puts him in the position of wanting to learn that language. Note that by referring to living *v gruzii* “in Georgia” with a spatial preposition, he references the Georgian national territory and thereby the Georgian nation state, rather than any other spatial entity such as his village, district or the like. In stating his belonging to the Georgian national sphere, his spatial belonging through living somewhere is broadened to encompass his belonging socially to the Georgian nation state as its citizen. Living on a certain national territory, then, implies being a member of the corresponding nation state – an understanding shared by all consultants who talk about Georgian being important to them, evidenced in how they make this relationship relevant.⁷¹

71 Note that consultants frequently reference more local spaces too. This is particularly true in rural areas, and when talking about the conflicts in Ts’alk’a, which were

This conceptualization of the citizenship-related (i.e. social) implications of living in a certain national territory is not at all obvious in the Georgian context, given its “frozen” territorial conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and where especially the Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities are almost continuously suspected of harboring irredentist plans (cf. Nilsson / Popjanevski, 2009; Wheatley, 2009). Nor is this obvious in the broader post-Soviet realm, with Latvia and Estonia, for instance, granting citizenship to members of their sizable Russian-speaking minority only after proof of comparatively high competence in the new official language (cf. Hogan-Brun, 2005; Popova, 2016). The fact that these statements are made in the interviews as a matter of course and framed as nothing out of the ordinary indicates that this feeling of belonging to the Georgian nation state is not perceived as under question either from within or outside the community.⁷² This is not to say that their BELONGING TO GEORGIA is so safely undisputed that one need not speak about it, either in terms of its historical development (cf. Chapter 6) or when it is in fact challenged in rural Ts’alk’a (cf. Chapter 7).

Note that although MP “wants” to learn the Georgian language, he does not state any “obligation” to do so. A consultant who does foreground the OBLIGATION related to citizenship is DL, a 27-year-old university-educated Urum Greek woman living in Ts’alk’a, who to her dismay does not speak Georgian on what she would consider an adequate level of competence. Excerpt 15 immediately follows DL’s explanations as to why she as a Greek woman considers it to be necessary to speak SMG, which she ends with *ya schitayu* “I consider” (DL, 0:39:43). She goes on:

(15) I’m obliged to speak Georgian (DL, 0:39:44-0:39:55)

- 1 DL: *takzhe schitayu chto mne nuzhno govorit’ i na gruzinskom*
also count_I that me necessary to_talk and on Georgian
- 2 *potomu chto ya grazhdanka gruzii i ya ObyAzana seychas ya*
because that I citizen_F of_Georgia and I obliged_F now I
- 3 *schitayu sebya obyazannoy govorit’ na gruzinskom prosto °h*
count_I self obliged_F to_speak on Georgian simply
- 4 *obstoyatel’sva v kakoy-to moment ne tak slozhilis’*
circumstances in some moment not so unfolded_PL

factually conflicts about land and which are discussed in terms of “having the right” to the land and being rooted in a particular place, cf. Chapter 7.

72 This is very much in line with SC’s first reaction to my question about discrimination on ethnic grounds in contemporary Georgia: *nas net* “us not” (SC, 0:55:44), which again points to the perception of the Greek minority being somehow different from other minorities.

‘I also consider that it’s necessary for me to also speak Georgian, because I’m a Georgian citizen and I’m obliged, I now consider myself obliged to speak Georgian, only the circumstances at the time didn’t unfold like this’

DL infers her “obligation” to speak Georgian from her Georgian citizenship (1-2), which “obliges” her to speak Georgian (2-3). Importantly, her emphasis *ya ObyAzana seychas* “I’m ObLIged now” (2) not only underscores the very high level of obligation through a prosodic cue, it also explicitly refers to the obligation’s temporal dimension. That is, during the Soviet Union this obligation did not exist, even though the territory most of our consultants and their direct ancestors lived on was considered to be “Georgian” territory already by the Russian Empire and in the Soviet Union (cf. Chapter 2).⁷³ The OBLIGATION to speak Georgian only arose after Georgia became an independent nation state – and perhaps only after the *Rose Revolution* in late 2003 after which secluded regions fell under government control, ahead of the 2005 educational reform.

DL is by no means the only consultant explicating that command of the Georgian language is a contemporary necessity, and an evaluation she wholeheartedly supports. IP, for instance, also traces the changing obligations from Russian to Georgian in a temporal way from the Soviet Union to contemporary Georgia (IP, 0:13:50-0:14:47). He, too, evaluates this positively with the normative conclusion: *i tak i dol’zhno byt’* “and this is how it should be” (IP, 0:14:28). Portraying themselves as competent in the official state language and evaluating this as a necessary prerequisite for belonging to the Georgian nation state, many consultants underscore that they “do what needs to be done” in order to belong and are therefore to be appreciated as Good CITIZENS.

Since I did not ask consultants to specifically evaluate Georgian at all, those who do not link competence in Georgian to their allegiance to the Georgian nation state – because LANGUAGE for them is not necessary for belonging, for instance – did not have to position themselves in this respect. Consultants who do consider GEORGIAN to be necessary for their belonging to the Georgian nation state, but who lack the competence this view demands, used the interactive method of SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY.

73 In Ach’ara, this generalization does not hold, as both Ach’ara and Abkhazia were categorized as *Autonomous Regions* within the Georgian SSR with greater regional autonomy.

It may be argued that DL, in excerpt 15, is deploying a “soft” version of this method, when she explains how circumstances have somehow kept her from attaining the level of competence she deems to be adequate (lines 3-4).⁷⁴ VE, a 77-year-old Urum Greek woman living in Tbilisi, who was born and raised in Ts’alk’a, transfers this responsibility even further away from herself or her community to some unspecified (governmental) authority: *my ne vinovaty a pochemu oni nam razreshili russskiy yazyk izuchali* (23:58-24:03) “we’re not guilty, but why did they allow us to learn the Russian language?” Most other consultants who regret that either they or their community do not speak better Georgian also deplore the Soviet school system, which allotted only one weekly Georgian lesson to non-Georgian schools. This is a topic on which the community is strongly united: we were told about *odin urok v nedele* “one class per week” by Pontic as well as Urum Greek consultants in both rural and urban settings. This is either achieved in the “softer” version by citing unfavorable circumstances, like DL above, or else by finding someone or “the system” more directly at fault. In either case, *my/oni ne vinovaty* “we/they are not guilty” remains the bottom line, whether or not the guilty party is explicitly named.

D. Discussion

At the beginning of this Chapter, I set out to unravel how consultants use the languages they speak as a resource for positioning themselves and their community, and thereby for relating themselves to other social, spatial or temporal categories they perceive to be relevant. After exploring the languages spoken, I will now pull the emerging strands together into a more coherent picture. I will look more closely at three features of the corpus: the discourses consultants explicitly or implicitly draw on, the methodical devices they make use of in communicating their position, and finally how this positions them socially, spatially and temporally.

First, however, let us recall the numbers of consultants who claim proficiency in the heritage varieties Urum or Pontic Greek, SMG, Russian, and Georgian. Comparing competence levels in the languages most commonly

74 She later talks about “being ashamed” after she heard a Chinese trader speaking Georgian more fluently than herself – her national language, as she reminds us, not his (DL, 0:56:28).

spoken in the community,⁷⁵ Russian clearly takes the lead with only two consultants not considering themselves to be competent speakers (95.9% competent). Both heritage varieties taken together come in second, with 40 speakers (81.6%) stating high competence. Importantly, both heritage varieties are not only still spoken, but also passed on to the next generation, even by our younger consultants. Georgian does not fare so badly given the seclusion of rural areas until quite recently and the fairly high average age of our consultants (cf. Chapter 4), with 36 competent speakers (75.5%). Standard Modern Greek is the least spoken relevant language in the corpus, with 18 competent speakers (36.7%).⁷⁶

While some speakers clearly deplore the fact that they and/or their community do not speak SMG, numerically it is the least important language that I explicitly asked about. In this light, some instances of less-than-clear lines of argument suggest that this language was made relevant by the interviewer rather than the consultant, forcing the latter to come up with coherent explanations for something not immediately relevant to their everyday life. Furthermore, that SMG was least often labeled “most important” on a personal level points to its low everyday relevance for most consultants. For some speakers, however, it is inarguably very relevant, as evidenced by the more emotional excerpts discussed in Section B.. The question of how important LANGUAGE is for identification and belonging brings us to the larger discourses consultants draw on, the first feature I will explore.

There are two broad discourses on what is relevant for national or ethnic affiliation: what I have termed the “imperial” discourse, which sees LANGUAGE as somehow MARGINAL; and the discourse of the “modern nation state”, for which LANGUAGE is one of the defining elements. For the former, belonging is based primarily on ANCESTRY – be it documented in official papers or not – and RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION. For self-identifying members of Georgia’s Greek community, this discourse has retained its relevance for centuries – during their experiences as subjects and citizens of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, as well as the Soviet Union – and still resonates in contemporary Georgia (cf. Chapter 2). Apart from the communal oral tradition underscoring RELIGIOUS RESILIENCE in the face of adversity (cf. Section A.), this discourse has been perpetuated by practices of taxation based on religious affiliation

75 English, for example, was mentioned so rarely that I discount it here, although it served occasionally to position some of its five competent speakers as particularly “cosmopolitan”.

76 Similar numbers for Russian, Georgian and SMG are reported by Sella-Mazi / Moisiidi (2011), who only interviewed competent Urum speakers.

in the Ottoman Empire (cf. Barkey, 2008; İçduygu et al., 2008; Mackridge, 2009); being documented as GREEK both in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (cf. Arel, 2003; Sideri, 2006); and being recognized as such by the independent Georgian nation state, which – similarly to Georgia’s Greek community – closely links its national narrative to Byzantium (cf. Fuchslocher, 2010). In this view, then, the language one speaks is not related to one’s ethno-national affiliation, as argued in excerpt 7.

The discourse around the “modern nation state”, on the other hand, relies on LANGUAGE for shaping the nation and defining who its members are (cf. Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983; Weber, 1976). This discourse is very pervasive in contemporary Greece (cf. Hionidou, 2012; Kaurinkoski, 2010; Sideri, 2006), with the symbolism of the NATIONAL LANGUAGE being perhaps one of the reasons it took the Greek nation state from 1880 to 1976 to settle on what is now termed *Standard Modern Greek* as its official language (cf. Mackridge, 2009). Many consultants were made quite painfully aware of this “discourse of purity” (Sideri, 2006, p. 52) when they or their relatives and friends emigrated to Greece (cf. Chapter 7). In contemporary Georgia, the situation is a little more complex: as mentioned above, the national narrative is closely linked to Byzantium and Christian minorities’ links to Byzantium are respected.⁷⁷ On the other hand, the Georgian language, along with Orthodox Christianity, is the one identifying element that serves as a resource for presenting a “coherent” narrative extending through the ages (cf. Smith et al., 1998; Suny, 1994). In the Georgian context, then, consultants may draw on both discourses as a resource for positioning their community. On a more abstract level, in the “imperial” discourse language is understood as a MEANS OF COMMUNICATION, whereas the modern nation state views it as a crucial MEANS OF IDENTIFICATION.

In everyday life and the interview context these discourses are not usually as neatly differentiated as in the above outline. Some consultants accommodate for that by pointing out the general DESIRABILITY of competence in a language which they or others associate with a particular national affiliation. They might also simply evade the question and emphasize time and again the general USEFULNESS of speaking many languages, using the argumentative line one could summarize as “the more the better”. This has been foregrounded with regards to all the languages spoken by the community,

77 While not wanting to suggest a mono-causal explanation, this might be one of the reasons Georgia’s Greek minority has had little trouble in aligning themselves as citizens with the Georgian nation state.

and brings us to the next feature: the interactive methods consultants use to argue for their points, and to position themselves and their community in the interview and these larger contexts.

Broadly speaking, three interactive methods have come up so far: ESTABLISHING HIERARCHIES of languages and/or varieties based on different features, ESTABLISHING A GENERAL RULE for the point one wants to argue, and SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY away from oneself or the community. Hierarchies are mainly established in one of two ways. The first is to rank varieties in terms of their *LANGUAGE*NESS. The scale, as argued for by my consultants, places *DIALECTS* at the bottom and ranks *NATIONAL LANGUAGES* higher up. “Dialects” may be further ranked based on their perceived *ADEQUACY* for a person self-identifying as being *GREEK*. In excerpt 5, this places *Urum* at the very bottom, followed by *Pontic Greek* and *SMG* as the *ADEQUATE* language for a *GREEK* person to speak. A different approach is taken in excerpt 4 by *IP*, who establishes a hierarchy of *ANTIQUITY* that understands his heritage language, *Pontic Greek*, as closer to “ancient Greek” than to “modern Greek” and thereby somehow more pristine. Further, national languages are also not immune to hierarchies, pertaining to their linguistic *ELABORATION*. This is most explicit in excerpt 13, in which *IK* ranks *Russian* higher than *Georgian* in comparing their literary *ELABORATION*.

In the same excerpt he also ranks both languages in terms of their *USEFULNESS*, with *Georgian* emerging as not merely useful to speak in contemporary *Georgia*, but as a *NECESSARY LANGUAGE* with regards to professional success. In this evaluation, he is joined by all consultants who speak about *Georgian* as an important language. *Georgian* is thus positioned higher than *USEFUL LANGUAGES* in the hierarchy, while the unanimity suggests that this purported *NECESSITY* enables consultants to position themselves and their community as loyal citizens of the *Georgian nation state*. All other languages spoken in the community have been defined as *USEFUL LANGUAGES* by different consultants: the heritage varieties in making it easier to communicate with speakers of *Turkic languages* or *SMG* respectively, *SMG* for communication and jobs in *Greece*, *Russian* for the (post-)Soviet sphere and internationally. This does not preclude them from being ranked in terms of their *USEFULNESS*, however. Here again, the heritage variety *Urum* is ranked lowest, for instance by *IK* who even discounts its *USEFULNESS* as a family language, a position that for him could be filled by *Russian*.

The second method consultants use is to either state a *GENERAL RULE* or to construct one, usually starting from their own experiences or the immediate context of the interview. Instances of the former appear in excerpts 6 and 7,

where AL and SC argue whether or not competence in SMG is a prerequisite for being GREEK. While AL aligns herself with the “modern” discursive line, SC holds in the “imperial” tradition that language is a characteristic MARGINAL to national belonging. Note that in both excerpts consultants also adduce examples strengthening their case, in both instances citing the same nationalities to argue, respectively, for and against the necessity of competence in the national language of the state in question. Examples are used in both cases to corroborate consultants’ initial statements. In other instances, consultants argue inversely, starting from their own experiences or the interview context to illustrate a GENERAL RULE, which is not always then explicitly stated. Illustrative examples include excerpt 8, where NB argues for her GREEKNESS being rooted in her person rather than in her language competence, and adduces the nationality of the interviewer as “proof”, and excerpt 12, in which FD establishes Russian as a truly INTERNATIONAL language by constructing an example intended to be “far-fetched”.

The third important method is used by consultants who SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY away from themselves and/or their community for failing to comply with some norm that is perceived as stipulating competence in a certain language as a condition for category membership. Thus, Urum is defined by some consultants as a somehow “problematic” heritage, blaming adverse historical circumstances for its present use in the community. These same circumstances are made responsible for the community’s perceived lack of competence in SMG by those consultants who see national affiliation as linked to competence in the language associated with that nation. A third context in which this device is used is when communicatively coming to terms with perceived personal and/or community “failures” once Georgian is established as a NECESSARY LANGUAGE for a citizen of the Georgian nation state. In this third scenario, consultants might SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY to historical circumstances, as for the other two languages. They might also SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY more specifically to an education system that did not provide them with the means to comply with their duties as citizens of contemporary Georgia. Either way, responsibility for the perceived “failure” is shifted to external forces more powerful than consultants or their community.

The final feature I want to explore concerns the social, spatial and temporal dimensions of the discourses and interactive methods discussed so far. In terms of belonging socially, consultants make relevant their belonging to their community (in many cases not divided by their heritage varieties); the wider Greek (diasporic) national community; and, as citizens of Georgia, to the Georgian nation state. In terms of language use, the latter is established

through stating the NECESSITY of the Georgian language for forming part of that nation state. As discussed above, being GREEK may either be framed in terms of ANCESTRY and RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, excluding LANGUAGE from the list of “necessary features”, or it may be viewed as a fundamental part of being GREEK. Particularly in Ts’alk’a, RELIGION and LANGUAGE are sometimes played off against each other as the central attributes of national category membership, as exemplified in excerpt 2.

The spaces invoked are closely linked to the social categories: the Georgian national territory is referred to when speaking about the importance of Georgian. SMG is mostly linked to Greece – and in many cases rejected as “unimportant” for someone who does not plan to leave Georgia permanently. Geographically more localized practices of shared languages are emphasized especially in smaller rural communities. In Ach’ara and Samtskhe-Javakheti, we are told that villagers speak both Pontic Greek and Georgian on the same level irrespective of their nationality, for instance leading up to excerpt 4. In Ts’alk’a, Urum is seen by some as indexing a person’s belonging to the region (DL, 0:39:11). Russian, finally, is frequently established as referencing belonging to the (post-)Soviet space, as in excerpt 12.

Referencing the (post-)Soviet sphere points to a certain time period that has left its complex traces. While Urum is seen as a sometimes “problematic” tidemark as per Green (2009), a trace accounted for in narratives of subjugation and displacement, the prevalence of speaking Russian is a trace perceived in many ways as more benign, one to which many of the (especially but not only) older consultants still feel an emotional attachment. This trace appears to be “problematic” mostly in the context of blaming schooling in Russian for limiting the competence now necessary in the Georgian language. Thus many consultants felt unjustly “left out” of the now dominant discourse demanding that GEORGIAN CITIZENS speak the Georgian language. Similarly, Georgian and SMG may both be viewed as “newer” traces, with Georgian being more deeply ingrained within Georgia’s Greek community through everyday necessity and the wish to form part of the contemporary Georgian nation state.

Chapter 6: Transformations: The end of the Soviet Union as a turning point

In this Chapter, I will explore the temporal dimension of a central category that consultants made relevant: being a GEORGIAN CITIZEN. The primacy of TIME in this Chapter, with its focus on the end of the Soviet Union, reflects how consultants establish it as a moment of rupture, a temporal boundary. The transformation from the Soviet Union to the independent Georgian nation state challenged previous identifications as SOVIET CITIZEN by discarding its associated ontologies and establishing new frames of belonging. At the same time, and on a very personal level, the massive emigration of members of Georgia's Greek community fundamentally transformed all my consultants' social lives, leaving them feeling isolated.

I start the analysis by examining some argumentative methods which consultants use to talk as little as possible about the end of the Soviet Union (A.). Analyzing this period as a *liminal phase* as introduced by Turner (1987) not only explains the difficulty to speak about this time, but also underlines its significance for contemporary identifications and belonging. I then explore the metaphor of FAMILY BREAKDOWN, which consultants frequently use to portray the end of the Soviet Union (B.). In doing this, I will first introduce the metaphor as it emerges in the corpus, then look at the rising nationalism in the 1990s as an example of how the supra-national "family" dissolved, and finally explore how this FAMILY BREAKDOWN led to the separation of very real families when my consultants' family members emigrated. In the discussion at the end of this chapter (C.), I will show how different analytical perspectives highlight different features of the temporal boundary. Here, focusing on the traces left by the past (Green, 2009) reveals (dis)continuities, whereas focusing on the process of transition reveals how consultants use it to relate TODAY to a YESTERDAY (cf. Tilly 2004) that is established as very different.

I limit my exploration to the period beginning with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and extending to the present day. This period arguably presents members of Georgia's Greek community with the most pressing and current challenges to their belonging to Georgia as GEORGIAN CITIZENS. This is not to say that the "ancestor story" of "how the Greeks came to Georgia" – as it was termed within the framework of our documentation efforts – is not a potential

focal point for identification. On the contrary, as we have seen in discussing the heritage varieties Urum and Pontic Greek in the previous Chapter, the narrative of having to leave a repressive Ottoman Empire is widely shared in the community. However, a full analysis of the narrative practices involved in relating this history in both heritage languages and Russian would exceed the scope of this book. A similar caveat applies to the deportation of Pontic Greeks in 1949 to Kazakhstan, which I also cannot explore in the requisite detail.¹ Needless to say, wherever necessary I will draw on the knowledge gleaned from these narratives to support my analysis. In terms of other recent transformations, Chapter 7 will explore how, in Cyprus and Greece, many Georgian Greeks encountered challenges to their self-identification as GREEK. It will also deal with the internal migration of Georgians from Svaneti and Ach'ara to Kvemo Kartli, which some consultants living in that region talk about as a deeply unsettling transformation.

The end of the Soviet Union was the most profoundly transformative event in the lives of those consultants old enough to remember it.² The Soviet Union left its traces not only in the language competence of my consultants: its tidemarks are inseparably woven into who they portray themselves to be today. As such, most of what they tell me about their lives in independent Georgia, as well as their evaluations of today's socio-political and economic climate, are deeply rooted in the background of their (shared) experiences, and in the stories they tell about the last years of the Soviet Union and the turmoil and insecurities which ensued. Some consultants explain this background to me, the outsider, who asks fairly explicit questions. For others it is part of a taken-for-granted "common" knowledge that they presume I share; yet others avoid an explicit evaluation of the end of the Soviet Union, as discussed in Section A. below.

Let us first take a brief look at how consultants evaluate life in the Soviet Union in general, as presented in Table 6.1. Note that I did not ask a question tailored to solicit an evaluation of life in the Soviet Union; hence the relatively high number of consultants expressing "no evaluation". Still, in interviews conducted almost 25 years after the dissolution of the USSR a striking 42.8%

1 Cf. Loladze (2019) for a thorough exploration.

2 One possible exception is AC, 81 at the time of the interview, who was 15 when he was deported to Kazakhstan with his family from a village in the area of Sokhumi. This experience notwithstanding, he is still a self-proclaimed "Stalinist", puts the deportation down to "a mistake" possibly made by Lavrenti Beria (AC, 0:07:28, 0:44:11), and tells us of his deep disappointment at the collapse of the Soviet Union, mostly because it left his community without means of securing their livelihood (AC, 0:12:30-0:12:55).

Table 6.1: Evaluation of life in the Soviet Union

	positive		no evaluation		negative		differentiated		too young		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Urum	11	47.8	8	34.8	1	4.3	0	0	3	13	23	100
Pontic	10	38.5	7	26.9	1	3.8	4	15.4	4	15.4	26	100
Total	21	42.8	15	30.6	2	4.1	4	8.2	7	14.3	49	100

evaluate their former life positively, with only two providing an explicitly negative assessment. The biggest difference between Pontic and Urum Greeks is that four Pontic Greeks each drew a nuanced picture of the Soviet Union.³

Overall, there are no differences between urban and rural spaces, nor between age groups, abstracting those too young to have memories of the Soviet experience. The influence of education is difficult to assess. Given the high number of university-educated consultants, we cannot consider it significant that four of the six consultants with negative or ambivalent evaluations of the Soviet Union have a university degree. Notably however, five of these consultants have personal experience of migration. OP explicitly states that his evaluation was influenced by what he experienced while traveling:

(16) Living in Black and White (OP, 0:18:54-0:19:40)

- 1 CH: *i kak vy vosprinyali raspad sovsetskogo soyuza*
and how you_2PL perceived_PL breakdown of_Soviet Union
- 2 OP: *hh° °h ya (-) v nachale vosprinyal (-) khorosho (I)*
I in beginning perceived_M well
- 3 CH: mhm
- 4 OP: *ya vam skazhu pochemu (I) °h ya plaval da i ya*
I you_2PL will_tell_I why I sailed_M yes and I
- 5 *videl raznitsu (-) raznitsu tam i raznitsu zdes'*
saw_M difference difference there and difference here
- 6 NL: *da (-)*
yes
- 7 OP: *°h kak tam zhivut no ya imeyu v vidu opyat' zhe*
how there live_they but I have_I in view once again
- 8 *tsivilizovannykh [stranakh] da evropu [da]*
civilized countries yes Europe yes

3 IP, the shopkeeper in a small Pontic village, particularly surprised me in this respect. He traces the “chauvinist tendencies” of successor states to the institutional make-up of the Soviet Union, and uses arguments which also appear in scholarship on nationalism in post-Soviet countries (cf. Brubaker, 1996; Slezkine, 1994; Suny, 1993).

- 9 NL: [da da] [da]
yes yes yes
- 10 OP: *ne budem govorit' seychas (xx[ikh] ((chuckles))) afriku i*
not will_we to_speak now Africa and
- 11 *(aziyu) da*
Asia yes
- 12 NL: [((chuckles))] mhm (1.5)
- 13 OP: *i tam videl' (—) i u menya predstavlenie bylo (-) chto vot*
and there saw_M and at me impression was that well
- 14 *tam v evrope oni zhivut (I) oni zhivut e:: kak vam (-)*
there in Europe they live_they they live_they how you_2PL
- 15 *ob"yasnit' chtob vy ponyali °h vot (1.7) e (—) v*
to_explain so_that you_2PL understood_PL well in
- 16 *tsvetnom (-) izobrazhenie*
colour image
- 17 NL: hm
- 18 OP: *a my v chërno-belom*
and we in black-white
- 19 NL: *da ponimayu [da da]*
yes understand_I yes yes
- 20 OP: *[vy ponyali da]*
you_2PL understood_PL yes
- 21 NL: *ponimayu otlichno ((chuckles))*
understand_I perfectly
- 22 OP: *vot v chëm delo*
well in what matter
-
- 1 CH: and how did you perceive the breakdown of the Soviet Union?
- 2 OP: I, in the beginning I took it well
- 3 CH: mhm
- 4 OP: I'll tell you why, I sailed, right? and I saw the difference, the difference
there and the difference here
- 5 NL: yes
- 6 OP: how they live there, but again I have in mind civilized [countries],
right? Europe, [right?]
- 7 NL: [yes, yes] [yes]
- 8 OP: we won't talk (about) [((chuckles))] Africa and (Asia) now, right?
- 9 NL: [((chuckles))] mhm (1.5)
- 10 OP: and I saw there, I had this impression that there in Europe they live,
they live, how to explain it so you would understand, in a color picture
- 11 NL: hm
- 12 OP: and we in black and white
- 13 NL: yes, I understand, [yes, yes]
- 14 OP: [you got it, right?]

- 21 NL: I understand you perfectly ((chuckles))
 22 OP: so that's the thing

In the conversation leading up to this excerpt, OP describes how he has (been) moved about throughout his life: as a very young child he was deported with his family to Kazakhstan, where they settled in reasonably well after a harsh and difficult beginning.⁴ They subsequently followed their relatives back to Abkhazia and finally to Batumi.

Excerpt 16 begins with my question, how he perceived the *raspad* ‘break-down, dissolution’ of the Soviet Union (1). He answers that he received it “well”, qualifying his statement with a temporal *v nachale* “in the beginning” (2), thereby preparing his listeners for an upcoming comparison in which his evaluation might change. In line 4, his metacommunicative *ya vam skazhu pochemu* “I’ll tell you why” prepares his reasoning and points to the fact that this positive evaluation of the Soviet Union’s end is something not to be taken for granted but rather in need of a justification. He refreshes our knowledge that he was a sailor in the Soviet Union and explains that this gave him the opportunity to “see the difference” between “there” and “here” (5), and *kak tam zhivut* “how they live there” (7). Having twice referred to an unspecified *tam* ‘there’, specified only in its opposition to being *zdes* ‘here’, he proceeds to limit this space to *tsivilisovannykh stranakh* “civilized countries” (8), and more specifically to “Europe” (8). About other continents, like “Africa and Asia”, *ne budem govorit’ seychas* “we won’t speak (about) now”, which is followed by a little chuckle, portraying their hypothetical inclusion in the comparison as comical (10). They are thereby removed from the set of potentially comparable spaces, and ultimately either refused a

4 He puts great emphasis on pointing out that they were given plots of land and supported by the Soviet administration, and that in a “truthful” account of that time these positive aspects must be mentioned (OP, 0:17:17-0:18:02). Stating this so explicitly suggests that he perceives modern portrayals of that time to be excessively negative.

In a later part of the interview (OP, 0:49:09-0:51:58), he positions Greeks as part of the Soviet *mission civilisatrice* intended to “raise up” the *kochevniki* “nomads”, which he portrays the population of Kazakhstan as having been at that time, to the level of “real people”: *sovetskaya vlast’ sdelala ikh lyud’mi (-) nastoyashchimi lyud’mi* “the Soviet authority made them into people, into real people” (OP, 0:50:28-0:50:31). Here and in another excerpt analyzed in detail in Höfler (2018b) he draws on and aligns himself with imperial (Soviet and preceding) discourses of a hierarchical order of people, based among other ascriptions on a “group’s” (purported) lifestyle and/or religion. Being a sedentary ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN places a person higher in this established ranking than being a NOMAD or MUSLIM.

position on the hierarchy of CIVILIZATION or ranked so far below the Soviet Union that the comparison is rendered meaningless.

Having clarified the point of comparison as “Europe”, he takes up his sensory experience again: *i tam videl* “and I saw there” (13). His *predstavlenie* “impression” about life in Europe appears not so easy to relate, which the transcript makes visible in the (filled) pauses and another metacommunicative comment on this difficulty: *kak vam ob”yasnit’ chtob vy ponyali* “how to explain it to you, so that you would understand” (14-15). He finally settles on an image and describes “life in Europe” as *v tsvetnom izobrazhenie* “in a color picture” (16), which he contrasts with *a my v chërno-belom* “and we in black and white” (18). This contrast not only depicts “life in Europe” as “more colorful” and thereby “more interesting” but also as “more developed”, having moved on to the technical means of color photography and film, whereas “we” have remained in the stage of black and white imaging.⁵ Nika Loladze, who has throughout this excerpt aligned himself with OP through his supportive backchannel behavior (6, 9, 12), voices his understanding (19). OP acknowledges it and confirms that his comparison was understood (20). NL reassures him, repeating his understanding: *ponimayu otlichno* “I understand you perfectly” (21), thereby confirming not only having understood the explanation but also the sentiment behind the comparison. This allows OP to close his explication in line 22.

What is remarkable about this short excerpt is that OP is very intent on securing our understanding (4, 14-15, 20), thereby marking the topic as potentially difficult and ensuring our alignment with him “every step of the way” as it were.⁶ Also remarkable is how he refers to the spaces he establishes and compares. As pointed out above, “the other place” is first introduced repeatedly as *tam* ‘there’,⁷ before narrowing it down by specifying one of its characteristic traits (being “civilized”), excluding potential contenders (“Africa and Asia”) and finally labeling it “Europe”. The other space of

5 The concept of a continuum of LINEAR PROGRESS alluded to here is also noticeable in other interviews, most so perhaps in excerpt 26 (cf. Chapter 7).

6 Note that this securing of alignment does not follow any previous “misunderstanding” in our conversation, but is a method OP uses in potentially precarious sequences of the interview. In Höfler (2018b) I use *inter alia* an excerpt from the interview with OP to discuss how the discourse marker *chestno govorya* “honestly speaking” is used to increase proximity between interlocutors and as a disclaimer before broaching topics that are considered potentially conflictual.

7 The space of comparison is referred to with *tam* four times in this short excerpt. Also in this, OP is no exception in the corpus, as will become apparent in excerpt 26.

comparison is referred to only twice in the excerpt as *zdes'* 'here' (5) and indirectly when OP speaks of how "we" lived – presumably "here" – in line 18. The place contrasted with "Europe" thus remains ambiguous and could refer either to Batumi, Ach'ara, the Georgian SSR or the Soviet Union as a whole.

Subsequent to excerpt 16, OP goes on to explain that not everything has progressed as easily as he had envisioned when moving from "black and white" to a life in "technicolor". On the contrary, it is difficult for him to find work at his age on the "free market", where he is left to his own devices since the Soviet Union stopped providing work for all of its citizens (OP, 0:21:12). Secure employment during the Soviet Union is an important point of comparison in all interviews with older consultants. The reasons given for viewing the Soviet Union positively center mainly on features that were tangible in everyday life: free education, work and salaries allowing a life without poverty, pensions, affordable cost of living, and the ability to travel the length and breadth of the Soviet Union for very little money. The ubiquity of employment is the feature most often mentioned, together with the assertion that people lived "well". In the words of EM: *vse prekrasno my zhili* "we all lived splendidly" (EM, 0:21:20), a sentiment many consultants expressed in similar ways. The other frequently mentioned positive aspect is people's amity regardless of ethno-national background, often conveyed by portraying the Soviet Union as a "big family" (cf. Section B.).

A. How to avoid talking about the end of the Soviet Union

Perhaps the most common way of communicatively dealing with the end of the Soviet Union is to discuss it as little as possible, often in statements one might summarize as "it was difficult; now everything is okay". As discussed in Chapter 4, I found these ways of meaning-making particularly difficult to grasp analytically and to put into writing. This was especially the case when consultants more or less explicitly avoided speaking about the end of the Soviet Union and the early 1990s in Georgia. Precisely because of these difficulties, these excerpts are important for our understanding of this period. I will now turn to an excerpt that does not "get to the point" as straightforwardly as most others in this book. It is, however, a good example of how an excerpt, which is difficult to access, can nonetheless provide invaluable insights about this period and its traces.

AK is a 62-year-old Pontic Greek retired nurse, who lives in rural Tetrīts'q'aro. Before excerpt 17, she tells us about the Georgian dance ensemble in which she was a soloist during the Soviet Union, using this narration to emphasize how little ethno-national affiliation mattered then. Her close friend – our host –, LT, another Pontic Greek woman, is also present during the interview conversation, which takes place over coffee in her courtyard.

(17) Every transition is difficult (AK, 0:17:11-0:19:20)

- 1 CH: *i kak vy vosprinyali raspad* (—) *sovetskogo soyuza*
and how you_2PL perceived_PL breakdown of_Soviet Union
- 2 (I)
- 3 LT: *raspad*
breakdown
- 4 AK: *°h nas nikto ne sprashival* (2) *naselenie kak [takogo] [ne*
us nobody not asked_M population as such not
- 5 *sprashivali]*
asked_PL
- 6 CH: [hm]
- 7 NL: [hm] [da]
yes
- 8 CH: [hm] hm
- 9 AK: [*°h*] *eto vsë proiskhodilo naverkhu*
this all happened_N on_top
- 10 NL: *konechno*
of_course
- 11 AK: *°h i my vosprinyali tak kak eto (-) dolzhno bylo i byt'*
and we perceived_PL as how this should was and to_be
- 12 CH: mhm
- 13 AK: *kak reshilo pravitel'stvo [i kak sdelali]*
how decided_N government and how did_PL
- 14 NL: [da] [da]
yes yes
- 15 CH: [hm]
- 16 NL: *kak vy chuvstvovali kak kak vy vosprinyali etot (-)*
how you_2PL felt_PL how how you_2PL took_PL this
- 17 *novost' [chto sovetskiy soyuz razvalilsya hm]*
news that Soviet Union collapsed_F
- 18 AK: [*nu* vy znaete *chto da konechno perekhod]* *trudnyy*
well you_2PL know_2PL that yes of_course transition difficult
- 19 CH: [mhm]
- 20 NL: [mhm]

- 21 AK: *lyuboy perekhod dazhe deti kogda perekhodyat iz [e_iz]*
any transition even kids when pass_they from from
- 22 CH: [mhm]
- 23 AK: *°h e v yu_vot v em: v yunoshestvo*
in well in in adolescence
- 24 CH: [mhm]
- 25 NL: *[da]*
yes
- 26 AK: *devochki v devushek perekhod trudnyy*
girls in girls transition difficult
- 27 NL: *da*
yes
- 28 AK: *°h nu estestvenno [m] bylo nemnozhko m (-) trudno bylo no*
well naturally was little difficult was but
- 29 CH: [hm] hm
- 30 AK: *normal'no potom vsë tut uregulirovalos'*
normally then everything here regulated_N
- 31 NL: *vy ne obradovalis' možno skazat' (2)*
you_2PL not were_happy_PL may to_say
- 32 AK: *obradovalas' ili i net ya*
was_happy_F or and not I
- 33 NL: *hm da (-)*
yes
- 34 AK: *nu vot a chemu bylo radovat'sya*
well here but what was to_be_happy
- 35 CH: hm
- 36 NL: *da (I)*
yes
- 37 AK: *vot °h esli by eto perekhodilo vy znaete kak vot °h*
well if would this passed_N you_2PL know_2PL how well
- 38 *postepenno [godami] ne oshchushchalos' by [na chto °h]*
gradually over_years not felt_N would on what
- 39 NL: *[da]*
yes
- 40 CH: [mhm]
- 41 AK: *[togda] konechno bylo by [boleee menee i]*
then of_course was would more less and
- 42 NL: *[mhm] [raz i rukhnulo da da da]*
since and collapsed_N yes yes yes
- 43 AK: *a eto vot kak po bashke tebya chem-to [udarili i*
and this here how to head you with_something hit_PL and
- 44 *nado]*
necessary

- 45 CH: *[(laughs)] da*
yes
- 46 AK: *perestraivat'sya*
to_adapt
- 47 CH: hm
- 48 AK: *vsë (-)*
all
- 49 NL: *[da]*
yes
- 50 AK: *[khochesh'] ne khochesh' nado perestraivat'sya*
want_2SG not want_2SG necessary to_adapt
- 51 CH: [hm]
- 52 NL: *[da]*
yes
- 53 AK: *no chtob perestroit'sya tozhe vremya nado*
but so_that to_adapt also time necessary
- 54 CH: [hm]
- 55 NL: [hm]
- 56 AK: *i my perestraivalis' seychas khorosho [(chuckles))]*
and we adapted_PL now well
- 57 CH: *[(chuckles))]*
- 58 NL: *[(chuckles))]*
- 59 CH: *i nezavisimost' gruzii (-) kak byla dlya vas (-)*
and independence of_Georgia how was_F for you_2PL
- 60 AK: *°hhh oy h° kak ya eto skazhu nezavisimost' gruzii (2) °h*
how I this will_say_I independence of_Georgia
- 61 *nu estestvenno (-) ya kak grazhdanka gruzii*
well naturally I as citizen_F of_Georgia
- 62 CH: mhm
- 63 AK: *ya podderzhivayu svoë pravitel'stvo*
I support_I own government
- 64 CH: mhm
- 65 AK: *°h i podderzhivayu te vzglyady*
and support_I those views
- 66 CH: mhm
- 67 AK: *kotorye (-) oni (-) delayut dlya gruzii*
which they do_they for Georgia
- 68 CH: mhm
- 69 AK: *ya ne imeyu nikakogo [tam pravo] dopustim tam chto-to*
I not have_I no_kind_of there right assume_we there something
- 70 °h
- 71 CH: [hm]
- 72 AK: *n no nu my vseгда kak lyudi nadeem'sya na vsë luchshee*
but well we always as people hope_we on everything better

A. How to avoid talking about the end of the Soviet Union

- 73 CH: mhm
- 74 AK: *i my zh_zhdali luchshe i zhdëm eshchë luchshee*
and we waited_PL better and wait_we more better
- 75 NL: *[da]*
yes
- 76 AK: *normal'no ya [dumayu]*
normally I think_I
- 77 CH: *[mhm] (–) konecho*
of_course
- 78 AK: *da moë pravitel'stvo ya lyublyu*
yes my government I love_I
- 1 CH: and how did you perceive the breakdown of the Soviet Union?
- 3 LT: breakdown
- 4 AK: nobody asked us, the population as [itself] [they didn't ask]
- 6 CH: [hm]
- 7 NL: yes
- 8 CH: [hm] hm
- 9 AK: this all happened at the top
- 10 NL: of course
- 11 AK: and we perceived it as how it was and should be
- 12 CH: mhm
- 13 AK: how the government decided it, it was done
- 14 NL: yes yes
- 15 CH: [hm]
- 16 NL: how did you feel? How did you handle these news [that the Soviet Union had collapsed?]
- 17
- 18 AK: [well, you know that, yes, of course, a transition] is difficult
- 19 CH: [mhm]
- 20 NL: [mhm]
- 21 AK: any transition, even when children pass from [from]
- 22 CH: [mhm]
- 23 AK: eh in in em in adolescence
- 24 CH: [mhm]
- 25 NL: yes
- 26 AK: girls, for girls the transition is difficult
- 27 NL: yes
- 28 AK: well, naturally [m] it was a little, it was difficult
- 29 CH: [hm] hm
- 30 AK: normally, later everything was settled
- 31 NL: so you weren't happy, one can say?
- 32 AK: whether I was happy or not
- 33 NL: hm yes
- 34 AK: well, but what was there to be happy about?

- 35 CH: hm
36 NL: yes
37 AK: well, if this had passed, you know, somehow gradually over the years, it
38 wouldn't have been [felt]
39 NL: [yes]
40 CH: [mhm]
41 AK: [back then] of course it was [more or less]
42 NL: [mhm] [since it just collapsed, yes, yes, yes]
43 AK: but this was like they hit you over the head with something [and it's
44 necessary]
45 CH: [((laughs))] yes
46 AK: to adapt
47 CH: hm
48 AK: that's it
49 NL: yes
50 AK: like it or not, it's necessary to adapt
51 CH: [hm]
52 NL: yes
53 AK: but in order to adapt, also time is necessary
54 CH: [hm]
55 NL: [hm]
56 AK: and we adapted, now it's good [((chuckles))]
57 CH: [((chuckles))]
58 NL: [((chuckles))]
59 CH: and the independence of Georgia, how was it for you?
60 AK: oy, how will I say it, the independence of Georgia, well, naturally, I as
61 a citizen of Georgia
62 CH: mhm
63 AK: I support my government
64 CH: mhm
65 AK: and I support those views
66 CH: mhm
67 AK: which they develop for Georgia
68 CH: mhm
69 AK: I don't have any [right there], let's say, there something
71 CH: [hm]
72 AK: but, well, we always as people hope for everything to get better
73 CH: mhm
74 AK: and we waited for things to get better and we're still waiting for things
75 to get even better
75 NL: yes
76 AK: it's normal, [I think]
77 CH: [mhm] of course
78 AK: yes, I love my government

AK answers my question (1-2) by explicating the processes of decision-making that led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In this, “we” were not involved: *nas nikto ne sprashival* “nobody asked us” (4). Who “we” refers to is clarified in the same line, repeating that they were not consulted: *naselenie* “the population”, i.e. all “ordinary” Soviet citizens. The Greek community is thereby portrayed as part of this population and therefore “completely ordinary”, not standing out from any other “groups” in terms of involvement in this political process. She then attributes responsibility for this decision to people *naverkh* “at the top” (9), and to her in-group (still “the population”) the role of accepting and dealing with it (11). In this, she emphasizes that things were done exactly as decided: *kak reshilo pravitel'stvo i kak sdelali* “how the government decided is how it was done” (13). This ATTRIBUTING RESPONSIBILITY is somewhat similar to the device of SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY (cf. Chapter 5). Note that in this case it is not an allocation of “blame”, but an explanation of how decisions were arrived at: by “the government” making a decision and “the population” at least not standing in the way of its implementation. This is very much in line with how AK and many other consultants speak about the allocation of tasks between a government and its citizens.

So far, the end of the Soviet Union is a process of decision-making and implementation that AK has very little to do with. This in a way excuses her from having to speak about her personal (emotional) involvement. It is, however, her personal take which interests us, prompting NL to ask how she “felt” about it (16-17). AK first acknowledges that *konechno perekhod trudnyy* “of course a transition is difficult” (18), before generalizing this to all kinds of “transitions” (21-26). The “difficulty” in question is thereby portrayed, not as restricted to transitions from one political, economic and social system to another, but as a GENERAL RULE which holds for “transitions” *per se*. She chooses the transition from “childhood” to “adolescence” as an example, thereby equating a socio-economic and political transition with one established as “natural”, perhaps even “biological”. She introduces it with *lyuboy perekhod* “any transition”, and puts emphasis on it being *dazhe* “even” difficult for children to make this transition (21). This attributes a lack of “nostalgia” to children that contrasts with the emotional attachment one might attribute to older “transitioners” – an attribution that is, in fact, frequently made in contemporary Georgia. It is worth noting how much communicative effort it takes her to construct this generalization, which is observable especially in her search for words in line 23, and in contrast to how carefully she chooses her words in other parts of this excerpt. At the

very least, this does not appear to be a highly conventionalized example for this generalization, or not one that she uses frequently.⁸ Returning to the post-Soviet transition, AK concedes that *estestvenno m bylo nemnozhko m (-) trudno bylo* “naturally it was a little, it was difficult” (28), which she immediately mitigates again by labeling this “difficulty” as *normal’no* “normal” and adding that everything was settled subsequently – and has presumably remained so (30). Summarizing this part of the excerpt (16-30), AK acknowledges some emotional “difficulties” in “making the transition”, which she compares with children’s developmental stages. The “difficulties” are therefore not only to be expected, as they apply to all kinds of transitions, they are further normalized and portrayed to be “nothing out of the ordinary”. AK, in short, does everything to NORMALIZE her emotional response to this transition.

NL takes up the “difficulties” and explores them with another question, this time a little closer to what he perceives her emotional state to entail: *vy ne obradovalis’ možno skazat’* “you weren’t happy, one can say?” (31). AK answers with an expression best translated loosely as “what did it matter whether I was happy or not?” (32), which NL acknowledges and shows himself to understand (33). AK’s rhetorical question *nu vot a chemu bylo radovat’sya* “well, what was there to be happy about?” (34) is her first unhedged evaluation of the end of the Soviet Union as emotionally more complex than “a little difficult”. She goes on to explain that if the transition had taken place *postepenno* “gradually” it would not have been “felt” as strongly (37-41), which NL supports: *raz i rukhnulo* “since it just collapsed”, introducing an element of surprise (42). In line 43, AK finds an image not corresponding to a predictable transition, namely being hit over the head with something – presumably involving surprise, if not shock and pain. She goes on to say that *nado perestraivats’ya* “it is necessary to adapt” (44-46), making sure she does not come across as an “uncritical nostalgic” who does not understand the necessity of reforms. She makes this point very strongly, first by closing it with *vsë* “that’s all” (48) and then by repeating it in a way that leaves no alternative: *khochesh’ ne khochesh’ nado perestraivats’ya* “like it or not, it’s necessary to adapt” (50).⁹ Here, she uses the generalized second person singular, indicating a generally applicable rule of life. Having made the necessity

8 While this might be explained by her not being used to talk about this period to outsiders in everyday life, she seems to easily find words for other comparisons that she would use with similar infrequency.

9 The end of the Soviet Union is often spoken about as “necessary” and “inevitable”. This perhaps painful but “inevitable shock” (MA, 0:14:56) allows consultants to then

of changes clear beyond any doubt, she takes up her call for more time in line 53. Having spoken about things happening “too fast”, this might be read as a statement deploring that things went too fast for adequate reforms. This is not how AK finishes, however: instead, she brings her account to a close by telling us that *i my perestraivalis’ seychas khorosho* “and we adapted, now it’s good” (56). The time that has passed since the “surprising” end of the Soviet Union is thereby characterized as “long enough” to come to terms with the “necessary reforms” required for a “good life now”. The close is achieved by all three of us sharing a chuckle.

In line 59, I move on to the next topic asking how Georgia’s independence *byla dlya vas* “was for you”. This may appear to be an odd question to ask, due to the two events “end of the Soviet Union” and “Georgia’s independence” being temporally so close and the second being an effect of the first. The pilot study (Höfler, 2011), however, showed that many consultants perceive these events as clearly distinguishable, as confirmed in the present study. The conversation with AK is a case in point, and a particularly illuminating one, since it highlights her position as GEORGIAN CITIZEN more than other excerpts do.

After a noticeable filled pause and a metacommunicative comment expressing that she is searching for a “good way to put it” (60), AK proceeds in a very cautious, slow, and deliberate manner, giving me ample time to align myself with her every step of the way as it were through the very regular hearer signals I produce. Even though it makes the excerpt more lengthy, this is an instance where it is especially important to visualize the backchannel behavior Nika Loladze and I produce, signaling our support and thereby allowing consultants to carry on through sometimes difficult topics. In line 61, AK very explicitly positions herself as *grazhdanka gruzii* “a citizen of Georgia” and in her following turns spells out what she believes this entails: to support *svoë pravitel’s tvo* ‘own government’ “my government” (63) and to support the government’s plans *dlya gruzii* “for Georgia” (65–67). Importantly, being a “Georgian citizen” does not give her “the right” to do certain things, which she does not elaborate (69). In the context of the interview, it could be anything from voicing dissenting views – perhaps only in an interview with an outsider – to starting an opposition party or inciting a revolt, probably closer to the first. She contrasts this “support” and “correct behavior” as a “Georgian citizen” with the feelings of an “ordinary

expand on, for instance, the economic difficulties the Soviet Union was fraught with, rather than dwelling on their personal situation and affects.

person”: *my [...] kak lyudi* “we as people” apparently also have hopes that differ from the “official” ones (72). Two points are noteworthy here: firstly, the fact that she distinguishes between a “public persona” (the GEORGIAN CITIZEN) and a “private persona” (the ORDINARY PERSON) each apparently endowed with different rights and obligations. Secondly, this is generalized via the use of the first person plural pronoun as pertaining not only to her but to all “ordinary people”. As one might expect in an answer to a question about a political topic on a state level, she does not speak in her position as a “Greek”, a “woman”, or a “nurse”, but explicitly as a GEORGIAN CITIZEN, who is afforded different obligations by different contexts. She also tells us what these “ordinary people” do: they “hope” and “wait” for “the better” (72-74). She evaluates these actions as *normal’no* “normal” and immediately hedges her evaluation by restricting it to the sphere of her personal opinion with *ya dumayu* “I think” (76), which I affirm (77).

In line 78, AK closes this excerpt by answering a different question than I had had in mind with *da moë pravitel’stvo ya lublyu* “yes, I love my government”. This final statement goes a long way towards explaining how AK understood my question in line 59, namely not in terms of a description of her personal situation as influenced by the political and administrative change that accompanied Georgia becoming a independent, but in terms of an evaluation of “the Georgian government”, without specifying at which point in time. The question, then, becomes one that requires an “official” answer from a GEORGIAN CITIZEN, which she provides as one might do in a TV interview, for instance: very carefully and deliberately, making sure to position herself as a “good citizen”. This also explains the contrast between how AK positions herself in this excerpt and in most other contexts of our interview, where she appears much less careful and brings up her positive feelings towards “Georgia” at great length and without much apparent restraint.

Subsequent to excerpt 17, AK goes on to emphasize that neither she nor her community has ever had any difficulties with the local administration, that “we” – the Georgian Greeks or at least those living in Tetrits’q’aro – participate in all the elections and in general behave like “good citizens”. In keeping with how carefully AK speaks about everything that she appears to categorize as “official” and does not bring up herself, she answers the question I ask later about how life was during the last 20 years with a careful *nemnozhko drugaya zhizn’ byla* “life was a little different” (AK, 0:20:26).

Such a close analysis of excerpt 17 benefits this study in a number of ways. Most importantly, this excerpt exemplifies how numerous consultants talk about the end of the Soviet Union and the early 1990s in Georgia: by trying to

keep both narration and evaluation as general as possible. Furthermore, the end of the Soviet Union is for AK – and for many other consultants – not to be equated with the independence of Georgia. While the former is portrayed as deserving differing levels of emotional attachment, the latter appears to be evaluated in terms of the obligations it imposes on its citizens. As in the case of AK, it is possible to position oneself in two different ways: as a “public” or as a “private” persona. Questions about the Georgian nation state appear to elicit the “public” position, which is mostly taken up through expressing values and opinions perceived to befit a GOOD GEORGIAN CITIZEN. The interview with AK shows these virtues to lie in “supporting” the government, participating in elections, and not “disrupting things”. Chapter 5 has shown competence in Georgian to be important for being a GEORGIAN CITIZEN, while religious affiliation, namely being an ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN is at least in Ts’alk’a perceived to be a prerequisite for being GEORGIAN (cf. Chapter 7).

On a methodological level, there are three remarks to be made here. Firstly, excerpt 17 allows me to showcase the analysis of a longer stretch of an interview. Secondly, it is an illustrative instance of how views and evaluations were carefully “teased out” in many interviews through listening attentively and asking questions attuned to our consultants. And thirdly, visualizing NL’s and my own feedback behavior shows just how important interlocutors are for the progress of any type of conversation and how their visualization is important for the kind of in-depth analysis offered in this book.

In terms of themes, excerpt 17 shows the emergence of a certain RESILIENCE, which AK attributes to the “ordinary people” she perceives herself to be one of. This is apparent in their “accepting” the decisions of the government regarding the complete reorganization of their life (11-13), in living through the “slight difficulties” until the circumstances were “settled” again (28-30), in carrying out the “necessary reforms” (44-46, 50, 56), and finally in being aware of their obligations as a “Georgian citizen” (61) to “support” (63-67) and “love” (78) their government. Other consultants curtly summarize the early 1990s with *spokoyno nikto ne zhil* “peacefully nobody lived”¹⁰ (LV, 0:10:33), also emphasizing that these difficulties were endured not only by members of Georgia’s Greek community but by everybody living in Georgia at that time. IA, a 54-year-old Pontic Greek woman living in Batumi, who actually does not hold back when talking about that time, at one point expresses this RESILIENCE explicitly: *nu zato my zakalyalis’ v etikh*

10 The fronting of *spokoyno* ‘peacefully’ is less marked in Russian than in English but I wanted to preserve the focus in the translation.

usloviyakh my uzhe nichego ne boimsya “well, on the other hand we were tempered in these conditions, we’re not afraid of anything anymore” (IA, 0:19:16).

Such ways of expressing RESILIENCE in talking about these profound transformations, especially when not explicitly articulating “what happened”, suggests an interpretation of the transition from the Soviet Union to independent Georgia as a liminal phase in the sense used by Turner (1987). With all its possibilities, imponderabilia and existential dangers it becomes a blank space that cannot be spoken about to an outsider who has not shared this liminal experience.¹¹

It must be mentioned that even though economic conditions are not easy for a number of my consultants, most of them evaluated the situation in Georgia in 2013-14 very positively. This was especially in regard to the reforms initiated by Mikheil Saakashvili from 2004 onwards, which led to a stark decrease in corruption and low level criminality (cf. Chapter 2). In this evaluation they are strikingly similar to the majority of Georgian citizens.

B. The end of the Soviet Union as “Family Breakdown”

Importantly, all the positive characterizations of life in the Soviet Union introduced at the beginning of this Chapter are employed with hindsight and in full knowledge and experience of the turmoil that afflicted Georgia in the 1990s. The image of “stability” and “brotherhood” invoked for the Soviet Union thereby serves as a foil, a contrastive backdrop against which the subsequent insecurities appear even harsher. Here, I will especially explore the metaphor of the SOVIET FAMILY, with the subsequent FAMILY BREAKDOWN discussed in Sections I. and II. below. The interview with LP clearly illustrates the communicative devices of contrasting a “better then” with a “difficult now”, as well as the metaphor of the SOVIET FAMILY. Before excerpt 18, he explains to us how “now” *brat brata ne znayut* “brothers don’t know each other” (LP, 0:10:53). If even siblings do not “know” each other, they have no means of knowing when their support might be needed nor of finding support when they are in need themselves. “Now” is thus a time that lacks dependable social cohesion. LP finds an image for how this lack plays out in

11 Cf. Langer (1991); Mishler (2006) for life narratives of trauma survivors being in many cases “disrupted narratives” with parts remaining blank, no matter how much an interviewer may press for an explication.

everyday life and explains that if he fell on the street “now”, nobody would have the basic civil grace to help him up; people would instead try to push him even “further down”. NL asks for clarification whether this state of affairs applies to Greece or *vezde* “everywhere”, to which LP answers *vezde* (LP, 0:10:58-0:11:09). He then goes on to contrast this “now” with a much more sociable “then”:

(18) All were like brothers (LP, 0:11:12-0:11:33)

- 1 LP: *shchas takoe vremya (-) esli est' esesskoe vremya [i brat]*
now such time if exists Soviet time and brother
- 2 *brata znal (-) sosed sosedu znal*
brother knew_M neighbor neighbor knew_M
- 3 CH: [mhm] [mhm]
- 4 NL: [mhm] [da]
yes
- 5 LP: *°h vse družno zhili (-) ni to chto eto gruzin ya*
all friendly lived_PL not that that this_one Georgian I
- 6 *armenin [eto] adzhar*
Armenian this_one Ajarian
- 7 NL: [mhm]
- 8 LP: *eto [svan] ne znayu °hhh azerbaidzhanets*
this_one Svan not know_I Azerbaijani
- 9 CH: [hm] mhm (—)
- 10 LP: *vse (—) kak bratya byli*
all like brothers were
- 11 CH: [mhm (1.8)]
- 12 NL: [mhm (1.8)]
- 13 LP: *i vsë khorosho byl*
and everything well was

- 1 LP: that's how things are now, if it were the Soviet time, a brother knew his
- 2 brother, a neighbor knew his neighbor
- 3 CH: [mhm] [mhm]
- 4 NL: [mhm] [yes]
- 5 LP: they all lived amicably, it wasn't such that this is a Georgian, I'm
- 6 Armenian, this is an Ach'arian
- 7 NL: [mhm]
- 8 LP: this is a Svan, I don't know, an Azerbaijani
- 9 CH: [hm] mhm (—)
- 10 LP: all were like brothers
- 11 CH: [mhm (1.8)]
- 12 NL: [mhm (1.8)]
- 13 LP: and everything was good

The contrast is made between “now” and “Soviet times” (1). In the latter, both siblings and neighbors “knew” each other (1-2). In the context of how he has characterized the present day before this excerpt, this “knowledge” may be interpreted as encompassing a certain degree of mutual care. In the next step, he extends this image of supportive familial and neighborly conviviality to one in which a person’s ethno-national affiliation played no role and could not be used to disrupt the harmony of living together (5-8). Intriguingly, he does not mention a “Greek” person in his list, but every other “nationality” living in Ts’alk’a at the time of the interview: “Georgian”, “Armenian”, “Ach’arian”, “Svan”, and even “Azerbaijani” – a national minority mentioned with surprisingly low frequency in the corpus, despite being Georgia’s largest.¹² It is remarkable that he mentions “Ach’arian” and “Svan” members of this “amicable” community, because both groups of Georgian internal migrants were settled in Ts’alk’a just before, or even after, the collapse of the Soviet Union and massive Greek emigration (cf. Chapters 2 and 7). By including them in this list, he establishes the potential for a harmonious community including even those perceived groups, who were not living in Ts’alk’a at the time and who in many other sequences of the interview he describes in terms of (violent) struggle and even fear (LP, 0:8:49, 0:33:01, 0:36:54, 0:37:14-0:37:50, cf. Section II. below and Chapter 7).

Two noteworthy things happen here. Firstly, by stressing the harmonious relationships of “everybody” who could conceivably have lived in Ts’alk’a during Soviet times, he elevates his reminiscence to the level of an almost Utopian vision of peaceful inter-ethnic conviviality. Secondly, the perceived “groups” he usually positions as essentially different in ways not allowing rapprochement¹³ are in this sequence positioned as mere “victims of circumstance” and thereby not essentially different. This contrast in how these “groups” are portrayed as having lived together “during the Soviet Union” versus how he talks about their relationship “today” establishes TIME and

12 This low frequency is more easily explained in Western Georgia (Samtskhe-Javakheti and Ach’ara) where consultants have little or no everyday contact with members of the Azerbaijani minority. However, this is not a factor in the region of Kvemo Kartli or in Tbilisi, where consultants also hardly mention Azerbaijanis. In Höfler (2018b) I discuss this discrepancy as an example of out-group homogenization (Dijk, 1987; Roth, 2005; Wodak et al., 2009) in which MUSLIM is established as a category that is not afforded internal differentiation, in this instance into a set of national categories, whereas CHRISTIAN is.

13 By attributing their “aggressive” “uncivilized” behavior to their “Turkish blood” for instance (LP, 0:37:14-0:37:50).

notably the end of the Soviet Union as a “turning point” – as the important factor in Ts’alk’a’s changing social order.

This friendly coexistence introduced in lines 5-8 is elevated in line 10: *vse kak bratya byli* “all were like brothers”, thereby extending the close and supportive relationships he attributes to familial collectives to a larger collective. Note that in this excerpt the level of commonality remains ambiguous: it could either remain on the local level of communal relationships, as introduced by bringing in the neighbors in line 2 and by mentioning “groups” living in the area; or it could reference larger contexts, extending the cherished “family relations” to a Georgia-wide collective or even to one encompassing all Soviet citizens.

LP picks up the positive character of his description in a closing line reminiscent of a “fairy tale”: *i vsë khorosho byl* “and everything was good” (13). This is also the climax of just “how good” conviviality was in the Soviet Union. The progression starts from the very local level of members of the biological family and immediate neighbors (1-2) to a – probably still local – level of commonality among perceived members of different ethno-national collectives (5-8), who are then described in terms of family relations. This progression is also apparent in the verbs and adverbs LP uses to describe these levels of living together: from “knowing” each other (1-2), via “living amicably” (5) to “being like brothers” (10).

Following excerpt 18, LP goes on to explain that “now” everybody has to look after themselves, reprising his grievances about individualization and isolation. The sociability of the Soviet times serves as a nostalgic point of comparison, without however explicitly criticizing “capitalism”, as done by other consultants, especially older ones like SC.

What does become clear in excerpt 18 is the comparison of the Soviet Union with a FAMILY, which in many interviews is described as having “broken down”.¹⁴ In the conversation with SC and FD this metaphor is made very explicit, not as LP does in terms of structuring the inter-ethnic relationships,¹⁵ but in terms of likening the mechanisms of “governing a state” to

14 Cf. Maisuradze / Thun-Hohenstein (2015) for a historical analysis of the FAMILY metaphor in the Soviet Union with Stalin as the father figure: *otets narodov* ‘father of the peoples’ (Thun-Hohenstein, 2015a, p. 8). Cf. also Sideri (2006, pp. 109–113) on the establishment of that metaphor.

15 SC and other consultants do elsewhere describe inter-ethnic relationships in the Soviet Union similarly to LP, regularly using terms that invoke family relations. SC is also very outspoken on the pain which the end of the Soviet Union caused him: *ochen’ boleznenno ochen’ boleznenno u menya serdtse bolit dazhe seychas* ‘h ya ishchu to

the mechanisms of “heading a family”. Before excerpt 19 SC talks at length about the bad economic decisions being made in or about Ts’alk’a, a district he portrays throughout as having great potential, especially in the agricultural sector. He concludes:

(19) The family fell apart (SC, 0:17:08-0:17:30)

- 1 SC: *stol’ko pravitel’stvo tak chasto menyaetsya chto ne znaet chto*
so_much government so often changes that not knows what
 - 2 *delat’*
to_do
 - 3 FD: *esli esli doma (-) obyknovennyy dom °h esli khozyain strogiy*
if if at_home ordinary home if master strict
 - 4 CH: mhm
 - 5 FD: *u nego doma vsë est’*
at him at_home everything exists
 - 6 CH: hm
 - 7 FD: *esli on kakoy-to alkash ili chto u nego nechego*
if he some_sort_of drunkard or what at him nothing
 - 8 SC: *i sem’ya uzhe ne sem’ya razval [tak i gosudarstvo]*
and family already not family ruin so and state
 - 9 NL: *[da konechno] [da da]*
yes of_course yes yes
 - 10 FD: *[eto gosudarstvo] tozhe kakaya-to sem’ya*
this state also some_sort_of family
 - 11 CH: mhm
 - 12 FD: *esli u gosudarstvo stoit u rulya (—) chelovek strogiy i*
if at state stands at helm person strict and
 - 13 *vsë i vsë*
everything and everything
-
- 1 SC: the government changes so often that it doesn’t know what to do
 - 3 FD: if at home, an ordinary home, the master is strict
 - 4 CH: mhm
 - 5 FD: he’ll have everything [he needs] at home
 - 6 CH: hm
 - 7 FD: if he is some kind of drunkard or something, he will have nothing
 - 8 SC: and the family already isn’t a family, it’s a ruin, [like the state]
 - 9 NL: [yes of course,] [yes, yes]
 - 10 FD: [the state] is also some kind of family
 - 11 CH: mhm

vremya “very painful, very painful, my heart hurts even now, I long for that time” (SC, 0:22:33-0:22:40).

12 FD: if at the helm of a state stands a person who’s strict and everything

In the first lines of excerpt 19, SC voices his exasperation at how “often” the government changes in independent Georgia. Too often to “know what to do”, as he puts it. Bearing in mind that at the time of the interview Georgia was helmed by only its fourth government in about 23 years of independence, this might be read specifically in terms of unsteady and/or unpredictable (economic) policy-making, as well as imprisoning or exiling members of the previous administration that accompanied changes in government. FD starts his efforts to explain how a state should be run by reminding us that in any *obyknovennyy dom* “ordinary house”, a “strict master” would make sure that everything is in order, resulting in sufficient material necessities at home (3-5). In contrast, someone unsuited to lead a household, for instance due to being *kakoy-to alkash* “some drunkard”, would have nothing (7). SC takes up the comparison and likens the FAMILY BREAKDOWN ensuing from inadequate leadership to the breakdown of the state (8). FD completes the comparison by explicating: *eto gosudarstvo tozhe kakaya-to sem’ya* “the state is also some kind of family” (10). In lines 12-13, FD then picks up the question of leadership, using the Platonic metaphor of the “helmsman” who needs to be *strogiy i vsë* “strict and everything”, in order to make sure the state “stays on course”. He proceeds to explain how this is exemplified “today” by the “strict” policies of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey. While he never really returns to the topic, the STATE AS FAMILY metaphor is clear. Whereas in excerpt 18 it is used to mourn the loss of sociability since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in excerpt 19 it is employed to decry the perceived loss of economic and political leadership since the Soviet Union’s demise.¹⁶

Consultants who talk about the end of the Soviet Union in terms of “liberation” (NV, MC, NA) do not use the STATE AS FAMILY metaphor explicitly. Perhaps they might have done so, however, completing the metaphor not to lament the loss of the “caring” and closely regulating state, but to celebrate the liberation from an oppressive “head of the family”.

16 Note that the STATE AS FAMILY metaphor is frequently used in other contexts and to refer to other states (cf. Ringmar, 2008), and that being part of such a FAMILY is usually evaluated positively (cf. Musolff, 2016). For an extensive (if problematically over-generalizing) exploration of the STATE AS FAMILY metaphor in US-American politics, cf. Lakoff (1996).

I. “Georgia for Georgians”: The dissolution of the “Family of Nations”

As already mentioned, the perception of Soviet “unity” or “solidarity” reminiscent of familial ties should be understood as a contrast to the subsequent economic hardship, civil war and (especially in rural areas) organized crime. Economic difficulties are mentioned by all consultants old enough to have a conscious memory of the time. Especially in the rural areas of Kvemo Kartli and Ach’ara, this period is also spoken about in terms of agricultural decline, mostly affecting cheese and potatoes in Kvemo Kartli, and tea and citrus fruits in Ach’ara. Both areas are still afflicted by the loss of the Soviet domestic market (for Ts’alk’a cf. Wheatley 2006a), and in both consultants deplore the dissolution of the *sovkhoz* and *kolkhoz* structures, wherein many Greeks are said to have held prestigious positions.

In this Section and the next, I want to explore two processes of change in the 1990s that are often narrated in terms of FAMILY BREAKDOWN: the perceptible rise in nationalism, and (in Section II. below) the large scale emigration of Georgian Greeks to Greece and Cyprus. While neither experience was unique to Georgia’s Greek community, both challenged my consultants in new ways, leaving traces in how they talk about their identification and belonging many years later.

The rise in Georgian nationalism is one of the most powerful indicators my consultants mention regarding the breakdown of the former SOVIET FAMILY, alongside more tangible phenomena like changing possibilities for travel. In narrating how their lives have changed since the end of the Soviet Union, 14 consultants mention the *natsional’nyy vopros* “national question” first becoming a pertinent issue in the early 1990s. Most link it to the presidency of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, independent Georgia’s first head of state (cf. Chapter 2). Bearing in mind that many consultants choose to avoid direct statements and narratives about this time, as discussed above, the fact that almost a third openly and unambiguously discuss their experiences in these terms indicates the importance of the topic. Four consultants explicitly link the emigration of Greeks and other minorities to Gamsakhurdia’s rhetoric.¹⁷ Although I ask about it directly, no consultant states that “nationalism” or discrimination

17 These four consultants present the minority opinion, not only in this corpus (Loladze, 2016, 2019) but also in other studies (cf. Kokoev et al., 1999). The dismal economic situation is widely considered to have been the most influential driver of emigration from Georgia, for ethnic majority and -minority members alike.

on ethnic grounds existed during the Soviet Union – hence the often used FAMILY metaphor.¹⁸

This supra-national FAMILY is portrayed as having come under threat from an official rhetoric proclaiming *gruziya dlya gruzin* “Georgia for Georgians” (a phrase uttered by 9 consultants in this context). This rhetoric sets new criteria for belonging, excluding many former “family members” and thereby undermining the idea of an inclusive, inter-ethnic “family”. The following excerpt 20 exemplifies this FAMILY BREAKDOWN metaphor, while importantly presenting the protagonist of the narrated small story as having defended herself adroitly. It may therefore be seen as another instance of the RESILIENCE already identified in excerpt 17.

AM is a 49-year-old, Urum Greek, university-educated former civil inspector who lives in Tbilisi and cares for her children at the time of the interview. Before the excerpt, we talk about life in the Soviet Union. In response to my question as to whether “life was different” for members of different ethno-national “groups” she explains at length how harmoniously “everybody” lived together. This culminates in another family comparison: *zhili vmeste i kak rodnye byli* “we lived together and were like relatives” (AM, 0:7:25). The “present” – here actually the time of Gamsakhurdia’s presidency – compares unfavorably:

(20) Georgia for Georgians (AM, 0:07:38-0:08:27)

- 1 AM: *my tak drug druga khodili stoly nakryvali e i vsë a*
we so each other went_PL tables covered_PL and everything but
- 2 *seychas °h seychas tol'ko poshlo gruziya dlya gruzin (-)*
now now only went_N Georgia for Georgians
- 3 CH: *[hm] [mhm (-) da]*
yes
- 4 AM: *[armeniya] dlya armyan (-) azerbaydzhan dlya azerbaydzhantsev*
Armenia for Armenians Azerbaijan for Azerbaijanis
- 5 *(I) razlichie [poshli (-) ukazyvayut] tebe (-)*
differences went_PL point_out_they to_you_2SG

18 Explicit discrimination “today” on ethno-national grounds is also denied. However, some consultants state that it is “normal” for members of the titular nationality to have slight advantages, for example in the labor market (3 consultants); talk about the advantage of having a “Georgian” surname (4 consultants); or say they cannot answer the question because their Georgian competence is so high that they are taken for Georgians whenever they choose to be.

- 6 AM: *mne naprimer lichno skazali (-) po-g_po-russki ne*
to_me for_example personally said_PL in_G in_Russian not
- 7 *razgovarivay ya s podruzhkoy razgovarivala vykhodila iz*
speak_2SG I with girl_friend was_talking_F was_exiting_F from
- 8 *magazina °h a ya skazala ya krome russkogo znayu eshchë*
shop and I said_F I apart_from Russian know_I more
- 9 *pyat' yazykov*
five languages
- 10 CH: *((chuckles)) [da]*
yes
- 11 AM: *[a:] (-) ty mne skazhi chto ty mne predlozhish' [krome]*
and you me tell_2SG what you to_me offer_2SG apart_from
- 12 *svoego gruzinskogo yazyka no tak nel'zya [tak] nel'zya*
own Georgian language but so must_not so must_not
- 13 *ponimaesh'*
understand_2SG
- 14 CH: *[hm] [hm] hm (-)*
- 15 NL: *kogda eto sluchilos' sego_a*
when this happend_N tod_
- 16 AM: *net*
no
- 17 NL: *v nashe vremya ili*
in our time or
- 18 AM: *net h° ne seychas*
no not now
- 19 AM: *(kat): ekhla ara*
not now
- 20 NL: *ah*
- 21 CH: *hm*
- 22 AM: *(kat): eg e iq'o im periodshi gamsakhurdias [p'eriody rom iq'o*
that was that period_in Gamsakhurdia's period that was
- 23 *mashin]*
then
- 24 NL: *(kat): [kho mashin (ikneboda)]*
yes then (would_be)
- 25 AM: *[da togda uzhe] nachilis' vot eti gamsakh[urdiyeviski]*
yes then already started_PL here these Gamsakhurdian
- 26 NL: *[mhm]*
- 27 AM: *[periody a] uzhe nachali podnimat' natsional'nyy vopros*
periods already started_PL to_raise national question
- 28 *[gruziya]*
Georgia

- 29 CH: [mhm] [da]
yes
- 30 AM: [dlya gruzin]
for Georgians
- 31 NL: [mhm] da
yes
- 1 AM: we went to visit each other, filled the tables and everything, but now,
2 now only came Georgia for Georgians
- 3 CH: [hm] [mhm (-) yes]
- 4 AM: Armenia for Armenians, Azerbaijan for Azerbaijanis, the differences
5 appeared, they point them out to you
- 6 AM: to me personally, for example, they said, don't speak Geo_ Russian, I
7 was talking with a friend, came out of a shop, and I said, apart from
8 Russian I speak another five languages
- 10 CH: ((chuckles)) [yes]
- 11 AM: [now] you tell me what you offer me [apart from] your Georgian
12 language, but you mustn't behave like this, [like this] you mustn't, you
13 understand?
- 14 CH: [hm] [hm] hm (-)
- 15 NL: when did that happen, tod_
- 16 AM: no
- 17 NL: in our time or
- 18 AM: no, not now
- 19 AM: (kat): not now
- 20 NL: ah
- 21 CH: hm
- 22 AM: (kat): that was in that period, Gamsakhurdia's [period that was then]
- 24 NL: (kat): [yes, it would have been in that time]
- 25 AM: [yes, then they already] started, in these Gamsa[khurdian]
- 26 NL: [mhm]
- 27 AM: [times] they already started to bring up the national question [Georgia]
- 29 CH: [mhm] [yes]
- 30 AM: [for Georgians]
- 31 NL: [mhm] yes

Line 1 sees the end of AM's description of the Soviet Union as a time of friendship and hospitality, which she contrasts with “now”, the time of allocating “nationalities” to a corresponding “national territory” (2-4). She first mentions the most salient *gruziya dlya gruzin* “Georgia for Georgians” (2), before listing the other two South Caucasian nation states Armenia and Azerbaijan, whose titular nationalities also happen to be Georgia's most numerous national minorities (4). In her account, the *razlichie* “differences” (4) *poshli* ‘went’ or started circulating more (5), i.e. they were not there

before people started to actively look for them and “point them out” (5). She emphasizes this divisiveness, by narrating an incident that happened to her *lichno* “personally” (6). According to this, she was told *po-russki ne razgovarivay* “don’t speak Russian!” (6), as she was coming out of a shop with a girlfriend with whom she had been speaking in Russian (7).

AM first defends herself by addressing the person reprimanding her and stating the breadth of her linguistic abilities: that she speaks another five languages apart from Russian (8-9). Even in multilingual Georgia, this is an impressive repertoire, which I acknowledge with a chuckle (9). This retort could have been the end of the small story. AM does not leave it at that, however, but proceeds to turn the table on her attacker and reprimand them for “not having anything to offer” *krome svoego gruzinskogo yazyka* “apart from your Georgian language” (11-12). The following line, wherein she scolds her attacker for misbehaving, makes it clear that this “offer” does not refer solely to the attacker’s presumably limited linguistic repertoire. The repeated *tak nel’zya* “you mustn’t (behave) like this” (12) is a very strong reprimand, not usually directed towards another adult. This is not softened by how she ends her story: *ponimaesh’* “do you understand?” (13). Using the second person singular closes a narration in which she shows herself to be so superior to her attacker both in terms of linguistic repertoire and in manners, that it is apparently appropriate to scold them like a child or young adult on proper behavior. Narrating this story, in this way, in an interview situation is also, of course, a way for her to deal with an incident she feels to be “unfair” both in terms of underestimating her linguistic expertise and in terms of how compatriots should treat one another (cf. Czyżewsky et al. 1995; Günthner 2012; Lucius-Hoene / Deppermann 2004).

In line 15, NL asks for clarification about when this episode took place. Answering him, AM switches easily from Russian to Georgian and back, demonstrating her mastery of both languages. Interestingly, she duplicates both sentences: “not now” is uttered first in Russian (18), then in Georgian (19), and the description of the time as “Gamsakhurdia’s period” first in Georgian (22), then in Russian (25), our main interview language. NL aligns himself with her switch by switching himself and with her statement by assessing the period she brings up as one in which such a story might have happened. In Russian, the language she can be sure I also understand, AM adds that this was the time when the *natsional’nyy vopros* “national question” was raised (27) and repeats the phrase from line 2: *gruziya dlya gruzin* “Georgia for Georgians” (27-30). Notably, it is NL’s request for clarification that prompts AM to establish a difference between “now” and the early 1990s.

That she initially uses “now” to refer to the latter indicates that she perceives the end of the Soviet Union to be the relevant temporal boundary.

Following excerpt 20, AM goes on to explain that personally she never encountered any substantial problems due to her high level of spoken and written Georgian, and that there are so many *umstvenno otstalye* “mentally retarded” people (AM, 0:08:52) that one should not pay too much attention to them. It remains unclear whether she reserves this less-than-favorable reference solely for those who “misbehave” like her attacker in the excerpt, or whether she applies it more broadly to all those expressing “nationalist” sentiments. What becomes very clear, however, is that she positions herself as intellectually more resourceful – through mastering six languages –, as able to defend herself when challenged, and as holding a morally superior position that permits her to reprimand those whose social conduct she considers deficient.

It also becomes clear that she views the carefree SOVIET FAMILY as a thing of the past, destroyed by the rise of the “national question” and the proposed “solutions” advocated during Gamsakhurdia’s presidency. This is an evaluation she shares with many consultants, as discussed above, and with a substantial part of the scholarly literature (cf. Chapter 2). Two of my consultants, LT and AK, the Pontic Greek friends living in Tetrits’q’aro, also find Gamsakhurdia’s outright nationalist rhetoric troubling and wonder whether he may have said things “in public” he did not believe “in private” (AK, 0:08:50).¹⁹ They explain this speculation by reference to Gamsakhurdia’s high level of education, which in their perception makes his nationalism somehow unlikely. This position only makes sense if “nationalism” is associated with a low level of education, which – as in AM’s view – might coincide with a low intellect. While this tells us nothing about Gamsakhurdia’s personal beliefs, it tells us a lot about how NATIONALISM is constructed by my consultants and in contemporary Georgian discourse more broadly: as a fairly rare position not befitting an intelligent and/or educated person.²⁰

19 Note that this is very much in line with AK’s statements about the “public” and “private” persona that she portrays individuals having in excerpt 17 above.

20 Other Georgian friends of mine also perceived a bewildering discrepancy between Gamsakhurdia’s foreign high education and literary acclaim and his nationalist rhetoric. In our conversations, they usually suggested that his statements had either been misquoted or taken out of context.

II. “Staying behind”: Coming to terms with emigrating family members

Another statement attributed to Gamsakhurdia is that it would not be necessary to forcefully drive Georgia’s Greek population out of the country: *greki umnye oni sami uedut* “Greeks are clever, they will leave by themselves” (SC, LP). Whatever the origin of that quotation,²¹ and whether or not Gamsakhurdia actually said such a thing, large-scale emigration and the concomitant breakdown of families did occur during his presidency.

21 of my consultants (43%) have personal experience of migration, some of which will be discussed in Chapter 7. Importantly, each and every consultant talks about at least some of their close family members emigrating. Along with their self-identification as GREEK this experience of “staying behind” unites my consultants. Loladze (2016, 2019) carefully explores how most consultants speak about the decision to emigrate as one based on economic considerations. As discussed above, consultants also mention the civil war and rising nationalism. The reason most often given is that people are said to have left *v poiskakh luchshey zhizni* “in search of a better life”, as IA (0:25:35) aptly put it.

In interviews with the Georgian-German team of outsiders, consultants frequently address this issue as briefly as possible, even more so than when relating the end of the Soviet Union and the early 1990s. A characteristically explicit answer is given by LP to NL’s question about how his life changed *kogda greki nachali uezhat’* “when the Greeks started to leave”:

(21) Better don’t ask (LP, 0:23:28-0:23:38)

- 1 LP: *luchshe ne sprosit’ brat luchshe ne sprosit’ eto ochen trudnaya*
better not_to_ask brother better not_to_ask this very difficult
- 2 *veshch’*
thing
“better not to ask, brother, better not to ask, this is a very difficult thing”

In excerpt 21 LP initially declares that the topic of Greek emigration is so difficult that he wishes not to discuss it in our interview.²² While he does use this as the opener for quite a lengthy explication of this emigration’s negative effects, the latter are not described in terms of the emotional trauma of separation from loved ones, but rather in terms of the palpable “danger”

21 In our conversations, Nika Loladze evaluated it as something of an “urban myth”, common only within Georgia’s Greek community.

22 Note that *brat* ‘brother’ is his usual way of addressing Nika Loladze throughout our conversation.

he feels exposed to in the region of Ts’alk’a now. He derives this “danger” from the numerically small group of Greeks left in the region, who would not be able to “put up a fight” in the case of violent inter-ethnic conflict. Even though the internal migration of Georgians from Svaneti and Ach’ara into Kvemo Kartli is a process mostly subsequent to Greek emigration, many consultants talk about the two as closely connected.²³ This is frequently related to the numerical distribution of members across the communities, as in the case of DP who sums up a small story with: *nashikh netu nashikh malo ikh mnogo chto delaesh* ‘there are none of our [people left], our [people] are few, theirs are many, what can you do’ (DP, 0:15:24). She and a few other consultants (LP, EM) portray this numerical distribution as threatening in the sense of rendering them physically “defenseless”. Interestingly, while this is an evaluation mostly (self-)attributed to older self-identifying Greeks (like EM), both LP and DP are in their late twenties at the time of the interview.

Apart from such “strategic” considerations, consultants talk about the loneliness they felt and continue to feel due to their family members’ and friends’ emigration, again, mostly in a brief manner. DG sums it up with a short “before and after”, telling us in which villages her relatives used to live before emigrating, an account she closes with: *byli vse ryadom i seychas ya odna* “they were all close, and now I’m alone” (DG, 0:13:05). Just prior to this, DG also provides us with a rare emotional account, when I ask her how she feels about the emigration:

(22) It’s very difficult (DG, 0:11:28-0:11:39)

- 1 DG: *trudno ochen’ trudno kogda govoryu s nim po telefonu mne*
difficult very difficult when talk_I with them by telephone me
- 2 *plakat’ khochetsya skuchayu ochen’ trudno*
to_cry desire_is_felt miss_I very difficult
“it’s difficult, very difficult, when I talk to them on the phone I feel like
crying, I miss (them), it’s very difficult”

She first characterizes her relatives’ being gone as “very difficult” and then explains that she feels like crying when she talks to them on the phone. Importantly, this emotional state is not something that she felt “before” and that has softened with time, as one might imagine. On the contrary, *kogda* ‘when’

23 Recall that LP is the consultant who speaks highly of inter-ethno-national harmony during the Soviet Union in excerpt 18. I will discuss the situation in Ts’alk’a in more detail in Chapter 7.

in the phrase *kogda govoryu s nim po telefonu* “when I talk to [them]²⁴ on the phone” (1) is a generalization, implying “every time when” (cf. Pomerantz, 1986; Roth, 2005). Overall, DG characterizes herself as being “lonely” and “left behind” against her wishes. This has not made her desire to emigrate herself, however. She makes this very explicit and tells me that she would not leave Georgia unless forced to do so, as this is the place she considers “home”, where she belongs and where she took her “first steps” (DG, 0:12:21-0:12:36). While few consultants are as candid as DG in talking about their personal losses to someone they met only shortly before the interview, many express their belonging to Georgia in a similarly explicit way. Thus, the metaphor of BEING ROOTED is not only mentioned explicitly or alluded to with some frequency – it also helps to understand the process of emigration as one of painful “uprooting” and one that many consultants say they do not wish to experience themselves (again).

I want to briefly discuss another way of dealing with the emigration. MP explains the last wave of Greek migrations in terms of an essential characteristic he ascribes to his in-group: *my lyudi kak kochevniki kochuem* “we are people roaming like nomads” (MP, 0:07:57). This essential “nomadism” is the only way for him to explain what he perceives to be a certain “pointlessness” in how often members of his in-group move from place to place. This “pointlessness” emerges from the other attributes he ascribes to his community a little later:

(23) History repeats itself (MP, 0:08:15-0:08:26)

- 1 MP: *vezde lyudi rabochie rabotayut rabochie lyudi [vezde]*
everywhere people workers work_they workers people everywhere
- 2 CH: [hm]
- 3 MP: *trud stavyat svoj dom stroyat ostavlyayut i ukhodyat [v*
labor put_they own house build_they leave_they and go_they in
- 4 *drugooe] mesto*
other place
- 5 CH: [hm]
- 6 NL: [mhm]
- 7 MP: *[tam] opyat' samoe [opyat' ta ta vsya istoriya povtoryaetsya]*
there again same again that that whole story repeats_self
- 8 NL: *[mhm opyat' s nachala]*
again from beginning

24 *s nim* is masculine singular and translates to “with him”. Given the context of speaking about a number of her close family members having emigrated, the last one mentioned being her daughter, it is likely that plural *s nimi* “with them” was intended.

- 1 MP: everywhere people are workers, they work, [everywhere] working
2 people
2 CH: [hm]
3 MP: put in work, they build their house, they leave and go [to another] place
5 CH: [hm]
6 NL: [mhm]
7 MP: [there] it's the same again [again, this this whole story repeats itself]
8 NL: [mhm again from the beginning]

Excerpt 23 starts with MP characterizing his in-group as being hardworking *vezde* “everywhere”, i.e. no matter in which situation or on which national territory they find themselves (1). *Lyudi* “people” refers to “Greek people” in this segment based on the conversation immediately preceding and following this excerpt. In line 3, he describes exactly what he means by being “working people”: they put in the work, build a house – and thereby “a life”, as this is how MP and many other consultants characterize a “successful life” – and then leave again for another place. According to him, in the new place *opyat' samoe* “it's the same again”, i.e. people settle in and “build a life”, before *ta vsya istoriya povtoryaetsya* “this whole story repeats itself” (7), with which NL aligns himself (8).

MP thus describes his in-group as never taking full advantage of the life they had “built” for themselves in any place, as they leave and start from scratch somewhere else. Hence, what he perceives as the driving force behind his community's “roaming” is not merely the necessities imposed by a collapsing political and economic system, but an essential trait of being GREEK. Since this makes it somehow inevitable that GREEKS should migrate – with some “left behind” – this is arguably a way of explaining what he describes as a rather “pointless” “roaming” from place to place. A little later he talks about his life without his family being “lonely” (MP, 0:09:28). Seen in this context, excerpt 23 may therefore be read as a way for him to reevaluate the emigration in essential rather than personal terms, NORMALIZING it and making it perhaps easier to cope with.²⁵

The loneliness which MP and DG talk about directly, and many other consultants only hint at, is also expressed in the way LP and DP talk about the demographic change in the region of Ts'alk'a and the vulnerability they believe resulted for them and their community. Taken together with the

25 As Ryan Wyeth aptly pointed out to me, in the Georgian post-Soviet context ethnic or national groups are also stereotyped as having inherent personal traits, and Greeks are associated with moving around a lot. MP's NORMALIZATION can therefore also be seen as drawing on a wider discourse of ethno-national characteristics.

transformations discussed in the previous sections, the dissolution of the SOVIET FAMILY through political changes and rising nationalism (not only) in Georgia, as well as the subsequent massive emigration of (not only) Greeks, led to the breakup of very real and tangible families for all of my consultants. This means that the FAMILY BREAKDOWN, which all my consultants talk about in terms of loneliness and vulnerability, is something they experienced on multiple scales.

C. Discussion

This Chapter has been devoted to exploring how the end of the Soviet Union is established as an important turning point for its former subjects. From a temporal perspective focusing on traces and tidemarks as per Green (2009), we have already seen how the traces of the Soviet way of structuring everyday life are found, for instance, in consultants' high competence in Russian and overall lower competence in Georgian (cf. Chapter 5). In this Chapter we have found them in laments for a “caring state” which in many ways acts like the “head of a family”, as told in narrations of SOVIET FAMILY and its BREAKDOWN. These metaphors and the one of BEING ABANDONED and left to one's own (economic) devices in a harsher “new world”, can be used to explore processes at the supra-national level, for instance rising nationalism, or at the personal level of very real families (nuclear and extended) dissolving through emigration. From this perspective, the key argument is that the boundary, the turning point itself, is not the center of focus. Instead, it is the temporal reference point for talking about the changing of orders and their historical relationship, as revealed by an analysis of traces of the former in the latter (cf. Hirschauer, 2014).

It makes little sense to focus on the end of the Soviet Union as a “moment” of transition – leaving aside the fact that there was no single moment in which everything changed. The point is that we can look at this meaning-making only from one side of the temporal boundary. The point of transition, then, is significant inasmuch as it enables interlocutors to establish meaningful points of comparison, relating TODAY to a very different YESTERDAY (cf. Tilly, 2004), and only thereby constructing both TODAY and YESTERDAY. This insight comes out very clearly in the excerpts discussed above: how good or bad things are TODAY is in the corpus very frequently established in comparison to YESTERDAY seen as “cozier/good overall” (the Soviet Union) or “utterly terrifying” (the 1990s). From this perspective, even though no

precise moment is made relevant in the interviews, the liminal phase of the transition process comes into focus as a *threshold* relating things that are constructed as starkly different.

Establishing a CONTRAST between YESTERDAY and TODAY is the interactive device most often used by consultants when relating these transformations. Another frequent device is to speak about the Soviet Union in terms of a FAMILY, as examined in this Chapter. The other three interactive devices are all used to interactively come to terms with unpleasant experiences or situations, and will accompany us into the next Chapter. They differ in terms of how they position the speaker. The first is to NORMALIZE difficult or painful experiences, like AK does in excerpt 17, in which her experiences are made “less interesting” by being “completely ordinary”, and thereby cease to be a topic “worthy” of our conversation. A slightly different example is MP in excerpt 23, who ESSENTIALIZES the behavior of “roaming” that he attributes to his in-group in order to explain it to us and to himself. While this still leaves him “alone” as a result of the emigration, this explanation makes his situation appear as the result of an inevitable “law of nature” rather than (painful) decisions made by close family members.

The second device is to self-ascribe a certain RESILIENCE in terms of being able to cope with even the most fundamental transformations. This also emerges from how AK talks about the end of the Soviet Union in excerpt 17. While this does not position her as particularly “active”, it does put her in a position of strength and of not being overwhelmed by the changes she describes as “difficult”. The third interactive device is to diagnose a fundamental LACK OF BASIC CIVILITY in the “times we live in”, and hence a degradation of social norms. In both instances in which this has emerged so far (LP just before excerpt 18 and AM in excerpt 20), the speaker assumes a position of moral superiority. AM shows herself to have used this to scold her attacker on proper manners, thus redefining the situation, actively “fighting back” and emerging “victoriously” – at least in how she tells this story. A related example is how she classifies “nationalism” as a “mental disorder” later in the conversation, again underlining her agency and – in this case mental – superiority.

These devices will become clearer and more differentiated in the analysis of the next Chapter, which sees consultants draw, negotiate and contest the boundaries of their social world.

Chapter 7: (Un)Making boundaries

In exploring this corpus, I started from the most intriguing question about the roles played by the five relevant languages in establishing identification and belonging in Georgia's Greek community. This exploration posed a number of analytical tasks for the remainder of the analysis. The end of the Soviet Union as a (if not *the*) major turning point in the lives of my consultants came up in the analysis of the complex relationship between Russian and Georgian and was discussed in the previous Chapter. The breakup of the SOVIET FAMILY and the resulting dissolution of my consultants' families through emigration, for its part, demands an exploration of the situation in Greece in terms of changing frames of identification and belonging. This also emerges from how consultants speak about Standard Modern Greek, and will be explored in detail in Section A. of this Chapter.

The situation in Ts'alk'a and the boundaries drawn and contested there have come up in how consultants speak about the heritage variety Urum, and in how consultants in Ts'alk'a speak about "being left behind" when a substantial part of their community and family emigrated. Rather than only discussing this in the context of the post-Soviet transformations, in Section B. I will focus on the processes of boundary-making and contestation these transformations entail. That consultants frequently position themselves as GOOD GEORGIAN CITIZENS raises the question where and how, if at all, boundaries are drawn between GREEKS and GEORGIANS. The analysis in Section C. will outline how my consultants' BELONGING TO GEORGIA creates a complex borderscape (cf. Brambilla 2015), in which boundaries may be blurred to the point of dissolution, while in other contexts they are perceived as remaining "uncrossable". Taken together with the analysis in Section D. of RELIGION and ANCESTRY as omnirelevant devices that consultants use to structure their social world (cf. Fitzgerald et al. 2009; Fitzgerald / Rintel 2013), the analysis in this Chapter will bring us one step closer to a context-sensitive theory of the (un)making of boundaries.

Note that while an exploration of differentiation *within* the community would be of interest,¹ I will limit this analysis to what I have already explored

1 Consultants' gender, for instance, appeared to play a role a number of times in whether they would address Nika Loladze or myself more often (cf. Chapter 4). Male consultants were a little more likely to have had personal experience of migration at the time of the

in terms of evaluating the respective “other” heritage variety (cf. Chapter 5). As I have done in the previous Chapters, I will as a matter of course continue pointing out internal differentiation in terms of settlement spaces, heritage variety, education, experience of migration etc. as and when they are important for the analysis.

Note also that while I focus in this chapter on the “big” collective categories like identification as GREEK or BELONGING TO GEORGIA and on the relevance given to ANCESTRY and RELIGION by my consultants, these are certainly not the only social categories made relevant by consultants in drawing and contesting boundaries. These categories were focused in the interviews because we were interested in “the life of Greeks in Georgia” and due to some pointed questions on my part. Consultants frequently and sometimes at length made other social categories relevant, positioning themselves in terms of their family or professional roles, for instance.

A. *Greece: Dealing with boundaries drawn by Others*

In the previous Chapter we saw that the end of the Soviet Union led to the massive emigration of (not only) Greeks from Georgia, reducing their numbers from roughly 100,000 in 1989 to 5,500 in 2014 (Geostat, 2013, 2016), and quite drastically changing the demographics of particularly the rural locales from which they departed. In this Section, I will discuss the challenges to identification faced by the emigrants in Greece and Cyprus – as narrated by them and by consultants without personal experience of migration.² While migration poses challenges to any *émigrée*, emigration to Greece and Cyprus

interview (10 of 22 male consultants, 45.5%) than female consultants (11 of 27 female consultants, 40.7%). However, regarding their answers and positionings, gender does not appear to play a decisive role. In terms of dealing with emigrating family members, for instance, gender does not predict whether someone will tell us about this having caused her or him pain (though no male consultant told us about crying in this context, they do talk about it being painful). In terms of explaining the decision not to emigrate themselves, consultants of all genders tell us about their close emotional ties to Georgia and/or about deciding to stay or return because of their children or ailing parents (i.e. it is not the case that care work keeps only female consultants from emigrating). There is, however, one reason given only by female consultants: seven tell us that they either came back or stayed due to their husband not wanting to leave.

- 2 As outlined in Chapter 2, these difficulties are in no way restricted to the post-Soviet Greek “co-ethnic” migration, cf. also Hess (2010); Panagiotidis (2019), and contributions in Čapo Žmegač et al. (2010).

confronted members of Georgia's Greek population with challenges to their core identification: the discourses linking national affiliation with ANCESTRY and RELIGION – historically so potent in terms of the life and fate of their imagined community – were suddenly challenged by the expectation that a “real Greek” should speak SMG. I am particularly interested in the boundary drawn by the Greek societal majority, which consultants have to cope with communicatively in our interview conversations.

Even though not all of my consultants have personal experience of migration (21 consultants, 43%), the situation in Greece is frequently discussed, with and without my prompting. If the Soviet Union in many ways functions as the historical point of comparison, Greece is the contemporary point of comparison, even for those consultants who have not left Georgia or who have returned. In exploring this issue, I will not dwell so much on the difficult experiences my consultants have had – at times of blatant discrimination – but rather on how they communicatively come to terms with these experiences in relating them to me. Here, the RESILIENCE introduced in the last Chapter plays an important role, as does the struggle over a REDEFINITION of categories, ascriptions and evaluations.

First, however, I will explore how post-Soviet Greek immigrants, including those from Georgia, are labeled in Greece. This is an *external identification* (cf. Jenkins, 1994; Tabouret-Keller, 1997) and one with which most consultants do not align themselves. On the contrary, they speak of being labeled forcefully and counter to their self-identification. The most common label are versions of *rosopóntioi* ‘Russian-Pontic’ (SMG), given either in Russian or SMG, categorizing the individual so-labeled as an “Asia Minor Greek from Russia” or a “Russian Asia Minor Greek”. This label is a complex one. At first glance, it comprises two geographical categories “Pontos” and “Russia”, tracing a geographical trajectory from the South-Eastern coast of the Black Sea to “Russia” – the latter either referring to the contemporary Russian nation state or *pars pro toto* for the Soviet Union. As exemplified in excerpt 24 below (Section I.), this is in fact mostly taken to refer to the former, and thereby perceived as an incorrect attribution. Secondly, *pontiakí* ‘Pontic’ (SMG) in Greece also refers to those displaced Asia Minor Greeks who came to Greece as part of the population exchange following the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (cf. Chapter 2). Greeks from post-Soviet states are thus labeled as what might loosely be translated as “Russian Asia Minor Greek refugees”. While some of my consultants refer to their community as *pontiytsy* ‘Pontics’ in Russian and express pride in this label as it traces their

Table 7.1: Being accepted as “genuine Greeks” in Greece

	yes		no		nuanced		unsure		no answer		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Urum urban	0	0	5	45.5	3	27.3	1	9.1	2	18.2	11	100
Urum rural	2	16.6	4	33.3	4	33.3	0	0	2	16.6	12	100
Pontic urban	0	0	6	60	2	20	1	10	1	0	10	100
Pontic rural	3	18.5	10	62.5	1	6.25	1	6.25	1	6.25	16	100
Total	5	10.2	25	51	10	20.4	3	6.1	6	12.2	49	100

provenance,³ the same consultants consider “being Pontic” a part of “being Greek”. In how they talk about being categorized as “(Russian-)Pontic” in Greece they make it clear, however, that this label is used towards people perceived to be “not truly Greek”, thereby negating the self-identification of the persons thus categorized and denying them “Greek” category membership. This is borne out by the informal conversations we had in Thessaloniki and Athens in 2014 with “Greek Greek” consultants and acquaintances: all of them considered “(Russian-)Pontic” to be a pejorative term. The literature on the subject provides further evidence (cf. Kaurinkoski, 2010; Sideri, 2006; Hionidou, 2012).

The fact that Georgian and other post-Soviet Greeks are labeled in such a way, already indicates the type of difficulties these individuals faced in being accepted as GREEKS in Greece. Table 7.1 gives my consultants’ answers to the question: *schitayut li v gretsii gruzinskikh grekov nastoyashchimi grekami* “Do they consider Georgian Greeks to be genuine Greeks in Greece?” This is, of course, a very direct and closed question, intended to get an explicit statement and to be the starting point for further explanation. I asked this question after carefully exploring the topic of Greek emigration with a number of open questions – unless, of course, consultants had already brought up the topic themselves. A clear “yes” answer was given very rarely, by 3 Pontic and 2 Urum Greeks (10.2% of the whole sample), notably only in rural areas. “No” is the answer most often given, by 25 consultants (51%) in total. Interestingly, Pontic Greeks answer “no” more often than Urum Greeks: a

3 NP for instance tells me *my nastoyashchye pontyiitsy* “we are genuine Pontics” (NP, 15:32).

total of 16 Pontic Greeks (61.5% of all Pontic Greeks) were very clear in their answer, compared to a total of 9 (39%) Urum Greek consultants.⁴

Both in rural Kvemo Kartli and in urban Tbilisi, Urum Greeks were a little more likely to give a nuanced answer to this question than Pontic Greeks. These nuanced answers can be further split into two subsets: rural Urum Greeks in particular (3) talk about a change over time, i.e. things having “gotten better” since they or their family members first arrived in Greece. This is usually explained by the rising levels of competence in SMG among both first- and second-generation Georgian Greek immigrants to Greece, or those who were children when their parents emigrated with them. Crucially, the importance of competence in SMG does not only affect Urum Greeks in Greece. IA’s Pontic Greek niece, for instance, tells us about not wanting her mother to speak Russian with her in her Greek school for fear of being bullied by her classmates (IA, 0:32:35-0:33:00). We are told that her younger sister need not live with this fear of persecution due to the combined factors of her competence in SMG and shifting attitudes among the Greek societal majority. The other variety of “nuanced” answers stated that it depended on the education of the “Greek Greek” interlocutor – and in some cases also on the education and demeanor of the “Georgian Greek” (cf. Section II. below). The three consultants stating they were “unsure” did not have any personal experience of migration to Greece and explained their answer with a lack of information.

For the other answers, when we take the migration experiences of consultants into account, the picture becomes a little more complex. Of the five consultants answering “yes”, four have lived and worked in Greece. The same holds for seven of the ten consultants who draw a differentiated picture. The “no” response, however, is not predicted by a consultant’s personal experience of migration. Only 10 of the 25 consultants answering that Georgian Greeks were not accepted as “Greeks” in Greece have personal experience of migration. This underlines the importance of the communicative networks existing between those members of Georgia’s Greek community who emigrated and those who remained in or have since returned to Georgia. Returnees’ accounts of their experiences are a key source of information on life in Greece for those

4 Note that this does not match the “commonsensical” expectation that Pontic Greeks might have faced fewer negative experiences in Greece due to their competence in Pontic Greek easing linguistic assimilation. It is possible, however, that Georgian Pontic Greeks did face fewer difficulties in Greece than Urum Greeks, but that my Pontic Greek consultants answered on the basis of their perception of the community’s (non)acceptance as a whole, rather than their own and family members’ experiences.

who have not experienced it themselves, as explored in detail in Loladze (2019).

As mentioned above, the “Greek Greek” discourse on the importance of LANGUAGE for national affiliation emerges quite strongly in some of the interviews, for instance in the conversation with LP (cf. Section III.). He tells us that the attribute *turkofonos* “turkophone” was used pejoratively against him in a court case by the judge himself (excerpt 28). The experiences my consultants share in the interviews are corroborated by accounts in the academic literature on post-Soviet Greek immigrants to Greece and Cyprus (cf. Hionidou, 2012; Kaurinkoski, 2010; Sideri, 2006; Zoumpalidis, 2016), as well as in a recent poll stressing the importance of speaking the national language in order to be accepted as “truly Greek” (Stokes, 2017).

Consultants also talk about having to deal with a different challenge, namely whether or not their ANCESTRY suffices for them to be recognized as GREEK. As we have seen in the previous Chapters, this point emerges from many interviews. The question underlying this struggle is whether CITIZENSHIP and LANGUAGE, or ANCESTRY and RELIGION are more important for being GREEK. This is a fruitful topic for the analysis of boundary (un)making, as it shows how the definition of the central category-bound attribute is negotiated and contested, and how individuals or larger collectives are included or excluded from membership in the social category GREEK. Consultants vary greatly in how they cope with this boundary question, both in terms of how they dealt with it in interactions in Greece and in talking about it in our interviews, where they attribute varying degrees of strength and durability to this central boundary.

In the following, I will look at three ways in which consultants deal with this challenge in our conversations. The first involves subtly ridiculing the challenge and thereby “playing it down” (Section I.). The second aligns itself with what consultants perceive to be the “Greek Greek” position (Section II.), and the third redefines what it means to be GREEK (Section III.), at times quite brutally, mirroring the aggression directed at the narrator.

I. Being categorized as “Different” in Greece

I will now start the exploration of how consultants deal with being “wrongly” categorized as “different” in Greece, by taking a closer look at how OP, the Pontic Greek man from Batumi (cf. excerpt 16), ridicules this categorization. OP starts talking about not being accepted in Greece without me having asked

about it. When I ask him why Greeks emigrated, he explains extensively that it was for economic reasons and that his family situation meant he could not leave Georgia for good. He also states that his two adult children will have to decide for themselves and concludes that even though life “there” in Greece might be “not bad”, life in Georgia would offer them “more comfort”. He goes on to contrast this feeling of belonging with being othered in Greece:

(24) They consider us to be strangers (OP, 0:30:56-0:31:36)

- 1 OP: °h tam im vsë-taki °h vy znaete kak by nas my ne
there them nevertheless you_PL know_2PL as if us we not
- 2 govorili chto my greki e:: to së (xxx) no my (-) nas oni
said_PL that we Greeks that this (xxx) but we us they
- 3 vsë ravno schitayut gru_e chuzhimi (-)
everything equal count_they Geor_ strangers
- 4 NL: [pravda]
truth
- 5 CH: [hm]
- 6 OP: chuzhimi
strangers
- 7 NL: mhm
- 8 OP: °h nu (-) a i za a za glaza govoryat russkie (-)
well and and behind and behind eyes say_they Russians
- 9 [((laughs))]
- 10 CH: [((laughs))]
- 11 NL: [((chuckles))]
- 12 OP: a ya govoryu (—) nu nado zhe bylo (-) da (-) vsyu e:
and I say_I well necessary again was yes whole
- 13 zhizn' prozhil e:: v etom v: gru_ e: (-) e nu (-) v sovetskom
life lived_M in this in Geor_ well in Soviet
- 14 [soyuze]
Union
- 15 NL: [da]
yes
- 16 OP: da °h i:: e u menya v pasporte bylo napisano grek (-) ya
yes and at me in passport was written Greek_M I
- 17 znal chto ya grek [°h]
knew_M that I Greek_M
- 18 CH: [hm]
- 19 OP: a ya priekhal e shchas v gretsiiyu °h okazyvaetsya ya
and I came_M now to Greece appears I
- 20 uznael chto ya russkiy [((laughs))]
found_out_M that I Russian_M

appears to surprise NL, who asks for confirmation (4), and is repeated by OP (6), affirming his statement. The experience of being considered a “stranger” in Greece, a country associated with “Greekness”, would alone be enough to pose a challenge to self-identification as “Greek”. OP goes on to describe an even stronger challenge: *a za glaza govoryat russkie* “and behind our backs they say Russians” (8). The perception of this as surprisingly incorrect and (intentionally) insulting is acknowledged by all three of us laughing (9-11).

OP positions himself as dealing with the insult through humor and, importantly, by not being moved by it – differing markedly from how LP narrates his reaction in Section III.. This is interactively achieved by a meta-communicative ironic exclamation *nu nado zhe bylo* “well, you don’t say!” (12). He goes on to reference the Soviet documentation of its subjects’ national affiliation in their internal passports (12-16).⁶ He explains that he had lived his *vsyu zhizn’* “whole life” (12-13) in a space he starts to refer to as “Georgia” but then corrects himself to call “Soviet Union” (13-14). During this “long time”, he carried a document, namely his passport, stating his national affiliation as *grek* “Greek” (16). He draws his knowledge about his national affiliation from this official document in the sequences captured in this excerpt: *ya znal chto ya grek* “I knew that I was Greek” (16-17). Importantly, in this account OP’s national affiliation is not something he could choose or that might be somehow in doubt, since an official document like a passport is not subject to interpretation, but rather serves as “proof” of its holder’s belonging. This unquestionable and secure knowledge is contrasted, however, with his “arrival” many years later in Greece, where he suddenly found out that his national affiliation had supposedly changed *okazyvaetsya ya uznal chto ya russkiy* “it turns out, I found out that I’m Russian” (19-20). That someone with official documents is made to “suddenly find out” about his “real affiliation” at such a late state in life, is established sarcastically as ridiculous. This is again acknowledged by all three of us laughing (20-22) and repeatedly evaluated as *paradoks* “a paradox” by OP (23, 25).

Bearing in mind that up to this point in the interview I had not yet asked about his evaluation of the acceptance of Georgian Greeks in Greece, this experience of being othered emerges as a very strong reason in answering my earlier question about his motives for returning to Georgia. The RESILIENCE

accounts in the following Sections. Note that this is in line with popular discourse in Georgia, with one common joke alleging that Mikheil Saakashvili’s 2004 police reform was so “successful” because “all the Georgian criminals left” for Western Europe.

6 Cf. Chapter 2; Arel (2006); Brubaker (1996); Slezkine (1994); Suny (1993).

already uncovered in Chapter 6 here takes the form of interactively framing his negative experience in a way that leaves his interlocutors with only one possible evaluation: that the categorization and behavior he attributes to the out-group is “laughable”. The attack thereby loses its force, leaving the narrator in a position of strength, having not allowed his confidence to be swayed.

The social boundary emerging in excerpt 24 is one drawn by the “Greek Greek” out-group. Importantly, only by drawing this boundary do they become an out-group, rather than a potential locus of belonging for OP and his community. This is done by their categorizing OP’s in-group as “strangers” and “Russians”. While the former might be interpreted as a category dissolving over time, the latter category is set up in this excerpt as not only incorrect but also durable: a “Russian” is unlikely to change into a “Greek” in this view. OP’s way of dealing with this boundary is twofold: firstly, by returning to Georgia which he had described as a place where he feels he belongs, and secondly by playing down the boundary in the interview situation through ridicule.

We then go on to discuss his migration trajectory, which saw him work in Greece as a sailor for months or a year at a time before coming back to spend time with his wife and children. A little later I ask whether it is necessary to speak SMG in order to consider oneself Greek. By way of an answer he explains how his definition of what it means to “be Greek” was fundamentally questioned by his experiences in Greece.

(25) What does it mean to be Greek? (OP, 0:42:33-0:43:18)⁷

- 1 OP: *vy znaete chto (-) posle togo kak ya priekhal v gretsiyu*
you_2PL know_2PL that after that how I came_M to Greece
- 2 *ya mnogo ponyal (-) chto (—) a chto takoe grek*
I much understood_M what and what such Greek_M
- 3 NL: *mhm*
- 4 OP: *chto takoe grek °h my ran'she dumali tak znaete °h eto*
what such Greek we earlier thought_PL so know_2PL this
- 5 *krov' tam tuda-syuda da*
blood there there-here yes
- 6 CH: *hm*
- 7 OP: *khotya (-) a potom ya kogda poekhal v gretsiyu (-) da i ne*
although but then I when went_M to Greece yes and not
- 8 *tol'ko gretsiyu tam po vsej evrope [°h]*
only Greece there by whole Europe

7 In this excerpt, utterances in SMG are underlined.

- 9 NL: [mhm]
 10 OP: *tam-zhe kak (-) e: lyudi e:: i drugoy natsional'nosti no*
 there how people and other nationality but
 11 *rozhdënnye uzhe v gre[tsii] oni schitayutsya grekami*
 born_PL already in Greece they considered_they Greeks
 12 NL: [mhm] *da*
 yes
 13 CH: [hm]
 14 OP: *[tam] bylo napisano ellin nu tam my zna_e_ellin da*
 there was written Greek well there we kno_Greek yes
 15 CH: *da*
 yes
 16 OP: *ellada ellada ellin [da]*
 Greece Greece Greek yes
 17 NL: [da]
 yes
 18 CH: hm (-)
 19 OP: *negr (-) grek (-) tam arab grek (-) uzkoglazye nu kitaets*
 Negro Greek there Arab Greek narrow-eyed well Chinese
 20 *grek (-) a kak ya posle etogo ne mogu skazat' chto vot*
 Greek and how I after this not can_I to_say that there
 21 *[takoe]*
 such
 22 CH: [mhm]
 23 OP: *razlichie nu i poetomu (-) no esli ty khochesh' sebya*
 difference well and therefore but if you_2SG want_2SG self
 24 *schitat' grekom schitay tak*
 to_count Greek count_2SG so
- 1 OP: you know after I came to Greece I understood a lot about what a Greek
 2 is
 3 NL: mhm
 4 OP: what is a Greek, we thought earlier, you know, it's this blood that goes
 5 here back and forth, right?
 6 CH: hm
 7 OP: but later, when I went to Greece, right, and not only to Greece but all
 8 over Europe [°h]
 9 NL: [mhm]
 10 OP: how is it there? people who have another nationality but were born in
 11 [Greece], they are considered Greeks
 12 NL: [mhm] yes
 13 CH: [hm]
 14 OP: there was written Greek, well, there we kno_ Greek, right?
 15 CH: yes

- 16 OP: Greece Greece Greek [right?]
 17 NL: [yes]
 18 CH: hm
 19 OP: a Black guy – Greek, there an Arab is Greek, narrow eyed, well,
 20 Chinese is Greek and how could I after that, I can't say that there is
 21 [such]
 22 CH: [mhm]
 23 OP: a difference and that therefore, but if you want to consider yourself
 24 Greek, consider yourself so

OP opens his answer by referring to his understanding having been influenced, perhaps even changed, by the time he spent in Greece (1-2). He describes this understanding as extensive: *ya mnogo ponyal* “I understood a lot” about *chto takoe grek* “what is a Greek”, which he repeats (2-4). Subsequent to this opening, he tells us how his in-group had *ran'she* “earlier” considered this question, namely as one of *krov* “blood” (5) moving *tuda-syuda* “back and forth” (5). This movement of the blood is emphasized by him tracing lines on his left forearm with his right index finger. This underscores the immediate corporeal availability of “blood” as a marker of belonging. Identification as GREEK is thereby established as depending on “Greek blood”, i.e. GREEK ANCESTRY. He contrasts this “simple” and “accessible” understanding with a space where things are very different, namely “Greece” (7) and *tam po vsej evrope* “there all over Europe” (8).

He orients our expectation with the rhetorical question *tam-zhe kak* “how is it there?” (10) and answers with the general statement that it is not *national'nosti* “nationality” that determines whether somebody might be considered as GREEK but their place of birth (10-11). Like in excerpt 24, OP draws on official documentation in order to ascertain the categorization as “Greek” (14). While *tam bylo napisano ellin* “there was written Greek” (14) is ambiguous in terms of specifying where exactly “Greek” was written, the conversation preceding this excerpt points to *tam* ‘there’ referring to official documentation like passports or identity cards. He repeats both “Greek” and “Greece” in SMG, clarifying for the non-SMG speakers NL and myself the connection or possibly the derivation of the term *ellin* ‘Greek’ from *ellada* ‘Greece’ (14-16). OP then proceeds to illustrate the generalization with a list of examples, which are uniformly presented: by stating a category followed by the attributed Greek government’s official classification as *grek* “Greek” (19-20).⁸ As with FD in excerpt 12, the list comprises individual people

8 This is a textbook example of how generalizations are established and “proven” through three-item lists, as discussed for instance in Roth (2005).

who are constructed as instantiations of various “groups” perceived to be “incongruous” with OP’s initial “simple” definition of belonging determined by ancestry. The list comprises a “black guy”, as an instance of perceived phenotypical difference, an “Arab”, as an instance of perceived religious difference, and finally a “Chinese”. The last is initially introduced by a phenotypical feature perceived to be different before the category label is invoked. The “Chinese” person is thereby marked both by their perceived phenotypical difference and by being perceived as hailing from “far away”. All three examples are thus constructed by OP as “unlikely Greeks”, or extreme cases as per Pomerantz (1986). This especially since these three instances are perceived as categories belonging by ancestry to spaces OP had previously dismissed as “civilized” points of comparison in excerpt 16 (cf. Chapter 6). This is notable due to how much emphasis OP puts on “Greek civilization” as the “founding civilization of Europe” in preceding sequences of the interview. Furthermore, the list does not include an example of someone whose national affiliation would have been afforded by the immediate interview context – “Georgian Greek” or “post-Soviet Greek”, “Georgian”, or “German”. Neither does it include an example of a person from the post-Soviet or European space, which OP had previously characterized as “closer” in terms of “culture”.

In the following, OP returns to my question and states that *posle etogo* “after this” (20) he is unable to tell what the *razlichie* “difference” (23) would be. He therefore positions himself as someone unable to pass judgment on somebody’s identification as GREEK, since his heuristic for decision-making – ancestry – is portrayed as having been unhinged by the citizenship policies of contemporary Greece and Europe. He then answers the question by locating the decision in the individual: *no esli ty khochesh’ sebya schitat’ grekom schitay tak* “but if you want to consider yourself Greek, consider yourself so” (23-24). He thereby adopts for himself the seemingly *laissez-faire* attitude he had just attributed to the contemporary Greek state. The boundary which the “Greek Greek” out-group is positioned as having established in excerpt 24 between “Greeks” and “Russians” is thereby described as dissolving to the point of non-existence, resulting in the category “Greek” being seemingly “arbitrary” and in category membership depending on the individual’s autonomous self-identification.

Importantly, while “what we thought earlier” is portrayed as “simple” and perhaps a little “backwards”, it at least provides – according to OP – a clear definition of who belongs and who does not. His difficulty in coming to terms with multi-ethnic citizenship in contemporary Greece might be explained as a tidemark of Soviet governance. As outlined in Chapter 2, this relied on

every one of its subjects being doubly categorized (and in many cases thereby doubly governed): as a member *qua* birth of a certain “nationality” and as a “Soviet citizen”. From such a perspective, it may be possible to acquire Greek citizenship but never Greek nationality. And since (at least in principle) contemporary European nation states conflate their subjects’ “nationality” and “citizenship”, they are thereby seen as committing a category mistake.

This different conceptualization might not have been such a relevant problem for OP had he not been offensively categorized as “Russian” himself and thereby denied identification as part of a collective he believes he “rightfully” belongs to by virtue of his GREEK ANCESTRY. Note that this conceptual difference is not made explicit by OP, who only speaks of “nationality” and “being Greek”. It is, however, made very explicit by IP and his friend TV in a small Pontic village, as we will see in the following Section. It is also at the heart of the excerpts explored in Section III., although not explicitly in these terms.

II. Relating “Nation” and “Citizenship”

Like excerpt 17 (Chapter 6), the following excerpt 26 is a long one, this time because IP devotes a substantial amount of conversational energy to explaining exactly what he sees as the conceptual differences behind the difficulties his in-group experienced in Greece. Overall, he positions Greece as “more advanced” on a continuum of progress than the post-Soviet space, where people “hold on to out-dated notions” – something he deplores. While he and his friend TV continually position themselves as closer to the “Greek Greek” type of “progress”, they nevertheless remain deeply rooted in the Georgian post-Soviet space, as evident in both their exasperation and word choice. This excerpt is therefore not only important because a consultant explains the conceptual traces he perceives the Soviet Union to have left in the minds of his community; it is also a poignant example of a consultant positioning himself as maintaining a different position from that which he attributes to his in-group.

About two minutes before excerpt 26, I ask whether Georgian Greeks are accepted as “genuine Greeks” in Greece. IP denies this, and states that it is a general rule the world over, thereby NORMALIZING this denial of belonging. TV supports him a little later, explaining that people in Western Germany also initially did not accept those from Eastern Germany as “real Germans” after the GDR came to an end. Both agree that this has something to do

with “communism” “changing” its subjects. According to them, there were additional difficulties, however, with *bezhtensy* “refugees” arriving in much greater numbers *kak eti murav’i* “like ants” (IP, 0:46:36) and bringing “chaos” and “criminality” with them. Importantly, the category “refugees” is not restricted to post-Soviet “Greeks” but comprises all post-Soviet immigrants to Greece, which according to them were numerous.

In establishing their language competence, I list the languages I caught from the preceding conversation as “Russian”, “Georgian”, and “Pontic” (IP, 0:48:41). I use the label *pontiyskiy* ‘Pontic’ like IP and TV had both done previously in the conversation, for example in excerpt 4 (cf. Chapter 5), where IP positions “Pontic” as closer to “Ancient Greek” than SMG. Some 40 minutes later, however, I am corrected for using this label and IP asserts that “Pontic” and “Greek” are basically the same language (IP, 0:48:50). He goes on to suggest that the “slight differences” in the language varieties may have been the starting point of the difficulties in Greece with them being considered “Greeks but somehow different Greeks”, “Greeks” who were raised to be “Russian citizens” (IP, 0:49:10-0:49:22). Note how defining “Pontic” a little differently in different sequences of the same interview allows IP to emphasize different aspects of his community’s belonging and thereby to position them differently. Whereas in excerpt 4 he focused on his in-group’s historical trajectory and their link to “Ancient Greece” and “Byzantium”, he now problematizes the Soviet traces in his community’s definitions of “nation” and “citizenship”, and discusses how these definitions are at odds with the ones used in contemporary Greece. This time, LANGUAGE is not taken to be crucial and differences between the two varieties are downplayed, so as to exclude the possibility that they might play a role in the differing conceptualizations of “nation” and “citizenship”.⁹

(26) Relating nation and citizenship (IP, 0:49:22-0:51:02)

- 1 IP: *i vo-pervykh chto ya ponyal eto ya davno*
and firstly what I understood_M this I long_ago
- 2 *ponyal*
understood_M
- 3 CH: hm

9 Importantly, these nuances are not captured in the way most studies on *language attitude* have traditionally been carried out, with the exception of those focusing on the discursive function of these attitude expressions, as for instance in Potter / Wetherell (1987) (cf. the discussion in the beginning of Chapter 5).

- 4 IP: °h a vot nashi naprimer do sikh por ne ponyali
and well our for_example till these times not understood_PL
- 5 etogo
this
- 6 CH: hm
- 7 IP: eto mnogie poka
this many so_far
- 8 CH: da
yes
- 9 IP: °h (—) zhivësh' (—) v gosudarstve (—) ty prinyal
live_2SG in state you accepted_M
- 10 grazhdanstvo (—) ty stanovish'sya chlenom etogo gosudarstva (—)
citizenship you become_2SG member of_this state
- 11 CH: hm
- 12 IP: eto (—) [ochen'] ochen' normal'no ochen' pravil'no ochen' tak i
this very very normally very correctly very so and
- 13 dolzhno bylo byt'
should was_N to_be
- 14 TV: [normal'no]
normally
- 15 CH: [da]
yes
- 16 TV: [tak i dolzhno] byt'
so and should to_be
- 17 IP: a my srazu tuda uekhali my govorim my greki
and we at_once to_there went_PL we say_we we Greeks
- 18 CH: hm
- 19 IP: na nas smotreli ochen' (—) udivlënno nu i chto chto ty
at us looked_PL very surprised well and what that you
- 20 grek [ty ne nash]
Greek_M you not our
- 21 CH: [((chuckles))]
- 22 NL: [((chuckles))]
- 23 IP: ty drugogo gosudarstva grek °h russo-poslannyy
you of_other state Greek_M Russian-sent
- 24 russo-poddannyy
Russian-subject
- 25 CH: [hm]
- 26 NL: [da]
yes
- 27 IP: a my obizhalis' (—) kak eto
and we took_offence_PL how this
- 28 CH: hm

- 29 IP: *ya grek priekhal v gretsiyu a mne govorish' ty russo_*
I Greek came_M to Greece and me tell_2SG you
- 30 *russko-poddannyi*
Russian-subject
- 31 CH: hm
- 32 IP: *m:y [zakhoteli chto my srazu]*
we wanted_PL that we at_once
- 33 TV: *[ponyatie natsii i grazhdanstva u nikh uzhe]*
concept nation and citizenship at them already
- 34 IP: *[ty grek] davay ty grek*
you Greek_M go_on_2SG you Greek
- 35 CH: *[<< smiling > da >]*
yes
- 36 CH: *[da]*
yes
- 37 TV: *[v evro]pe drugoy u nas*
in Europe different at us
- 38 IP: *a vot (-) a vot tam p p po-drugomu [tam pravil'no*
and here (-) and here there differently there correctly
- 39 *postavleny veshchi (-) tam negr zhivët]*
arranged things there Negro lives
- 40 TV: *[tonkie momenty kak govorit ((first name)) vostok delo tonkoe*
delicate moments how says ((first name)) East matter delicate
- 41 *nu]*
well
- 42 IP: *dopustim negr zazhil tam da (-) prinyal e:*
assume_we Negro lived_M there yes accepted_M
- 43 CH: hm
- 44 IP: *prozhil pyat' desyat' let i on prinyal poddanstvo on*
lived_M five ten years and he accepted_PL citizenship he
- 45 *uzhe grek*
already Greek_M
- 46 CH: [hm]
- 47 NL: *[da]*
yes
- 48 IP: *°h tam ne smotryat imenno na natsiyu*
there not look_they namely on nation
- 49 CH: hm
- 50 IP: *tam smotryat na grazhdanstvo*
there look_they on citizenship
- 51 TV: *da*
yes

- 52 IP: *o natsii rechi netu °h a u nas poka eto derzhitsya*
about nation speech is_not and at us so_far this holds
- 53 *[shovinisticheskie]*
chauvinistic
- 54 TV: *[da]*
yes
- 55 IP: *[ponyatiya]*
notions
- 56 NL: *[da da]*
yes yes
- 57 TV: *da*
yes
- 58 IP: *natsii*
of_nation
- 59 TV: *da*
yes
- 60 CH: *hm*
- 61 IP: *vot eto ponimaesh' eto eto [dolzhen byt' period °h]*
well this understand_2SG this this should_M to_be period
- 62 TV: *[nu so vremenem eto uydēt eto]*
well with time this will_go this
- 63 CH: *da*
yes
- 64 IP: *[period chtob eto chelovek ponyal]*
period so_that this person understood_M
- 65 TV: *[uzhe pervyy shag uzhe sdelan chtob] v pasporte uzhe ne*
already first step already done_M so_that in passport already not
- 66 *pishut natsional'nost' nichego pervyy shag sdelan da (xxx)*
write_they nationality nothing first step done_M yes
- 67 IP: *shagi z_ [sdelany]*
steps done
- 68 CH: *[da]*
yes
- 69 IP: *nO (-) e: poka [izmenitsya eto ne tak skoro chtob dopustim]*
but still will_change this not so soon so_that assume_we
- 70 TV: *[izmenitsya eto i tak dolzhno byt' eto]*
will_change this and so should to_be this
- 71 CH: *[hm]*
- 72 IP: *[my] ne govorili o natsii govorili tol'ko o grazhdanstve*
we not spoke_PL about nation spoke_PL only about citizenship
- 73 TV: *o grazhdanstve*
about citizenship

- 74 IP: *potomu chto (-) poka etot (-) sovetskaya etot (-) derzhitsya [sidit eto*
because that still this Soviet this holds sits this
75 *°h (-) shovinizm sidit]*
(-) chauvinism sits
76 TV: *[sidit sidit sidit sidit tem bolee chto]*
sits sits sits sits that more that
77 IP: *(—) °h khot' eto ne zametno mozhet [e:] obizhaetsya*
even_though this not noticeable might takes_offence
78 *kto-to drugoy esli skazhu (x) sidit eto pravda*
somebody other if will_say_I sits this truth
79 TV: *[mhm] pravda*
truth
80 IP: *tak i [est']*
so and is
81 NL: *da*
yes
82 TV: *eto pravda*
this truth
- 1 IP: and firstly, what I understood, this I've understood long ago
3 CH: hm
4 IP: but our people for example, until now they haven't understood this
6 CH: hm
7 IP: there's still many there
8 CH: yes
9 IP: you live in a state, you took the citizenship, you become a member of
10 that state
11 CH: hm
12 IP: this is [very] very normal, very correct and very much how it should be
14 TV: [normal]
15 CH: [yes]
16 TV: [like it should] be
17 IP: but we went there and immediately said we're Greeks
18 CH: hm
19 IP: they looked at us very surprised, well so what that you're Greek? [Your
20 not one of ours,]
21 CH: [[[chuckles]]]
22 NL: [[[chuckles]]]
23 IP: you're Greek of a different state, Russian-sent, a Russian citizen
25 CH: [hm]
26 NL: [yes]
27 IP: but we were offended, how is this possible?
28 CH: hm
29 IP: I'm Greek, I came to Greece and you tell me you're a Russian subject

- 31 CH: hm
- 32 IP: we [wanted that we immediately]
- 33 TV: [their concept of nation and citizenship is already]
- 34 IP: [you're Greek,] come on, you're Greek
- 35 CH: [<< *smiling* > yes >]
- 36 CH: [yes]
- 37 TV: [in Euro]pe it's different, we have
- 38 IP: and it's like but there it's different, [everything is in order there, there
- 39 lives a black guy]
- 40 TV: [these are delicate moments like ((first name)) says, the East is a
- 41 delicate matter, well]
- 42 IP: let's say a black guy lived there, right, he took
- 43 CH: hm
- 44 IP: he lived five or ten years and he accepted citizenship, he's already
- 45 Greek
- 46 CH: [hm]
- 47 NL: [yes]
- 48 IP: there they don't look at nationality
- 49 CH: hm
- 50 IP: there they look at citizenship
- 51 TV: yes
- 52 IP: there's no talk of the nation, but we have, so far this holds the
- 53 [chauvinistic]
- 54 TP: [yes]
- 55 IP: [notions]
- 56 NL: [yes, yes]
- 57 TV: yes
- 58 IP: of the nation
- 59 TV: yes
- 60 CH: hm
- 61 IP: you understand, [this should be the time]
- 62 TP: [well, with time this will go]
- 63 CH: yes
- 64 IP: [the time that a person would understand this]
- 65 TP: [the first step has been taken, that] in the passport they already don't
- 66 write anything about nationality, the first step is done, yes
- 67 IP: steps [have been taken]
- 68 CH: [yes]
- 69 IP: but still [it will not change so soon that, let's say]
- 70 TP: [it will change and that's how it should be]
- 71 CH: [hm]
- 72 IP: [we] didn't speak about nation anymore, we only spoke about
- 73 citizenship
- 73 TP: about citizenship

- 74 IP: because so far, this Soviet (thing), this holds, [it sits, this chauvinism
75 sits]
76 TP: [it sits, it sits, it sits, it sits, especially since]
77 IP: even though it's not noticeable, [maybe] somebody else will be
78 offended if I say (that) it sits, it's the truth
79 TV: [mhm] true
80 IP: that's how it is
81 NL: yes
82 TV: it's the truth

Excerpt 26 can be divided into four parts: the first establishing the concept of “citizenship” (1-16), the second giving a generalized example of how the in-group was “too fast” in demanding acceptance as “Greek” (17-34), the third offering a more detailed description of how “citizenship” is handled “there” (33-52), and a fourth contrasting this to “here” where “chauvinism” and a certain “backwardness” characterize how “nation” and “citizenship” are related (52-82). I will examine these in turn.

IP starts by distancing himself from his community by explaining that he “understood” (1-2) something which *nashi naprimer do sikh por ne ponyali etogo* “our (people) for example still have not understood this” (4-5). Note that by referring to those who “do not understand” as *nashi* “our (people)” he positions himself as part of this community, no matter how much he later distances himself from their views. In lines 9-10 he states what he perceives to be the GENERAL RULE of how belonging to a state is determined: by living there and “accepting” that state’s citizenship *ty stanovish’sya chlenom etogo gosudarstva* “you become a member of this state”. The generalization is achieved by the generic present tense as well as the generic second person singular. It is thus the time spent on a state’s territory and officially “accepting” both the rights and obligations it bestows on its citizens that govern belonging to said state. He goes on to very positively evaluate this GENERAL RULE: he evaluates it as “very normal”, “very correct”, and finally “very much how it should be” (12-13). In this, he is supported by TV, who backs up IP’s evaluation by repeating it in line 16.

This is subsequently not only contrasted with the Georgian Greek conceptualization of what being GREEK entails but also shown to clash in a generalized story. IP portrays his in-group as not paying attention to the time one has to spend living in a certain place for belonging: *a my srazu tuda uekhali my govorim my greki* “but we immediately upon going there say we are Greeks” (17). Note that the attribution of this behavior does not cohere with how OP describes their in-group’s demeanor in Greece in excerpt 24

above. This immediate identification is described as “surprising” for the “Greek Greeks”, who are portrayed as unconvinced by this claim to “Greekness” and quoted: *nu i chto chto ty grek* “well, so what that you’re Greek?” (19-20). IP ascribes to them a distinction between “our Greeks” (20), which is a category not immediately available to newcomers, and “Greeks from other states”, which in the case of IP’s in-group is further categorized as “Russian citizen” (24). Note that IP and TV do not perceive the categorization “Russian” to be wrong, let alone offensive. On the contrary, “Russian” is used as a *pars pro toto* category label referring to “Soviet citizens”. The adherence to the GENERAL RULE ascribed to the “Greek Greek” out-group is, however, narrated as being highly offensive to IP’s in-group – who he continues to refer to as *my* ‘we’, thereby not distancing himself from them completely (27). IP cites a generalized quote of his in-group members, which echoes how OP relates his story of being othered in excerpt 24: *ya grek priekhal v gretsiyu a mne govorish’ ty [...] rusko-poddannyi* “I’m Greek, I came to Greece, and you tell me, you’re a Russian citizen?” (29-30). For his in-group, their ANCESTRY-based claim to GREEK category membership should have been sufficient for them to be welcomed as such, instead of having their “Russian” citizenship pointed out (32-34). It is TV who, in supporting IP’s account, indicates that the concepts of “nation” and “citizenship” *u nikh* ‘at them’ “at their place” (33), clarified as referring to “Europe” in line 37, is *uzhe* “already” (33) *drugoy* “different” (37). This clarifies the concepts at stake and establishes the compared spaces as “Europe” and the much more ambiguous *u nas* ‘at us’ “at our place”. In the following, this personalized version of “here” is used to ambiguously refer to both “Georgia” and the “post-Soviet space”.

TV’s contribution enables IP to further expound on these concepts. He begins with the evaluation *tam pravil’no postavleny veshchi* “everything is in order there” (38-39), repeating his evaluation of the GENERAL RULE for CITIZENSHIP (9-10) and preparing us for his explanations. While he, too, begins to illustrate the GENERAL RULE with an example involving a “black guy” (39), TV flags this subject as potentially difficult by pointing out that these are *tonkie momenty* “delicate moments”, since *vostok delo tonkoe* “the East is a delicate matter” (40). By positioning themselves as “from the East” and thereby also situating the space in which the interview is taking place, he draws attention to his perception that this is a space where matters of ancestry are so central that questioning their use to categorize people is a

“delicate matter”.¹⁰ By showing himself to be aware of the precariousness of the moment, TV creates greater proximity among the interlocutors, enabling his friend to discuss these “delicate matters” “openly” and without fear of offending an interlocutor (cf. Höfler 2018b). The “offensive” nature of this topic, as perceived by both TV and IP, is taken up and made explicit later (line 77-78, and subsequent to the excerpt). Unperturbed, IP continues with his example, repeating the initial scenario of a “black guy living there” (42). He starts to say that the protagonist of his story “accepted” – probably citizenship –, but stops himself to first specify the time this person had lived “there” as *pyat’ desyat’ let* “five, ten years” before *on prinyal poddanstvo* “he accepted citizenship” (44). Time spent in Greece is thus stated to be the important variable, and it has to be a considerable amount of time, which contrasts with the “immediate” demand for recognition he attributes to his in-group (17, 32-34). With this official recognition of CITIZENSHIP, the process of national integration is both finalized and complete: *on uzhe grek* “he is already Greek” (44-45), i.e. there is nothing to distinguish the protagonist of this story from any other “Greek citizen” – his ancestry notwithstanding. This is reinforced by how IP sums up his example, contrasting what is “looked at” (“citizenship”, 50) and what is not (“nation”, 48) in two sentences of identical syntactical structure.

Another closing statement *o natsii rechi netu* “there’s no talk of the nation” (52) prepares to contrast this “progressive” space with how it is *u nas* ‘at our place’ “here”. This latter is characterized by IP as “holding on” (52) to *shovinisticheskie ponyatiya natsii* “chauvinistic notions of the nation” (53-58), in which he is supported by TV and NL through repeated utterances of agreement. In the following, there are three sequences where IP expresses his frustration at “things moving too slowly” while TV almost simultaneously tries to console him by pointing out the changes he perceives as having already taken place (61-62, 64-66, 69-70). I will examine these in turn.

The first two are closely related by the point IP makes, voicing his frustration that *eto dolzhen byt’ period* “this should be the time” (61) *period chtob eto chelovek ponyal* “the time that a person would understand this” (64). He thereby characterizes the present day as a time of gradual “progress” in terms of privileging CITIZENSHIP over NATION – the latter defined as hereditary in the (post-)Soviet context. TV’s comforting contribution also spans the two sequences, which are interspersed by an affirmation on my part (63). Just

10 It is precisely this centrality of ancestry that will allow me to argue for its *omnirelevance* in section D..

as IP first refers explicitly to the temporal dimension, TV does the same by generally stating that “this” – the “chauvinistic notions” – would “go away” given time (62). In his second contribution, he gives an example, namely that *v pasporte uzhe ne pishut natsionalnost’ nichego* “in the passport they already don’t write the nationality at all” (65-66). While for OP this practice offered “evidence” of his “true” national affiliation, TV conversely cites its abolition as a positive “first step” (65) towards instating CITIZENSHIP as the relevant category for belonging. He reinforces his confidence by repeating *pervyy shag sdelan* “the first step has been taken” (66). This is also expressed in his repetition of the temporal adverb *uzhe* ‘already’ three times in line 65, ensuring that the “progress” he perceives is not lost on his hearers.

IP concedes that *shagi [...] sdelayi* “steps have been taken” (67), but immediately voices more concern: *nO (-) e: poka* “bUt (-) e: still” (69). At this point TV chimes in again and strengthens his previous contribution by voicing the firm conviction that *izmenitsya eto* “this will change” and evaluating such change as “how it should be” (70). IP’s concern is that it will be *ne tak skoro* “not so soon” (69) that *my ne govori o natsii govori tol’ko o grazhdanstve* “we would not speak about the nation, we would speak only about citizenship” (72-73), thereby repeating the desired state of affairs he has previously attested to “already” holding in Greece (48-50). TV affirms the desideratum by repeating *o grazhdanstve* “about citizenship” (73). IP goes on to trace the “chauvinism” he perceives to be at the root of the “backwardness” he attributes to the place where “we” define belonging back to the Soviet Union (74). This is described as “holding back” and somehow firmly “sitting” (74-75), which is affirmed by TV repeating *sidit* “it sits” four times (76). Where exactly this “Soviet chauvinism”, i.e. the primacy of ancestry-based “nationality”, is perceived to be located remains unclear. Still, its “sitting” and “holding back” portrays it less like a conceptual difficulty and more as incorporated in a similar way to how OP had spoken about “blood” being an immediately available bodily marker of national membership.

Towards the end of this excerpt, IP softens his previous very clear assertion that “Soviet chauvinism” somehow “holds back” the “progress” he sees implemented in “Europe”, by conceding that it might be *ne zametno* “not noticeable” (77). IP now also attends to the precariousness already pointed to by TV in line 40, where he characterized as “delicate” in “the East” (77-78). The risk of causing offence notwithstanding, he confirms the “truth” of his explanations (78) and closes his statement with a clear *tak i est’* “that’s how it is” (80). In this, he is supported by NL (81) and, as always, by TV who confirms the “truthfulness” of IP’s elucidation (79, 82).

Following this excerpt, IP goes on to deplore and give examples for how paying attention to people's "nationality", sometimes also clearly explicated as "ancestry", is still problematic in contemporary Georgia. He assures us that he never experiences any difficulties himself because *sredi gruzinov ya kak gruzin zhivu* "among Georgians I live like a Georgian" (IP, 0:51:14), but that other minorities (he mentions Armenians) have their ANCESTRY held against them far too regularly. His position on this is very clear: *o natsii govorit' voobshche nel'zya* "one absolutely mustn't speak about the nation" (IP, 0:51:44), "nation" again understood in the Soviet sense as based on ancestry. As in the excerpt above, TV does his best to calm him and expresses confidence that the "progress" they both desire will come at the latest with the change of generations.¹¹

To summarize excerpt 26, IP and TV expound on what they understand the concepts of "nation" and "citizenship" to entail "there" in Europe – instantiated by Greece in their examples – and "here", and how these concepts differ in both spaces. Overall, "Europe" is the space characterized as PROGRESSIVE, which is established through the frequent use of the temporal adverb *uzhe* "already", juxtaposed to *poka* "still" or *ne tak skoro* "not so soon". It is perceived as a space that has "moved on" from an ANCESTRY-based model of belonging, to one of CITIZENSHIP. The latter is acquired through spending time in a place – and over time presumably coming to share the values and obligations necessary to be eligible for CITIZENSHIP. This is described as unconnected to whether or not one has ancestral ties to Greece, rendering it more egalitarian and thus perhaps better suited to a multicultural society – even though neither friend brings up globalization explicitly. The space of comparison is characterized as slower in "letting go" of an ANCESTRY-based concept of belonging, much to IP's frustration. Both establish this "holding on" as a trace of the Soviet understanding of the "nation". And while scholars of the post-Soviet space and Western Europe alike would probably take issue with the "progressive" politics attributed to Greece and Europe, they would very much agree with the assessment that many national(ist) struggles in the post-Soviet space were structured by how national categories were maintained in the Soviet Union (cf. Chapter 2).

Notably, the space "here" is established through the use of *u nas* 'at our place' and the things *my* 'we' do, and is only once referred to as "the East" and characterized as "post-Soviet". It thereby remains much more ambiguous

11 This is a point commonly made in Georgia, where I have been told many times that it would take 40 years – one generation – for "real change" to take hold.

than the space *tam* ‘there’, which is established through direct reference as “Greece” or “Europe”. Furthermore, the spatial deictics show an unusual distribution, allowing a closer analysis of IP’s and TV’s positions. Instead of juxtaposing *tam* ‘there’ with the equally abstract spatial deictic *zdes* ‘here’, it is juxtaposed with *u nas* ‘at our place’, which is not just a geographical designation but an explicitly social spatial reference. By evaluating things “in our society” as “moving too slowly”, both IP and TV position themselves as “one step ahead” of their community. They continue, however, to root themselves firmly in their Georgian, post-Soviet community through the spatial and personal deictics they use and also, perhaps, through the frustration they express.

There are, then, two very different boundaries made relevant in excerpt 26. The first is the boundary portrayed as defining what is necessary in Greece in order to gain access to membership in the category GREEK. This is described as a temporal issue, with social membership gained through the time spent living in Greece. The boundary is thus permeable, and importantly one that “everyone” can cross, given the necessary patience. The second boundary is established by IP and TV themselves in differentiating between “progressive Europe” and the “backwards post-Soviet space”. The difference is portrayed to lie in the conceptualization of belonging: *qua* ANCESTRY or *qua* CITIZENSHIP. This boundary is also permeable, in this case by adopting a different understanding of the nature of belonging. Notably, rather than “crossing the line” individually, IP and TV wish to “erase the boundary”, as it were, by changing how their community conceptualizes belonging. Especially in TV’s more optimistic view, this boundary change is also understood as involving the passage of time, in this case with generational change.

III. Contesting the category “Greek”

In Section I., OP expressed his bewilderment at being categorized as “Russian” in Greece and dealt with it in the interview situation by subtly ridiculing the incorrect categorization and those who imposed it. IP and TV in the previous Section positioned themselves as very much agreeing with the “European Greek” view and deploring the “slow progress” made in the post-Soviet space in terms of changing how NATION and CITIZENSHIP are conceptualized. These methods could be interpreted as “playing down an incorrect categorization” (OP) or, on the contrary, “embracing” it (IP and TV). Either way, the categorization itself is not fundamentally contested. Although in OP’s case

one might argue to that effect, it remains a rather subtle and unaggressive challenge, delivered calmly and from a position of perceived strength. I now turn to a very different way of coping with a categorization perceived as incorrect and offensive, namely to contest it outright.

This contestation revolves around the question of defining the central attribute for membership in the category GREEK, as well as around who has the prerogative to establish the definition. To begin approaching this complex let us consider the answer VE, a 77-year-old Urum Greek woman living in Tbilisi, gives concerning the acceptance of Georgian Greeks in Greece:

(27) They're not Greeks at all (VE, 0:16:13-0:16:25)

- 1 VE: *net (-) oni oni nas ne priznayut (-) oni govoryat (-) e::*
no they they us not acknowledge_they they say_they
- 2 *(-) my ne khristianie (-) e ne ne greki (-) a my schitaem oni*
we not Christians not not Greeks and we count_we they
- 3 *voobshche ne greki*
absolutely not Greeks
'no, they, they don't acknowledge us, they say, we're not Christians, not Greeks, and we consider they are not Greeks at all!'

VE first negates my question without any hesitation (1). She then alleges that the out-group assesses her community as *ne khristianie* "not Christians" (1-2), corrects herself and states the out-group position as considering her community to be *ne greki* "not Greeks" (2). This is contrasted with the position she ascribes to her in-group: *a my schitaem oni voobshche ne greki* "and we think they are not Greeks at all!" (2-3). This very clear "reply" and the conviction with which she expresses it is greeted by NL and myself with laughter. VE thus not only discounts the GREEKNESS of the "Greek Greek" out-group, she also questions and takes away their prerogative to define what being GREEK is about. Her "false start" in lines 1-2 is later shown to be not so "false" after all, as we learn that she considers being CHRISTIAN the most important criterion for being GREEK. In the conversation following excerpt 27, VE argues that her in-group more closely observes what she perceives to be the rules of her religious community, like praying and attending church regularly, compared to the "Greek Greek" out-group. NL and I unfortunately only follow up on the "not being considered Greek" part and ask what her community is considered to be instead, which VE answers curtly with *turki* "Turks" (VE, 0:16:54), alluding to their heritage variety Urum.

I will now take a closer look at how LP makes use of the categories ANCESTRY and RELIGION in order to challenge the primacy of LANGUAGE and

to forcefully ascertain his self-identification as GREEK by discounting that of the “Greek Greek” out-group. I want to be transparent at this point about excerpt 28 being my own use of an “extreme case” as per Pomerantz (1986) (cf. Chapter 3). While about half of my consultants state that they were not accepted as GREEKS in Greece, others also describe quite positive experiences or draw a nuanced picture, as another look at Table 7.1 reminds us. Nor is LP in any way representative of all the denials to the question of acceptance, as apparent from the two previous Sections. However, this excerpt shows just how far the importance of ANCESTRY can be taken by a consultant who narrates having been denied recognition of his self-identification. Thus, I am here employing the device my consultants frequently use when constructing a GENERAL RULE, namely to take an “extreme” example to show how GREEK category membership may be related more generally to ANCESTRY, RELIGION and LANGUAGE.

At the very beginning of the interview, LP declares himself to be a *chis-tokrovnyy grek* “pure-blooded Greek” (LP, 0:04:27) already at the very beginning of the interview. When I ask him about Georgian Greeks being accepted in Greece, he denies, which I follow up with *pochemu* “why?” The following is his answer, with omitted turns marked by [...].

(28) We are pure-blooded Greeks (LP, 0:27:34-0:29:58)¹²

- 1 LP: *potomu chto gruzinskie greki govoryat (–) oni chistye greki*
because that Georgian Greeks say_they they pure Greeks
- 2 *[kotorye] kotorye chetyresta let tam: izvinite ne khochu*
who who four_hundred years there excuse_2PL not want_I
- 3 *skazat'*
to_say
- 4 CH: [hm] hm
- 5 LP: *°hh m vnutri salonikakh vse oni stali khristianinami a my*
inside Thessaloniki all they became_PL Christians but we
- 6 *net*
not
- 7 CH: hm (–)
- 8 LP: *oni ne dumayut chto my s russkimi vmeste priekhali syuda*
they not think_they that we with Russians together came_PL here
- 9 NL: hm
- 10 LP: *eti zemli kupili*
these lands bought_PL
- 11 CH: hm

12 Utterances in Standard Modern Greek are underlined in this excerpt.

- 12 LP: *svoyu veru ne poteryali kotorye v_v_ veru poteryali oni sami*
own faith not lost_PL who faith lost_PL they themselves
- 13 *poteryali*
lost_PL
- 14 CH: hm (—)
- 15 LP: *pust' eto ochen' khorosho znayut*
let_2SG this very well know_they
- 16 CH: [hm]
- 17 NL: [hm]
- 18 LP: *°hhhh my chistokrovnye greki*
we pure-blooded Greeks
- 19 CH: hm (-)
- 20 LP: *nu chto yazyk poteryali yazyk poteryali potomu chto*
well what language lost_PL language lost_PL because that
- 21 *khristianstvo ne [poteryali]*
Christianity not lost_PL
- 22 CH: [hm] [hm (-)]
- 23 NL: *da da*
yes yes
- 24 LP: *oni mne ga:_oni govoryat chto vy::: (-) gruzinskie greki*
they me they say_they that you_2PL Georgian Greeks
- 25 *[govoryu] (-) da (-) gruzinskie greki potomu chto my v gruzii*
say_I yes Georgian Greeks because that we in Georgia
- 26 *zhili*
lived_PL
- 27 CH: hm (-)
- 28 LP: *no zhe i my greki (—)*
but same and we Greeks
- 29 NL: [hm]
- 30 LP: *[net] govorit vy ni greki turkofonos po-grecheski [(xx)]*
no says you_2PL not Greeks turkophone in_Greek
- 31 *vy turki*
you_2PL Turks
- 32 CH: *[da] hm (I)*
yes
- 33 LP: *e:: ya tozhe razozlilsya eto proizoshël v sude*
I also became_angry_M this happened_M at court
- 34 LP: [...]
- 35 LP: *tak tak tak turkofonos (-) ty govorit mafioz (-) ya govoryu*
so so so turkophone you_2SG says mafioso I say_I
- 36 *slushay mafioz govoryu za dvadtsat' pyat' evro rabotaet °h*
listen_2SG mafioso say_I for twenty five euro works
- 37 CH: ((chuckles)) (—)

- 38 LP: *nu ochen' tupoy narod (-)*
well very stupid nation
- 39 CH: hm (1)
- 40 LP: *voobshem tupye narody takie tupye narody ya nigde ne videl*
generally stupid nations such stupid nations I nowhere not saw_M
- 41 LP: [...]
- 42 LP: *govoryu khorosho ya mafioz [dal'she chto] (-) vot bumagi chto ya*
say_I well I mafioso further what here papers that I
- 43 *grek ya ne khochu poekhat' obratno v svoyu e: rodinu gde*
Greek I not want_I to_go back to own homeland where
- 44 *ya rodilsya*
I was_born_M
- 45 NL: [((chuckles))] hm
- 46 LP: *ya khochu zdes' zhit'*
I want here to_live
- 47 CH: hm
- 48 LP: *ya zhe grek ne imeyu pravo*
I same Greek not have_I right
- 49 NL: hm (-)
- 50 LP: *albantsy-malbantsy govoryu turki vse zdes'*
Albanians-Malbanians say_I Turks all here
- 51 CH: hm
- 52 LP: *nam nel'zya zdes' zhit'*
us forbidden here to_live
- 53 CH: hm (1)
- 54 LP: *govorit (—) net govorit ty vizovyy rezhim*
says no says you_2SG visa regime
- 55 LP: [...]
- 56 LP: *vsë ravno deportirovali*
all same deported_PL
- 57 CH: hm
- 58 LP: *kogda mne skazali chto ty (-) [turkofonos] vy ne*
when me told_PL that you_2SG turkophone you_2PL not
- 59 *greki °h (-) nu izvinite za vyrazheniya ya tozhe skazal chto*
Greeks well excuse_2PL for expression I also said_M that
- 60 *esli my ne greki chetyresta let s vashei [mamoi] i*
if we not Greeks fourhundred years with your_2PL mother and
- 61 *dochku (-) perespali turki vnutri gretsii govoryu vy*
daughter slept_with_PL Turks inside Greece say_I you_2PL
- 62 *stali greki a my net*
became_2PL Greeks but we not
- 63 NL: [((chuckles))] [((chuckles))]
- 64 CH: ((chuckles))

- 65 LP: *nam nichego ne trogali (-) u nas trebovali °h yazyk ili*
us nothing not touched_PL at us demanded_PL language or
66 *vera (-)*
faith
67 CH: hm
68 LP: *my pereshli v gruziyu yazyk poteryali (-)*
we moved_PL to Georgia language lost_PL
- 1 LP: because (you're) Georgian Greeks, they say, they are pure Greeks [who]
2 who for four-hundred years there, excuse me, I don't want to say it
4 CH: [hm] hm
5 LP: inside Thessaloniki they all became Christians, but we did not
7 CH: hm
8 LP: they don't think that we came here together with the Russians
9 NL: hm
10 LP: bought these lands
11 CH: hm
12 LP: did not lose our faith, who lost the faith, they themselves lost it
14 CH: hm
15 LP: let them know this very well
16 CH: [hm]
17 NL: [hm]
18 LP: we are pure-blooded Greeks
19 CH: hm (-)
20 LP: so what, we lost the language, we lost the language because we did not
21 lose Christianity
22 CH: [hm] [hm]
23 NL: yes yes
24 LP: to me they sa_ they say that you're Georgian Greeks [I say] yes,
25 Georgian Greeks because we lived in Georgia
27 CH: hm
28 LP: but we're still Greeks
29 NL: [hm]
30 LP: [no] he says you're not Greeks turkophone in Greek, you're Turks
32 CH: [yes] hm
33 LP: I also got angry, this happened in court
34 LP: [...]
35 LP: so, so, so turkophone, you, he says, are a mafioso, I say, listen, a
36 mafioso, I say, works for twenty five Euros?
37 CH: ((chuckles))
38 LP: well, this is a very stupid nation
39 CH: hm
40 LP: nations in general are stupid but such a stupid nation I've never seen
41 anywhere

- 41 LP: [...]
 42 LP: I say, alright, I'm a mafioso, [what next?] here are the papers that I'm
 43 Greek, I don't want to go back to my homeland where I was born
 45 NL: [((chuckles))] hm
 46 LP: I want to live here
 47 CH: hm
 48 LP: I'm Greek, don't I have the right?
 49 NL: hm
 50 LP: Albanians-Malbanians, I say, Turks, they're all here
 51 CH: hm
 52 LP: but we are not allowed to live here?
 53 CH: hm
 54 LP: he says, no, he says, you (overstayed) visa conditions
 55 LP: [...]
 56 LP: they deported me anyway
 57 CH: hm
 58 LP: when they told me that you, [turkophone], you're not Greeks, well
 59 excuse the expression, I also said that, if we're not Greeks, for four
 60 hundred years Turks slept with your [mother] and daughter inside of
 61 Greece, I say, you became Greek and we did not?
 63 NL: [((chuckles))] [((chuckles))]
 64 CH: ((chuckles))
 65 LP: nobody touched us, from us they demanded language or faith
 67 CH: hm
 68 LP: we went to Georgia and lost the language

LP answers my question as to why Georgian Greeks were not accepted as “genuine Greeks” in Greece by reporting that they are “said” to be *gruzin-skie greki* “Georgian Greeks” (1). This apparently entails an ascription of “impurity”, since he goes on to ascribe to the “Greek Greek” out-group the contrasting self-assessment of being *chistye greki* “pure Greeks” (1). He makes an attempt at questioning this “purity” by referring with *chetyresta let* “four hundred years” (2) to the Ottoman Empire, a reference we have already witnessed IP achieve a little more explicitly in excerpt 3 (cf. Chapter 5). LP then stops himself with a meta-communicative comment stating *ne khochu skazat* “I don’t want to say” (2-3). Still, he continues with the ascribed “self-”assessment of the out-group, who over this long period of time “became Christians” *vnutri salonikakh* “in Thessaloniki” (5). Thessaloniki remained under Ottoman rule until 1912, i.e. roughly a century longer than LP’s ancestors, who according to his earlier narrative left Anatolia and moved to Ts’alk’a around 1828. He ascribes to the out-group the view that they would have remained “Christians” during that time *a my net* “but not

us” (5-6). At this point, he does not question anyone’s “Christianity”, but he does question the reasoning that challenges his in-group’s “Christianity” and claims that his in-group maintained their faith under difficult conditions. His argumentative line might thus be summarized as “if they managed to stay Christian, why shouldn’t we?”.

He goes on to portray the out-group as “not believing” (8) everything he portrays his in-group, the “Georgian Greeks”, to have achieved: coming to what is contemporary Georgia “with the Russians” (8) – this is also a temporal reference to their time of migration to Georgia –, “buy[ing] these lands” (10), and finally “not los[ing] their faith” (12). Having already narrated his community’s historical trajectory previously, he can be sure we already know this story. Nevertheless, retelling it in this context turns the purpose of his in-group’s movement from “escaping the Turks” to “preserving the faith”. The primacy of the latter is strengthened by his accusation: *oni sami poteryali* “they themselves lost it” (12-13). He portrays the out-group of being aware of this: *pust’ eto ochen’ khorosho znayut* “and they know this very well” (15), before repeating and thus strengthening what he told us previously: *my chistokrovnye greki* “we’re pure-blooded Greeks” (18).¹³ He thereby picks up on the contrast between “Georgian Greeks” and “pure Greeks” in line 1 and – having already asserted his in-group’s “Christianity” – further asserts his in-group’s “purity”.

After establishing his community’s claim to being GREEK by asserting that their RELIGION and ANCESTRY comply with what he perceives to be the central category-bound predicates, he goes on to address the more complicated point for heritage Urum Greek speakers like himself: LANGUAGE. He does this by playing down its importance, starting his concession of having “lost the language” with *nu chto* “so what?” (20). This “shortcoming” is further justified by repeating that his in-group did not loose “Christianity” (20-21), thereby referring to the previously mentioned mythical “choice” between language and religion (LP, 0:06:23-0:06:38) (cf. Chapter 5). Having justified the language he speaks, he then picks up the label “Georgian Greek” again. This is now part of what appears to be a generalized narration, in which he reports a dialogue having taken place, wherein more than one person – *oni* ‘they’ – labeled his in-group *gruzinskie greki* “Georgian Greeks” (24). Rather than questioning his interlocutors’ own “purity” or “religious faithfulness”, he portrays himself as having calmly affirmed the label and explained it

13 Note that in Russian most collocations involving *chistokrovnyy* revolve around thoroughbred horses or pedigree dogs.

with his community's having lived in Georgia (25-26). The label is thereby changed from one denoting "impurity" – as alluded to in line 1 – to one referencing the geographical location where LP's community has preserved said "purity" of ANCESTRY and RELIGION. He reaffirms that this does not in any way question their identification by stating: *no zhe i my greki* "but we are also Greeks" (28).

This identification is, however, challenged by the narrated interlocutor, who now no longer appears in the plural. The interlocutor is cited as clearly stating *vy ne greki* "you're not Greeks" and then referring to their language use as the reason to deny them this belonging: *turkofonos [...] vy turki* "turkophone [...] you're Turks" (30-31). LANGUAGE, namely speaking a Turkish variety, is thereby asserted by LP's interlocutor as the central category-bound activity that defines category membership. This results in the assertion that LP's community's national affiliation is not GREEK but rather TURKISH. Considering that in leading up to this narration LP had already discounted the relevance of LANGUAGE for GREEKNESS, this is not only an "incorrect" categorization, it is further based on "incorrect" reasoning and finally considered to be offensive, due to the perceived "historical antagonism" between MUSLIM TURKEY and CHRISTIAN GREECE.¹⁴ He expresses feeling offended in line 33: *ya tozhe razozlilsya* "I also lost my cool", which is a strong way of describing his "getting angry" as escalating immediately and including some loss of control over one's actions. He further situates the conversation as having taken place "in court" (33). This changes the nature of the story from a generalized one to a singular event that is portrayed as particularly poignant. It also changes the quality of the offense: it can no longer be understood in terms of a "street altercation", for instance, in which an "ordinary" – albeit ill-intentioned and ignorant – person is cast as the perpetrator. Most importantly, such an "ordinary person" would hold no power to define or interpret the category GREEK in a legally meaningful way and does not represent the "official view". All this changes when it is an official of the Greek state – apparently the judge at LP's deportation hearing. This person first of all holds the power to interpret

14 Especially in an interview given in Georgia and to a team including a Georgian researcher, this antagonism does not have to be explicated, as it is presumed to be common knowledge. In the case of LP, he talks about this antagonism about ten minutes later in the interview, when he attributes the negatively evaluated behavior of the ACH'ARIAN out-group to their "Turkish blood" (LP, 0:37:14-0:38:00). Note that had LP's interlocutor stayed with labeling him as GEORGIAN, this would have been perceived as still "incorrect" but much less offensive, since GREEKS and GEORGIANS are considered to share the same RELIGION, as will be discussed later in this Chapter.

GREEK category membership in a legally binding way, in this story set up in terms of deciding whether LP is “Greek enough” to avoid deportation. In order to make his decision, this person should also be knowledgeable about the “official” criteria for inclusion and exclusion from the category GREEK, and uphold the law “objectively”, i.e. not to use what LP perceives as a derogatory term with no legal significance. Finally, being an official of the Greek government, this person has to comply with and carry out the government’s position. Construed in this way, it is not an individual challenging LP’s GREEK category membership and offensively mis-categorizing him as TURKISH, but rather the Greek state. My question about recognition, then, is not answered on the level of everyday interactions but on the level of the highest authority, which clearly and powerfully rejects “Georgian Greeks” in the person of LP.

This is not the end of the offense in LP’s narration, however. Having explained the visa-related issue (34), LP regains the gist of his story in line 35: *tak tak tak turkofonos* “so, so, so, turkophone”. He proceeds with another allegation he ascribes to the judge, namely categorizing LP as playing a part in organized crime: *ty govorit mafioz* “you, he says, are a mafioso” (35). Note that this is the first time that the informal second person singular is used in the excerpt, marking also a shift from the category “Turkish Georgian Greeks” to LP personally. Thus, he alone is alleged to participate in organized crime, even though one might argue that his ascribed category membership likely played a role in the accusation, as discussed earlier. Similarly to lines 25-26, LP portrays himself as capable of dealing with the accusation, this time by ridiculing it. He says that he answered by asking whether a “mafioso” would work for 25 Euros a day (35-36), the implication being that someone with ties to organized crime would not have to hold down such a low-paying job. He proceeds with a meta-communicative comment on the “stupidity” of the “Greek people” (38), which he characterizes as “even more stupid” than all the other “stupid nations” (40). This is sequentially most closely related to the allegation of being a “mafioso”, but can also be read as a comment on being categorized as “Turkish” earlier – the judge having, in LP’s view, demonstrated little intellectual prowess in either case.

LP proceeds to explain how he was employed (41), before returning again to the story in court. He concedes being a “mafioso” (42), in order to return to the topic he is most interested in: *vot bumagi chto ya grek* “here are the papers that I’m a Greek” (42-43). He thereby also refers to the official documentation as “proof” of his GREEK category membership. In the following, he explicitly positions himself as someone who does not wish to return to his “homeland”

gde ya rodilsya “where I was born” (43-44) and states clearly: *ya khochu zdes’ zhit’* “I want to live here” (46). This is followed with: *ya zhe grek ne imeyu pravo* “I – a Greek – don’t have the right?” (48). He thus asserts his national affiliation – ignoring the challenges he narrates as having been posed just moments before – and poses a rhetorical question. He goes on to expand on his grievances of not being able to live as a “Greek” in the Greek nation state by listing people of “non-Greek” national affiliation, who, according to him, find it easier to obtain permission to live in Greece. These are *albantsy-malbantsy* “Albanians-Malbanians”, in this context an overtly pejorative partial reduplication, and *turki* “Turks” (50). Following his account, it is completely incomprehensible to first incorrectly categorize him as TURKISH instead of recognizing him as GREEK, and to then take him to court for overstaying his visa whereas “all other Turks” apparently face much less difficulty. He voices his frustration with another (rhetorical) question that closes his account on his being GREEK: *nam nel’zya zdes’ zhit’* “we are not allowed to live here?” (52). The judge does not take the question to be a rhetorical one, as LP tells us *net govorit* “no, he says” (54) and relates how the judge upheld the visa conditions, with which LP apparently had not complied. LP then recounts having tried to comply with the official regulations and shown all his documents (55), which still did not keep him from being deported (56).

Having finished his story, LP picks up the offensive label *turkofonos* “turkophone” from line 30 again, together with the denial of recognition *vy ne greki* “you’re not Greeks” (58). Following a meta-communicative comment excusing what he is about to say (59), he finally launches into a contest of what it means to be GREEK by voicing what he had stopped himself from saying in lines 2-3. Importantly, he starts this with *esli my ne greki* “if we’re not Greeks” (60), thereby clarifying that the following challenge is a response to his community not being recognized as GREEK. The implication is that if his in-group fails to meet the criteria for the category GREEK, similarly stringent criteria must be applied in determining the category membership of all other claimants. LANGUAGE being a criterion his community is said to have “failed”, he chooses not RELIGION but ANCESTRY and more specifically “purity” as the criterion for comparison. This “purity” he assesses as having been compromised by “Greek Greeks” having sexual intercourse with “Turks” for the already mentioned time span of “four hundred years” *vnutri gretsii* “inside of Greece” (60-61). Notably, it is the “Greek Greek women” who – personified as “your mother and daughter” (60-61) – are being portrayed as having had sexual intercourse with “Turkish men”. The narration leaves it

unclear whether or not this is alleged to have been consensual on the part of these women. In this image, women embody not only “the nation” but also its “purity”, in common with patriarchal imagery of the nation the world over (cf. Alonso 1994; Seifert 2003; Thiele et al. 2010). “Greek Greek men” are not mentioned, and by being “left out of the picture” displayed as “not strong enough” to “protect their property” – both in the tangible form of female bodies and in the more abstract form of “national territory”. The either “violated” or “sexually treacherous” female body is therefore not only an image of “racial impurity” but also one of male weakness. “Greece” is thereby portrayed as “doubly violated”: by the (“treacherous”) sexual act and by the fact that it happened on “her territory”. LP’s attack on the “purity” of the “Greek Greeks” is closed by the rhetorical question: *govoryu vy stali greki a my net* “I say, you became Greeks but we didn’t?” (61-62). This repeats the position he had attributed to the out-group in lines 5-6, this time as a rhetorical question and much more strongly due to everything he has related in the preceding 55 lines. He picks up on the “ancestral purity” he has already claimed for his in-group in line 18 and reinforces his in-group’s claim on it by stating: *nam nichego ne trogali* “nothing touched us” (65), retaining the body-related imagery of lines (61-62). He then repeats how his in-group had preserved said “purity” in his view: by choosing RELIGION over LANGUAGE and moving to Georgia (65-68). The two points he had narrated as being held against his community – their heritage language and moving to Georgia – are thus portrayed as indispensable to “preserving” the two features he takes to be crucial for GREEK category membership: RELIGION and, above all, ANCESTRY. Following the excerpt, LP excuses himself again and explains how “they” had “hurt his heart” with the insult, which NL shows that he understands.

Importantly, until line 60 LP only ever asserts his and/or his community’s being GREEK by preserving what he defines as the prerequisites for category membership and therefore legitimate claims to belonging and residing in Greece: RELIGION and ANCESTRY. It is only when he narrates being denied the visa and insulted by an official of the Greek government who labeled him as TURKISH that he portrays himself as “losing control” and starts his attack. Thus, it is only after being othered and denied identification in what he perceives to be “the most insulting way” that he narrates himself as having “returned the insult”. Still, from the structure of excerpt 28, this attack is foreshadowed by how he sets up his account in the first six lines, which would not be intelligible otherwise.

Telling us the story of how he defended himself does not, of course, change anything about his deportation. As he tells us later, his attack comes after he had already seen the “reject” stamp on his passport, i.e. he had “nothing to lose”. Therefore, similar to telling the story in the interview, “speaking his mind” in court also changed nothing. However, it appears very important to him to “set the record straight” in this way both in the situation and in the interview. In the latter context it might appear less necessary, since we had shown ourselves to be very much aligned with his narrations of his community’s trajectory, and never questioned their being GREEK. Still, it appears crucial to LP that we understand his exact reasons for discounting the GREEK category membership of “Greek Greeks” – that they failed to “keep themselves pure” and away from TURKISH bodies. This is visible in that he alludes to the accusation already in lines 1-3, but only “permits” himself to fully verbalize it about a minute later, in lines 60-62. Like VE in excerpt 27 he challenges the “Greek Greek’s” GREEKNESS, in his case by asserting that if anybody is to be categorized as TURKISH it would have to be the out-group, an official representative of which first voiced the offensive categorization. His defensive device is to question the out-group’s criteria for GREEK category membership (having lived in Greece, speaking SMG) and to propose and communicatively enforce a different set of mandatory attributes (ancestry and religion), showing his community to be superior in complying with them. This is, therefore, another struggle over the prerogative of defining the category GREEK, with both sides attempting to contract what it means to be GREEK and with LP attempting an inversion of hierarchies (cf. Wimmer, 2013) to position his community as BETTER GREEKS. In the situation, the definition held by the judge and invested with great institutional power prevailed. Crucially, as in the case of OP’s alienation discussed in Section I. above, this struggle is the result of the perception of exclusion by a government LP had previously considered “his own” by virtue of his ancestral ties to the category GREEK. “Setting the record straight” in the interview and expounding on how the category is to be filled instead, is thus a way of “dealing with past injustice” as per Czyżewsky et al. (1995, p. 78) and as already discussed regarding excerpt 20 (cf. Chapter 6).

IV. Preliminary summary

This Section has explored how consultants interactively deal with experiences that challenge their self-identification as GREEK in Greece. The fact that about

half of my consultants speak about not being accepted in Greece underlines the relevance of this topic in how they establish their identification and belonging. Crucially, *krov* ‘blood’, i.e. ANCESTRY remains a fundamental point of reference in all the excerpts explored in detail in this Section, although consultants evaluate it quite differently.

For OP in Section I. and LP in Section III., it is problematic that their GREEK ANCESTRY is not recognized as sufficient for being GREEK, although to different extents. Contrarily, IP and TV position themselves as frustrated by the slow “progress” made in the post-Soviet space in abolishing ancestry-based concepts of belonging and introducing CITIZENSHIP as the relevant category instead. They therefore do not at all dispute the boundary set by the “Greek Greek” out-group. The change they seek rather involves changing the conceptualization of their own community to fit the “European” model, which would eventually lead to a blurring of this particular boundary. It is important to note that, in focusing on this conceptual difference, IP and TV could portray themselves as having already crossed this boundary individually; however, neither seems interested in doing so, opting instead to position themselves as being “one step ahead” on a continuum of “progress”. As such, conceptualizing the boundary as a line to be crossed is not appropriate for this case.

Consultants who dispute the boundary in Sections I. and III. accomplish this by questioning the category-bound predicates and activities that enable the drawing of these boundaries. What we thus see is less a struggle to belong – by being “model Greeks” for example, i.e. trying their best to emulate views, definitions and categories of the Greek societal majority – but rather a struggle about how these categories are to be filled. In Section I., OP shows how the category system, as he perceives it, includes and excludes the wrong people (excluding him and including people without ancestral ties to Greece) and thereby questions its rationale. VE and LP both forcefully deny that “Greek Greeks” have the prerogative to define the category GREEK – as implied in the wording of my question – and instead claim this prerogative for themselves. The boundary thus remains untouched but the sides are reversed, at least for the duration of our interview in Georgia. Crucially, they do not attack these categories immediately. Especially in LP’s case, it is quite evident that he only lashes out after having had all his attempts at proving his belonging rejected. It is thus a very strong defense mechanism, only invoked when there appears to be no other way of being included. Notably, outside of the interview context neither OP nor LP achieved a change in how the category GREEK was defined in Greece, with the out-group remaining in the powerful

position of determining where to draw the boundary. In OP's case, he also does not report that anything like that had been his aim: in a way he "turned away" from the boundary he encountered, and returned to Georgia where his belonging is not questioned.

B. Ts'alk'a: Struggling to belong

Moving back to Georgia, I will now take a closer look at what some consultants perceive to be an ongoing dispute in Ts'alk'a. From the outside, this is best described as a conflict with economic roots (cf. Chapter 2), which came to be framed in *groupist* terms (cf. Brubaker 2002). While this conflict concerns only some consultants, it is important for three reasons. Firstly, because some consultants portray it as posing a challenge to their belonging to a place they and their ancestors have for almost two centuries considered "their home" and "their land". Secondly, the differences perceived and the boundaries drawn in speaking about these conflicts highlight ascriptions and evaluations of what it means to be GREEK and GEORGIAN. These complement and sustain the analysis above, since they also highlight the importance of RELIGION for national affiliation and the time spent in a place for belonging. Thirdly, the contest over these categories provides the context for evaluations made by consultants from Ts'alk'a, for instance about the "importance" of their heritage language Urum (cf. Chapter 5), which would otherwise remain unintelligible. That is to say, we can see here how PLACE plays an important role in my consultants' experiences and how these experiences inform their views on a number of topics.

As previously, I will focus on the perceptions of difference and the boundary-making they entail, rather than on "what really happened".¹⁵ There is a notable disparity in the sample regarding knowledge about the internal migration to Kvemo Kartli from the highlands of Svaneti and Ach'ara in the sample. Similarly to Urum Greeks being mostly unaware of Pontic Greek deportations after the Second World War, most Pontic Greek consultants know very little about this internal migration. Our five Pontic Greek consultants from the district of Tetrits'q'aro are the exception, of course. All of them, however, deny that there were ever any difficulties with internal migrants in their villages. Most Urum Greek consultants knew what I was referring to when I posed the question *mozhet li vy rasskazat'*

15 Cf. the introduction and further reading in Chapter 2.

chto-nibud' o gruzinakh kotorye priekhali zhit' v tsalke iz adzharii i svaneti “could you talk a little bit about the Georgians who came to live in Ts'alk'a from Ach'ara and Svaneti?” Among my Urum Greek consultants from both urban Tbilisi and rural Ts'alk'a, almost half (11, 47.7%) state that there had been “some difficulties” *ran'she* “earlier” but that things had “calmed down” considerably and were “fine” now. Four consultants (17.4%) state that there were “never any problems”, two of them from Tbilisi and two living in Ts'alk'a. Three (13%) gave no answer. Four consultants (17.4%) state that the difficulties are ongoing, three of whom live in Ts'alk'a and one in Tbilisi. While I will mostly use excerpts from these latter four interviews to illustrate the differences and boundaries in question, other consultants in Ts'alk'a also perceive the same differences and draw the same boundaries, albeit less explicitly and not with the same verve. Hence, like excerpt 28 in Section A., these should be considered “extreme cases” that I analyze in order to explicate the boundaries more clearly.¹⁶

The grievances and conflicts mentioned by all Urum Greek consultants primarily result from economic difficulties, with “newcomers” being portrayed as unceremoniously “just taking” houses left behind by emigrating Greeks, either entering without permission or subsequently refusing to pay rent, for instance. These types of conflict are described as having on occasion turned violent, especially among “young men”. Consultants living in Ts'alk'a go further in differentiating the out-group from their own community and describe the “newcomers” as somehow “less civilized”: turning houses – which “Greeks had built with their own hands” – into “cowsheds”, letting their cattle roam “everywhere”; in short as “careless” about what consultants perceive to be “basic rules of cleanliness”.¹⁷ These issues are mentioned in passing in many interviews. Our conversation with SC on the side of the village green offers a substantial collection. At one point, it was interrupted by his friend FD calling a young boy, who self-identified as “Ach'arian”, over to us and explaining to him at length how he was to walk on the paved path instead of on the grass.¹⁸

16 Notably, while the boundary loses some of its relevance for those consultants who evaluate the conflictual times as a thing of the past, the categories and their associated negative ascriptions often remain.

17 EM refers to this in excerpt 31 below, albeit without explicating the behavior she perceives to be deviant.

18 Previous to this interview, Nika Loladze and I had also not cared about walking on the paved path, since it was not the shortest way across the village green. Having found

The above already describes differences between “Georgian Greeks” and “newcomers”. Remarkably, the latter are – by and large – not categorized as “Georgians” by my consultants, even though both “Svans” and “Ach’arians” self-identify as such and are categorized as such by the Georgian nation state.¹⁹ This differentiation remains relevant to a consultant who does not perceive any persisting difficulties. When I ask ME the above-mentioned question, she first tells us at length about the conflicts in the beginning but that they calmed down after “people started living together” (ME, 0:38:16-0:44:18) – again pointing out TIME as the relevant factor. I proceed to ask *i kak sosushchestvuyut seychas v tsalke greki i gruziny* “and how do Greeks and Georgians live together now in Ts’alk’a?” to which she answers: *khorocho greki i gruziny vseгда khorosho sosushchestvovali* “good, Greeks and Georgians have always lived well together” (ME, 0:44:19-0:44:32). So, even though my first question had mentioned “Georgians [...] from Svaneti and Ach’ara”, ME apparently understood this as referring to “Svans” and “Ach’arians”, perhaps also to the category of “newcomers”, which we will encounter below. Her later answer that “Greeks and Georgians” had always lived well together makes clear that – at least in the later sequence – for her “Svans” and “Ach’arians” are categories not encompassed in the category “Georgian”, contrary to the official categorization. The following excerpt from the interview with LP also establishes differences between “Georgians” and “newcomers”:

(29) We’re happy to live with Georgians (LP, 0:53:10-0:53:42)

- | | | |
|---|-----|---|
| 1 | LP: | <i>ya v gruzii rodilsya [s etim] gor[zhus’]</i> |
| | | I in Georgia was_born_M with this pride_myself_I |
| 2 | NL: | [hm] |
| 3 | CH: | [hm] |
| 4 | LP: | <i>°hh chto u menya takie ponyatie gostepriimstvo</i> |
| | | that at me such understanding hospitality |
| 5 | NL: | hm |
| 6 | LP: | <i>e:: druzhba (-)</i> |
| | | friendship |
| 7 | CH: | [hm] (-) |
| 8 | LP: | <i>lyubit’ drug druga (-) otsenivat’ lyudey</i> |
| | | to_love each other to_appreciate people |

out how much of a symbol of “basic civilization” it represented to some members of the older Greek generation in Ts’alk’a, we thereafter walked on the path.

- 19 The official categorization, which coincides with their self-identification, sees “Svans” as “ethnic Georgians” who speak Svan, a Kartvelian language related to but distinct from Georgian. “Ach’arians”, also categorized as “ethnic Georgians”, had converted to Islam in the centuries their territory was governed by the Ottoman Empire.

- 9 CH: hm
- 10 LP: *eto ot nikh ya [nauchilsya]*
this from them I learned_M
- 11 CH: [hm]
- 12 NL: hm (1)
- 13 LP: *potomu chto ochen' khoroshie lyudi*
because that very good people
- 14 CH: hm (2)
- 15 LP: *my rady ^oh [s gruzinami zhit']*
we glad with Georgians to_live
- 16 CH: [((chuckles))] [((chuckles))]
- 17 NL: [((chuckles))]
- 18 LP: [((chuckles))]
- 19 CH: << smiling > khorosho >
well
- 20 LP: << smiling > gruziny nam > ((clears throat)) (1) i otets i
Georgians us and father and
- 21 *brat i vsë (-)*
brother and all
- 22 NL: hm
- 23 LP: *a chto zdes' chto priezzhie [schitayut] sebya gruzinami*
but that here what newcomers consider_they themselves Georgians
- 24 *(—) my ikh ne uvazhaem*
we them not respect_we
- 1 LP: I was born in Georgia, I'm proud
- 2 NL: [hm]
- 3 CH: [hm]
- 4 LP: that I have this understanding of hospitality
- 5 NL: hm
- 6 LP: friendship
- 7 CH: [hm] (—)
- 8 LP: to love each other, to appreciate people
- 9 CH: hm
- 10 LP: I learned this from them
- 11 CH: [hm]
- 12 NL: hm (1)
- 13 LP: because they are very good people
- 14 CH: hm (2)
- 15 LP: we're happy to live with Georgians
- 16 CH: [((chuckles))] [((chuckles))]
- 17 NL: [((chuckles))]
- 18 LP: [((chuckles))]
- 19 CH: << smiling > alright >

- 20 LP: << *smiling* > Georgians > ((clears throat)) (1) are father, brother and
 21 everything to us
 22 NL: hm
 23 LP: but these newcomers here, they consider themselves Georgians, we
 24 don't respect them

Excerpt 29 is how LP answers the question whether he can think of situations in which he might “feel Georgian”. He first repeats having been born in Georgia (1), a fact he had already stated numerous times in the interview. He then voices his “pride” (1) in his understanding of “hospitality” (4), “friendship” (6), “loving each other”, and “appreciating people” (8). He goes on to explain his personal relation to these attributes: *eto ot nikh ya nauchilsya* “I learned this from them” (10), “them” referring here to “Georgians”. Especially the first two attributes in his list, “hospitality” and “friendship”, are frequently attributed to “Georgians” in particular or “Caucasians” in general, not only in the interview corpus. LP evaluates “Georgians” as *ochen' khoroshie lyudi* “very good people” (13) and expresses the “joy” of his in-group to be able to live “with Georgians” (15). He closes his exposition of positive ascriptions to “Georgians” by stating: *gruziny nam [...] i otets i brat i vsë* “Georgians [...] are father, brother and everything to us” (20-21). This is another family metaphor²⁰, this time likening “Georgians” both to a “guiding father” – the one “having taught” him and his community the positive attributes listed in lines 4-8 – and to a sibling, an “equal” in harmonious conviviality, as alluded to in line 15.

This positive picture of “hospitality”, “friendship” and “love” is then contrasted with *priezzhie* “newcomers” (23), a reference to the internal migrants from Svaneti and Ach'ara. Notably, by being “newcomers” they are also “strangers”, perhaps even “intruders” in the harmonious living situation of “Greeks” and “Georgians” that LP had established in the first 21 lines. They further *schitayut sebya gruzinami* “consider themselves Georgians” (23). By not categorizing them as “Georgians” himself but attributing this self-identification to the “newcomers”, LP opens up the possibility of questioning said self-identification and perhaps evaluating it as “not really true”. This is also a reference to his previous categorization of the out-group as “not Georgian” due to their “Turkish blood” (LP, 0:37:14) and to his evaluation that “Muslim” and “Georgian” are mutually exclusive categories (LP, 0:40:40). His in-group is then portrayed as not recognizing the out-group's self-identification: *my ikh ne uvazhaem* “we don't respect them” (23-24).

20 Cf. the exploration of the SOVIET UNION AS FAMILY metaphor in Chapter 6.

This allows the interpretation that his in-group – by living harmoniously with “real Georgians” – are somehow capable of distinguishing between “Georgians” and “impostors”, and categorizing the “newcomers” as the latter. He then goes on to give examples furthering his evaluation of the out-group as “very stupid” and never returns to the topic of “feeling Georgian”.

In excerpt 29, then, LP not only positions himself – and by extension his community – as sharing important and positive attributes with “Georgians”: this same commonality is used to refer to the differences he perceives *vis-à-vis* the “newcomers”, which enables him to withhold his “respect” and to then proceed to draw a strong boundary following the excerpt. Having established that consultants distinguish between GEORGIANS on the one hand and SVANS and ACH'ARIANS on the other,²¹ I will now examine what the perceived differences are, what boundaries are drawn and how they reflect on my consultants' self-identification. To this end, I will first complete the discussion of Urum as heritage variety, and then look at it from a boundary perspective.

Excerpt 2 in Chapter 5 points to the biggest difference consultants in Ts'alk'a perceive between ACH'ARIANS and GEORGIANS, namely the former having given up their religious affiliation to ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY, which is taken to be paramount for category membership as GEORGIAN. ACH'ARIANS thus lost this membership by converting to ISLAM and thereby becoming so fundamentally different that they can no longer be considered GEORGIANS. This establishes a difference not only between ACH'ARIANS and GEORGIANS, but crucially also between ORTHODOX GREEKS and MUSLIM ACH'ARIANS. The latter are said to have made the “wrong choice” in giving up their religious affiliation, hence losing their national affiliation, instead of changing their language. This is also the difference LP underscores as the fundamental one.

In the interview with EM, she too picks up on the religious differences between her in-group and the “Ach'arian” out-group. For her, however, LANGUAGE is not something as marginal as it is for DP, but should coincide with a person's religious (and national) affiliation:

(30) Categories “are mixed up” (EM, 0:39:33-0:40:01)

- 1 EM: *musul'man govorit na gruzinskom a ya khristianka na turetskom*
Muslim speaks on Georgian and I Christian_F on Turkish
- 2 NL: [[[chuckles]]]

21 Many consultants in Ts'alk'a also perceive differences between the categories SVAN and ACH'ARIAN beyond their place of origin, which I cannot detail here.

- 3 CH: [(*laughs*))] [*da*]
yes
- 4 EM: [*eto*] *eto razve zakonno spravedlivo*
this this really lawfully justly
- 1 EM: a Muslim speaks Georgian and I, a Christian, Turkish
- 2 NL: [(*chuckles*)]
- 3 CH: [(*laughs*))] [*yes*]
- 4 EM: how is this lawful? just?

Immediately preceding this excerpt, I had asked EM whether her heritage variety Urum is “important” to her. She denies this, saying she would prefer not to speak the language at all. In line 1, she describes the language situation in Ts’alk’a by pairing the religious affiliation “Muslim” with the language “Georgian”, and “Christian” with “Turkish”. From our almost 40 minutes of conversation up to this point, it is already clear that CHRISTIANITY and ISLAM are two very important categories for EM, which she perceives for the most part as mutually-conflictual. She has also already made clear that both categories GEORGIAN and GREEK are for her characterized by CHRISTIANITY. Line 1, therefore, describes a perceived mismatch, due to a “Muslim” speaking the “Christian” language “Georgian”, while a “Christian Greek” speaks the “Muslim” language “Turkish”. NL and myself acknowledge this “mismatch” by voicing amusement (2-3). EM evaluates this “mismatch” by posing a rhetorical question about the “lawfulness” and “justness” of this situation (4), thereby expressing that she does not take this state of affairs to be correct. For EM, then, it is not just the case that national and religious affiliation are inextricably tied together; LANGUAGE is coded for religious affiliation as well. Hence, the problem she perceives in speaking her heritage variety Urum is not only that it does not match her national affiliation, but also, if not more importantly, that it does not match her religious affiliation.

This perceived mismatch appears to be more relevant in rural Ts’alk’a than in urban Tbilisi, since it is tied to a conflict about the “right to ownership of the land”, which is conceptualized as involving more than legal property titles. Thus, immediately following excerpt 30 EM goes on to tell us how “they” had told her that she is “Turkish” due to her ancestors’ provenance. This is something she already tells us right at the beginning of the interview and returns to frequently over the course of our conversation, highlighting its relevance to her. I will now examine two excerpts in more detail to show how this contest is implicated in EM’s sense of identification and belonging.

(31) They say this is their land (EM, 0:00:45-0:01:43)

- 1 EM: *greki priekhali (-) iz turtsii my priekhali*
Greeks came_PL from Turkey we came_PL
- 2 CH: mhm
- 3 EM: *iz turtsii oni priekhali (-) °h a vot tepereshnyi:: narod (-)*
from Turkey they came_PL and here current folk
- 4 *dazhe nas osuzhdayut chto eti priezzhie syuda eti*
even us condemn_they that these newcomers to_here these
- 5 CH: mhm
- 6 EM: *adzhartsy (-) mnogie (1.3) my govoriли chto vy pochemu*
Ach'arians many we told_PL that you_PL why
- 7 *stali musul'manami da my khristianye (-) pochemu eto vot*
became_PL Muslims yes we Christians why this here
- 8 *tak delaete eto narushaete eto*
so do_2PL this break_2PL this
- 9 CH: [mhm]
- 10 EM: *[vot] tak eto vot tak oni nam govoryat chto (-) vy iz*
here so this here so they us tell_they what you_2PL from
- 11 *turtsii priekhali (-) eto zemlya nasha my [gruziny]*
Turkey came_PL this land ours we Georgians
- 12 CH: [mhm]
- 13 NL: [hm] mhm
- 14 CH: *mhm (-) da*
yes
- 15 EM: *vot a:: my ne vinovatyy chto my byli v turtsii pravil'no*
here but we not guilty that we were in Turkey correctly
- 16 NL: *da oni*
yes they
- 17 EM: *my v turtsii my byli pod i::gom turkov*
we in Turkey we were under yoke of_Turks
- 18 CH: mhm
- 19 EM: [...]
- 20 EM: *i oni zadevayut nas uzhe chto*
and they offend_they us already that
- 21 EM kat: *es sheni mits'a aris me kartveli var da shen (-)*
this your_2SG land is I Georgian am and you_2SG
- 22 *turketidan mokhvedi*
Turkey_from came_2SG
- 23 NL: mhm
- 24 EM: *vot tak (-) po-gruzinski ya khorosho ne znayu*
here so Georgian I well not know_I
- 25 CH: *((laughs)) ya tozhe ne mogu (((xxx))) ((chuckles)))*
I also not can_I
- 26 EM: *[ya grechanka] nu koe-kak ne mogu [tak]*
I Greek_F well somehow not can_I so

- 27 NL: [hm]
 28 EM: *dopustim eto delat'*
 suppose_we this to_do
 29 CH: *[mhm] [da]*
 yes
 30 EM: *[vy]yti na chistuyu vodu*
 go_out on clean water
- 1 EM: Greeks came, we came from Turkey
 2 CH: mhm
 3 EM: they came from Turkey and now the people present here even condemn
 4 us, these newcomers, these
 5 CH: mhm
 6 EM: Ach'arians, there are many, we said, why did you become Muslims,
 7 right? we're Christians, why do you do this, break this, like this?
 9 CH: [mhm]
 10 EM: like this and like this, they say to us, you came from Turkey, this is our
 11 land, we're [Georgians]
 12 CH: [mhm]
 13 NL: [hm] mhm
 14 CH: mhm yes
 15 EM: but we're not guilty that we were in Turkey, right?
 16 NL: yes they
 17 EM: in Turkey we were under the yoke of Turks
 18 CH: mhm
 19 EM: [...]
 20 EM: and they offend us like
 21 EM kat: this is your land? I'm Georgian and you came from Turkey!
 23 NL: mhm
 24 EM: like this, I don't speak Georgian so well
 25 CH: ((laughs)) I also can't [((xxx)) ((chuckles))]
 26 EM: [I'm Greek], well somehow I can't
 27 NL: [hm]
 28 EM: let's say, do this
 29 CH: [mhm] [yes]
 30 EM: get out onto open water

Excerpt 31 is part of EM's answer to my opening question asking "how Greeks came to Georgia". She states a rough time period and then gives the point of origin as *iz turtsii* "from Turkey" and positions "Greeks" as her in-group by referring to the people arriving from Turkey as *my* "we" (1). EM then repeats the migratory movement in the identically structured sentence: *iz turtsii oni priekhali* "they came from Turkey", this time referring to the migrants as *oni* "they" (3). She goes on to portray this provenance as a source

of conflicts in Ts'alk'a (3-11). Since this is at the very beginning of the interview, EM first has to establish who the "other side" is, the out-group in this conflict. She achieves this through a progression of labels and ascriptions, beginning with *tepereshniy narod* "current people" (3), who are described as *dazhe nas osuzhdayut* "they even condemn us" (3-4), presumably in a way that problematizes her community's provenance. Her next label *eti priez-zhie* "these newcomers" (4) positions them, like LP did in excerpt 29, as unfamiliar with the region and as potential "intruders". With *eti adzhartsy* "these Ach'arians" (4-6) she categorizes them according to their provenance as "from Ach'ara", using a label that she expects to be intelligible to the two outsiders NL and myself. This label also alludes to ascriptions and concomitant evaluations that might be shared in the broader Georgian discourse on "Ach'arians", for instance the perception that they are still "predominantly Muslims" (7). In line 6, she quantifies their presence in Ts'alk'a as *mnogie* "many", thereby alerting her interlocutors to her perception of the conflict she is about to describe as relevant enough to be the topic of what is her first contribution in the interview.

EM goes on to narrate the general attitude of her in-group towards "these newcomers" in the form of a generalized citation, consisting of two questions (6-8). The first challenges the out-group's religious affiliation: *vy pochemu stali musul'manami* "why did you become Muslims?" (6-7) and is immediately contrasted with a statement of the in-group's religious affiliation *my khristiany* "we're Christians" (7). This contrast and thus the problem of religious affiliation is apparently so relevant for EM that she puts it first in her list of grievances about the out-group. It also presupposes knowledge of "the fact" that the Georgian-speaking "Ach'arians" were "once Christians", which we have already seen DP voice in excerpt 2 (cf. Chapter 5) and which plays a role in wider Georgian discourse about "Ach'arian Muslims". The second generalized question concerns activities attributed by EM's in-group to the out-group, namely "doing things" – presumably somehow differently to how they are expected to be done – and "breaking things" (7-8). These accusations are presented as "commonsensical" enough to warrant no explanation or justification. Importantly, this applies both to the out-group's religious affiliation and to the destructive behavior attributed to them.

The generalized conversation is then narrated to go on with the out-group not changing their religious affiliation or their behavior, or even explaining either, but claiming ownership of the land: *vy iz turtsii priekhali (-) eto zemlya nasha my gruziny* "you came from Turkey, this is our land, we're Georgians" (10-11). The out-group is thereby portrayed as denying EM's community the

ownership of the land, due to their “being from Turkey”. The out-group is said to claim ownership by virtue of their “being Georgian” and thus the issue becomes not one of legal ownership, but of “right to ownership” through national affiliation. Notably, in this argument the link to a national territory takes precedence over other potential modes of establishing BELONGING, such as religious affiliation or property titles. From this perspective, EM’s in-group is thus categorized as “being Turkish”, in stark contrast to how EM categorizes her community. In the interview situation, EM shifts responsibility for their time in “Turkey” away from her community and demands our support for this statement with *pravil’no* ‘correctly’ “right?” (15), which NL provides in line 16. EM goes on to describe her in-group’s circumstances in “Turkey” with the metaphor frequently used by consultants in this context *my byli pod igom turkov* “we were under the Turks’ yoke” (17). She thereby not only argues that her community’s situation was “not their fault” but also positions them as “victims of the Turks” and thereby not “Turks” themselves.

Whereas in line 4 the out-group is portrayed as “condemning” EM’s in-group, this is augmented in line 20 as “offending” them. EM repeats the reproach, this time in Georgian: *es sheni mits’a aris me kartveli var da shen turketidan mokhvedi* “this is your land? I’m Georgian and you came from Turkey” (21-22).²² Repeating the quote she attributes to the out-group strengthens the accusation, and doing so in Georgian allows her to position herself as speaking at least some Georgian and therefore as properly understanding the accusation. It also enables her to make the limitation of her Georgian competence a topic in our conversation and to use it as an explanation of why she does not adroitly defend her community in the generalized exchange she narrates (24-30). This is achieved by first stating that she does not speak Georgian well (24), which is acknowledged by my laughing concession of my own shortcomings in this language (25). EM then reasserts her “being Greek” (26) but mitigates that she is “somehow unable” (26-28) to *vyyti na chistuyu vodu* “go out onto open water” (30). Note that the idiomatic Russian target phrase in line 30 would be *vyvesti na chistuyu vodu* “bring something to light”, i.e. “expose something”, which EM does not use in its idiomatic context but rather in the context of her not speaking Georgian

22 Note that in repeating the reproach from lines 10-11 in Georgian, *sheni* ‘your’ in *es sheni mits’a aris* “this is your land” was possibly intended as *chemi* ‘my’, making the repetition more similar to the Russian sentence in this excerpt and her other frequent repetitions of this attack she attributes to the “Ach’arian” out-group. Her Georgian is noticeably accented, fitting her self-assessment in line 24.

“fluently” enough to assert and argue for her status as “Greek” in Georgian.²³ The linguistic difficulties apparent here between the internal migrants who speak almost exclusively Georgian and the Georgian Greek population of Ts'alk'a who (especially in the older generation) are more comfortable speaking Russian or their heritage variety Urum, are mentioned in some but not all interviews in the region.

Note that even though EM positions herself in excerpt 31 as not quite able to verbally defend herself due to not speaking Georgian well enough, this is not her position in other contexts of the interview. Furthermore, as she narrates the story in excerpt 31, it is her in-group who starts asking questions which might very well be perceived to be offensive by the out-group. So, even though she does not present them as such, but rather as so “commonsensical” as to warrant no justification, the out-group is first put into the position of defending itself, which in her narration they accomplish by denying EM's in-group the “right to the land”.

Let us now turn to an excerpt in which EM portrays herself as asserting clearly “whose land” she perceives the region of Ts'alk'a to be. When I ask her which place she considers to be her “homeland” she answers: *eta moya gruziya* “this [homeland] is my Georgia”. She goes on to refer again to the struggle she perceives to be taking place in Ts'alk'a:

(32) This is our land (EM, 0:41:54-0:42:05)

- | | | |
|---|-----|--|
| 1 | EM: | <i>my rodilis' zdes' eta nasha ya skazala</i> |
| | | we were_born_PL here this our I said_F |
| 2 | CH: | mhm |
| 3 | EM: | <i>oni govoryat vot eta nasha gruziya vot eta °h nasha zemlya ya</i> |
| | | they say_they here this our Georgia here this our land I |
| 4 | | <i>skazala vasha zemlya khulo</i> |
| | | said_F your land Khulo |
| 5 | CH: | [mhm] |
| 6 | NL: | [(chuckles)] |
| 7 | EM: | <i>tam rodilis' °h ya rodilas' zdes' (-)</i> |
| | | there were_born_PL I was_born_F here |
| | | |
| 1 | EM: | we were born here, this is ours, I said |
| 2 | CH: | mhm |
| 3 | EM: | they say, this is our Georgia, this here is our land, I said, your land is |
| 4 | | Khulo |

23 Many thanks to Elena Novozhilova for her native Russian and linguistic competence in helping me decipher this sequence.

- 5 CH: [mhm]
 6 NL: [((chuckles))]
 7 EM: you were born there, I was born here

Her claim to “having the right” to the land centers heavily on being born “here”. She first states *my rodilis’ zdes’* “we were born here”. To her it logically follows that *eta nasha* “this is ours”, with *zemlya* ‘land’ omitted but contextually clear (1). She reports that she “said” this (1) – referring either to her having already repeatedly stated it in the interview or in conversation with members of the out-group. EM then relates what *oni govoryat* “they say”, citing the out-group’s reasoning as: *eta nasha gruziya eta nasha zemlya* “this is our Georgia, this is our land” (3). This time, EM reports herself as ready to defend herself: *ya skazala vasha zemlya khulo* “I said, your land is Khulo” (3-4). She thus not only answers back, but furthermore rejects the out-group’s claim to potentially “all the land in Georgia” by restricting their claim to Khulo, the Ach’arian district from which some of the internal migrants relocated. This repartee is acknowledged by NL with a chuckle (6). EM closes this sequence by reaffirming that for her, the issue is the place of birth: *tam rodilis’ o h ya rodilas’ zdes’* “you were born there, I was born here” (7).

This struggle over rightful ownership of the land in Ts’alk’a appears in other interviews as well. DP, for instance, tells us of frequently being told by “Ach’arians” to “go to Greece” (DP, 0:09:57). While this does not position her as “Turkish” but as “Greek”, she still attributes to the out-group a denial of her right to live and own land in Ts’alk’a. For consultants who mention ownership disputes, the land is rightfully “theirs” not only by virtue of being born there, as EM reasons, but also because they bought it or were settled there (accounts differ) as ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN GREEKS. This religious affiliation ties them even more strongly to this land, which through its conceptualization as GEORGIAN becomes one that ought to be kept and tilled by ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS. EM herself also emphasizes this point, when she repeatedly argues *eto khristianskiy rayon* “this is a Christian district” (EM, 0:10:30, 0:12:59). So, in her eyes MUSLIM ACH’ARIANS were not only breaking the law by seizing formerly Greek-owned land, they were also violating the religious affiliation of the normatively CHRISTIAN LAND. Furthermore, national belonging is seen as so closely linked to religious affiliation that a MUSLIM ACH’ARIAN cannot really claim access to the category GEORGIAN.

The attitude attributed by EM and others to the MUSLIM ACH'ARIAN out-group is unsurprisingly at odds with this interpretation. The citations put in their mouths, usually in generalized stories, frame belonging in terms of linguistic affiliation and, through this, traceable provenance, as we have seen in excerpt 31. According to this view, an individual with a TURKISH migration background who still speaks TURKISH cannot possibly be a CHRISTIAN, nor make a claim to GEORGIAN LAND. Having “always” lived in what is today part of Georgian national territory and speaking GEORGIAN – and never having given up that language –, however, would support said claim to GEORGIAN LAND. Remarkably, the “others” are both times constructed to be somehow TURKISH, either due to their heritage language or their religious affiliation. This is the challenge to being GREEK, in short, that a few consultants perceive to be ongoing in Ts'alk'a and most of their community members I interviewed perceive as having settled down. As this is the only contemporary challenge to GREEK category membership in Georgia that is reported in the interviews, it might help explain why for some consultants in Ts'alk'a their heritage variety Urum is perceived as a problematic feature in the contest over BELONGING TO TS'ALK'A, especially since it is precisely their BELONGING TO GEORGIA that is very relevant, as the following Section will show.

C. Belonging to Georgia and blurring boundaries

I will now explore three issues in more detail: firstly, my consultants' rootedness in Georgia as their “homeland”, secondly how I tried – largely unsuccessfully – to find practices in which Georgian Greeks would see themselves as differing from “Georgians”, and thirdly differences between consultants in how “traversable” a boundary they perceive ANCESTRY to be. Before looking at examples of how ANCESTRY and RELIGION can be viewed as “uncrossable” boundaries in Section D., this section will focus on exploring instances of blurred boundaries, multiple belongings, and being irreducibly rooted in Georgia.

In addition to being GREEK, BELONGING TO GEORGIA emerges as the other important point of identification in the interviews. This has already been discussed in terms of meeting requirements for CITIZENSHIP, including topics like language competence (cf. Chapter 5), or the avoidance of questioning political decisions about institutional changes (cf. Chapter 6). However, consultants also frequently frame belonging in emotive terms that go well beyond instrumental considerations. Recall MP, who in excerpt 14 (Chapter 5) refers

to Georgia as “my country” – not “my country of citizenship” – and talks about “wanting to speak Georgian”, not in order to cope with administrative procedures but as a way of expressing a deeper sense of belonging. Recall also AM’s indignation at the rising nationalism in the 1990s that she perceives as, at the time, challenging her belonging to Georgia in excerpt 20 (cf. Chapter 6). An emotive framing of belonging is also found in consultants’ emphasis on experiences shared by “everyone” in newly-independent Georgia, as discussed in Chapter 6 and aptly summarized by LV as: *spokoyno nikto ne zhil* “calmly, nobody lived” (LV, 0:10:33). It is further found in OP’s “turning back” from a Greece he experienced as alienating to a Georgia he considers “home” (cf. Section A.).

It will thus come as no surprise that that when I ask them which place they consider to be their *rodina* “homeland”,²⁴ most of my consultants answer “Georgia” or give a more specific location within Georgia. This breaks down into 34 consultants who indicate “Georgia” (69.4%) and nine who give a more specific location (18.4%).²⁵ ZI is the only consultant who in answering this question explains that Greece is his “historical homeland”. The only consultant who states that she is “unsure” is VD, a 21-year-old Pontic Greek woman, who spent most of her formative years in Greece but returned for her university education and to live with her grandmother. In four interviews I did not ask this question. Although I did not prompt consultants to elaborate on their answer, many do. In doing so, they most strongly emphasize their “homeland” being the place where they were born and grew up. Recall how DG spoke about not wanting to leave Georgia due to having taken her “first steps” there (cf. Chapter 6), even though she feels incredibly lonely in rural Tetrts’q’aro. Especially in Ts’alk’a, consultants might also highlight their connection to the *zemlya* ‘land’ (cf. Section B.), while others underscore the long time they have lived in Georgia as making them a part of it. Three male consultants state their readiness to “fight for Georgia” should the need arise, the 2008 war against Russia apparently still fresh in their memory. SM, a 23-year-old Pontic Greek who had returned from Georgian military service not very long before our interview, emphasizes his readiness not only to fight but also to “die for Georgia” more than once during our conversation (SM, 0:24:22, 0:34:00).

24 *Kakoe mesto rassmatrivaete kak rodinu* “which place do you consider to be your homeland?”

25 Consultants specifically mentioned Batumi (3) and Ts’alk’a (2), with Tbilisi, Iraga, Tetrts’q’aro, and Tsikhisjvari each mentioned once.

Portraying themselves as firmly rooted in and belonging to Georgia, roughly half of my consultants position themselves in our interviews as not wanting to leave Georgia.²⁶ Since our conversations took place in 2013-14, some time after the global financial crisis and once Georgia's economic and institutional situation had stabilized considerably, economic considerations certainly also played a role in their decisions – and consultants frequently spoke about the topic in these terms. These complexities and “good reasons for staying” notwithstanding, consultants also underscore their feeling of BELONGING TO GEORGIA in these sequences. AM, for instance, makes it very clear that she does not want to leave at all (AM, 0:20:58-0:21:57), using the discourse marker *chestno govorya* “honestly speaking” as a device to both manage my expectations and create greater proximity, thus allowing her to address a topic thereby positioned as potentially difficult (cf. Höfler, 2018b). When I ask her why she did not leave, her first answer is to mitigate and express her uncertainty, before launching into a longer explanation centered on “having roots” in Georgia due to the long time her family has lived “here”: *zdes' svoy dom korni (-) roditeli (-) kladbishche* “here is my house, my roots, my parents, the cemetery”. Having introduced this with *chestno govorya ya voobshche ne khochu nikuda uezhat'* “honestly speaking, I really don't want to go anywhere at all” at the start, she closes it with the almost identical *chestno govorya ya ne khochu uezhat' nikuda* “honestly speaking, I don't want to go anywhere”. The things she lists as “rooting” her in Georgia are her parents – who decided against emigration – as well as her house and the cemetery, which provides a physical link to her ancestors. Ancestors and their tillable land itself (especially in Ts'alk'a) are also mentioned by other consultants as reasons for not leaving, for coming back, or for why their emigrant family members long to return to Georgia. SC, who spends some of his time in Greece and some in Georgia, asserts that he cannot do without Georgia: *menya tyanet syuda* “it pulls me here” (SC, 0:06:19). Asked whether she could imagine leaving Georgia under any circumstances, ME denies this:

(33) I've survived so much (ME, 0:37:35)

- 1 ME: *ya sto'lko perenesla v gruzii chto ya naverno otsyuda* [ne
I so_much survived_F in Georgia that I probably from_here not
2 *uekhala by nikuda*
went_F would nowhere

26 The other half were unsure, or had wanted to leave but this was prevented by personal or institutional difficulties.

- 3 NL: [da] [konechno]
yes of_course
- 4 CH: [((chuckles))] [khorosho ((chuckles)) da]
good yes
- 5 NL: [posle vsego chto vy perezhili]
after all what you_2PL went_through_PL
- 6 ME: [vot ya nikogda nikogda] ne dumala chto ya kuda-to
well I never never not thought_F that I somewhere
- 7 uedu nikogda
will_go_I never
- 1 ME: I survived so much in Georgia that I would probably [not go anywhere
2 from here]
- 3 NL: [yes] [of course]
- 4 CH: [((chuckles))] [alright ((chuckles)) yes]
- 5 NL: [after everything that you've been through]
- 6 ME: [well, I never, never] thought that I would go somewhere, never

ME first asserts *ya stol'ko perenesla v gruzii* “I have survived so much in Georgia” (1) that she would *naverno* “probably” (1) not go *nikuda* “anywhere” (2). She thereby suggests that the scenario described in my question is nearly inconceivable, with *stol'ko* “so much” estimating the amount of the hardship she experienced as very high. Even though *naverno* ‘probably’ opens the possibility of considering emigration as an option, she firstly makes it clear that her difficult experiences were not reason enough to leave even at the time she was enduring them, implying they give even less cause for emigration now that they are over. Secondly, these hardships might be interpreted as having established a further and deeper connection between her and “Georgia”, making it even harder to leave. Her statement is acknowledged by both NL and myself (3-4), with NL repeating and thereby confirming that there was much to “go through” (5). ME then closes this sequence by reaffirming that she never thought about “going anywhere” (6). She reinforces this by repeating *nikogda* “never” three times, so as not to leave the slightest trace of doubt in the minds of her interlocutors. The possibility of her emigrating is thereby now positioned as not having crossed her mind “ever”. This attests as much to ME’s RESILIENCE in coping with great hardship (cf. Chapter 6) – as to her sense of attachment to Georgia, which is strong enough to have even endured civil war unshaken.

Having explored my consultants’ BELONGING TO GEORGIA, I will now explore whether they perceive any differences between themselves and the “Georgian” societal majority. Towards the end of the interviews, I posed

a number of questions probing whether consultants perceive differences between “how things are done” in their community and in Georgia generally. I specifically asked them to describe differences in religious practices and “traditions and customs”, allowing them to interpret the latter as they saw fit. My consultants consider the autocephalous Georgian Orthodox and Greek Orthodox churches to be fundamentally “the same”. The most mentioned difference concerns the calendars: the Georgian Orthodox church follows the Julian calendar, whereas the Greek Orthodox Church follows the Gregorian calendar. Whenever this difference is stated, consultants also assert that they take it to be a minor, even superficial one. They frequently mention the church’s ORTHODOXY as the most crucial and uniting factor. As AK puts it after explaining that her in-group and “Georgians” celebrate the same holidays:

(34) We have the same bible (AK, 0:47:57-0:48:04)

- 1 AK: *pravoslavnye oni pravoslavnye my nikakoy raznitsy tam netu*
Orthodox they Orthodox we any difference there not_is
2 *odna u nas bibliya*
one at us Bible
'they are Orthodox, we are Orthodox, there is no difference there at all,
we have the same Bible'

In excerpt 34, AK closes her explication of similarities between “Georgian” and “Greek” religious practices by emphasizing that both “groups”, which I had established in asking that question, are “Orthodox”. This is achieved by repeating the fronting of *pravoslavnye* “Orthodox” in both instances, creating emphasis through both word order and repetition. Therefore, there is “no difference” between them, evidenced by their recourse to the same foundational scripture: *odna u nas bibliya* “we have the same Bible” (2). This answer’s focus on what is perceived to be the essence of their faith is also apparent in another frequently heard sentence: *vera u nas odna* ‘faith at us one’ “our faith is the same” (for instance EM, 0:48:30).

Interestingly, this is quite often voiced in conjunction with statements about other cultural practices being similar, as in the case of LT who asserts *u nas odinakovaya vera vospitanie obryady* “we have the same faith, upbringing, rites” (LT, 0:10:40). Regarding “other cultural customs”, however, not all of my consultants would agree with LT. Ten consultants (20.4%) state that they perceive some differences in this respect, although half of them could not come up with any examples. The others mention differences in food, dances or marriage customs, none of which are presented as “core” practices in any

way.²⁷ Consultants frequently attribute this perceived “sameness” to the time their community has spent living in Georgia (for instance IS, 0:45:47). MP takes this a step further in the following excerpt:

(35) I dance the Georgian way (MP, 0:40:57-0:41:25)

- 1 CH: *i sushchestvuyut li kakie-libo drugie kul'turnye osobennosti*
and exist_they whether any other cultural peculiarities
- 2 (-) *e mezhdu: grekami*
between Greeks
- 3 MP: *grekami i gruzinami [da]*
Greeks and Georgians yes
- 4 CH: *[da]*
yes
- 5 NL: *[mhm]*
- 6 MP: *(3) ya znaesh' skazhu chto net (-) pochemu net °h ya to chto*
I know_2SG will_say_I that no why no I that what
- 7 *zdes' v gruzii zhivu [kak] gruzin tak i ya gruzin*
here in Georgia live_I how Georgian_M so and I Georgian_M
- 8 *vot tak (ya s etim zhivu)*
well so I with this live_I
- 9 CH: *[mhm] da*
yes
- 10 NL: *da*
yes
- 11 MP: *po-drugomu ne bylo ya grets: po-grecheski ne znayu*
differently not was I Gree_ the_Greek_way not know_I
- 12 *tantsevat' ne znayu po-grecheski nichego ne [znayu]*
to_dance not know_I the_Greek_way nothing not know_I
- 13 NL: *[da]*
yes
- 14 MP: *[tak chto] po-gruzinski potantsuyu po [((chuckles))]*
so that the_Georgian_way will_dance_I in
- 15 CH: *[((chuckles))] [((laughs))]*
- 16 NL: *[((chuckles))]*

- 1 CH: and are there any other cultural peculiarities between Greeks
- 3 MP: between Greeks and Georgians? [yes]
- 4 CH: [yes]

27 Notably, when I started to ask about these “differences”, a number of consultants first understood me as referring to differences between “Georgian Greeks” and “Greek Greeks” or between “Georgia” and “Greece” in general. This also suggests that such “differences” are perceived, if at all, as minimal.

- 5 NL: [mhm]
 6 MP: I, you know, will say no, why not? I live here in Georgia like a
 7 Georgian, so I am Georgian so (I live with this)
 9 CH: [mhm] yes
 10 NL: yes
 11 MP: it wasn't differently, I Gree_ the Greek way I can't, I don't know the
 12 Greek way to dance, I don't know anything
 13 NL: [yes]
 14 MP: so I'll dance the Georgian way [((chuckles))]
 15 CH: [((chuckles))] [((laughs))]
 16 NL: [((chuckles))]

At the beginning of excerpt 35, MP supports me in establishing that my question is whether there are any “cultural differences” between “Georgian Greeks” and “Georgians” (1-3). MP had earlier ruled out the possibility of any “religious differences” with the normative statement that they “should not exist”. He now also denies the existence of other differences, and explains that *zdes' v gruzii zhivu kak gruzin* “here in Georgia I live like a Georgian” (7). This comparison of his lifestyle with that of a “Georgian” is then taken a step further: *tak i ya gruzin* “so I am also Georgian” (7). He thereby not only equates the way he lives with how a “Georgian” would, but asserts his membership in that category. While my question had set up two different categories, MP here establishes the boundary as a permeable one, crossable by “living like” a member of the other category. He provides an example as “proof”, namely that he cannot dance *po-grecheski* “the Greek way” (11-12). He strengthens this by repeating *ne znayu* “I don't know (how to)” three times. In line 14 he tells us his solution to this “problem” – since he presumably finds it necessary to dance on social occasions: *tak chto po-gruzinski potantsuyu* “so I'll dance the Georgian way”. This satisfactorily closes the sequence with all three of us voicing amusement (14-16).

Crucially, this is not a case of a boundary dissolving between the categories GREEK and GEORGIAN, exemplified in different ways of dancing. This is a highly salient example, since both the “Greek” and the “Georgian” way of dancing are perceived to be distinctive and highly elaborate each in its own way, not just by MP. Instead, by positioning himself as “incapable” of dancing “the Greek way”, MP resorts to the way of dancing that is contextually more readily available, namely “the Georgian way”. Therefore, this is not a case of liminality, with perhaps a new way of dancing that combines “Greek” and “Georgian” elements, but a case of individual assimilation. Based on how MP first answers the question (6), we can assume that he adduces his own example in order to make a more general statement about the community.

Table 7.2: Feeling as “Greek”, “Georgian”, or both

	Greek		more Georgian		both		no answer		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Urum urban	2	18.2	0	0	7	63.6	2	18.2	11	100
Urum rural	8	66.6	1	8.3	2	16.6	1	8.3	12	100
Pontic urban	4	40	2	20	4	40	0	0	10	100
Pontic rural	8	50	0	0	5	31.3	3	18.5	16	100
Total	22	45	3	6.1	18	36.7	6	12.2	49	100

However, while MP positions himself in excerpt 35 as GEORGIAN, this holds only for the very specific context of speaking about “cultural differences”, not for others in which he positions himself unequivocally and only as GREEK. In order to tease out these subtleties, I asked consultants towards the end of the interview whether they could think of situations in which they would “feel especially Greek”.²⁸ After exploring these situations, I would then ask about situations in which they might “feel especially Georgian”, followed by a similar exploration of these situations. These are very direct questions aimed precisely at probing their identification with these two categories. They were intended to complement the analysis of categories and identifications emerging from the open questions and were quite helpful in establishing the primacy of ANCESTRY in how many – but not all – consultants trace their belonging, as will be further discussed in section D.

Consultants’ positionings in the context of these two questions are given in Table 7.2. The categories were derived as follows: those consultants who could think only of situations where they felt “Greek” and denied feeling “Georgian” in any situation were put in the category “Greek”. Those who found situations for feeling both “Greek” and “Georgian” are given under “both”. Those consultants who had difficulties finding a situation in which they would feel “especially Greek” and stated that given the choice, they would consider themselves to be either “more Georgian” or “Georgian” are to be found under “more Georgian”.

Notably, while 22 (45%) of consultants stated they could only ever “feel Greek”, a combined tally of those who identified situations for both, and those who expressed “feeling more Georgian”, amounts to almost the same:

28 The question I asked was: *est' situatsii v kotorykh vy chustvujete sebya osobenno grekami* “are there situations in which you feel especially Greek?”

21 consultants (42.8%). For both Pontic and Urum Greeks, consultants living in cities were more likely to consider themselves as belonging multiply. Importantly, all those consultants who answered that they could only ever “feel Greek” interpreted this question as somehow connected to their GREEK ANCESTRY. For instance, MP, who in excerpt 35 tells us that he “is Georgian” by virtue of living in Georgia, and who calls Georgia “his country” in excerpt 14, denied “feeling Georgian” in the context of these questions because for him, these were questions about ancestry rather than individual choice. I will explore this complex in greater detail in Section D. below and now focus on those who talk about belonging multiply.

Consultants who reported situations for both “feeling Greek” and “feeling Georgian” clearly did not interpret these questions as prompting an “either-or” answer – and some consultants’ explanations may be fairly interpreted as preempting and/or refusing the restriction to only one category. The following excerpt is taken from the interview with MC, a 34-year-old Urum Greek professional living in Tbilisi. Excerpt 36 is her answer to Nika Loladze’s question, which language is “currently the most important” to her.

(36) Everything in me is Georgian (MC, 0:37:56-0:38:13)²⁹

- 1 MC: *kartuli ra tkma unda (-) arts imas e berdzeni var vambob*
Georgian what say should not_even this Greek am say_I
- 2 *ubralod ekhla ra_dav_itsi ra kartveli var ar*
simply now know_2SG what Georgian am no
- 3 *[met'q`vian]*
say_they
- 4 NL: [mhm]
- 5 MC: *debili khar ranairi kartveli khar kho mara*
stupid are_2SG what_kind_of Georgian are_2SG yes but
- 6 NL: mhm
- 7 MC: *q'oveltvis vapiksireb ro erovnebit var berdzeni [mara*
always highlight_I that nationality_with am Greek but
- 8 *ai] is raghatsa rats aris is [mtlianad] kartulia*
look_here that something since is it wholly Georgian_is
- 9 *chemshi*
me_in
- 10 NL: [mhm] [mhm]

- 1 MC: Georgian, of course, even though I’m Greek I say, you know, if I said I
- 2 am a Georgian, they won’t [say to me]

29 This interview was conducted in Georgian.

- 4 NL: [mhm]
 5 MC: are you stupid, what kind of Georgian are you but
 6 NL: mhm
 7 MC: I always highlight that my nationality is Greek [but there is something]
 8 inside me that is entirely Georgian
 10 NL: [mhm] [mhm]

MC answers the question very clearly with *kartuli ra tkma unda* “Georgian of course”, which she strengthens by stating that this is the case “even though” she is “Greek” (1). She goes on to explain that if she positioned herself as “being Georgian” by uttering *kartveli var* “I’m Georgian”, this would be accepted: *ar met’q’vian debili khar ranairi kartveli khar* “they won’t say to me are you stupid, what kind of Georgian are you?” (5).³⁰ She explains how she *q’oveltvis* “always” underscores how she belongs in more than one way: *erovnebit var berdzeni* “by nationality I am Greek” (7), while at the same time *is raghatsa rats aris is mtlianad kartulia chemshi* “there is something in me that is entirely Georgian” (8-9). Crucially, this is not a way of playing down her GREEK category membership in the sense of reducing it to a trace of her ancestry. This becomes apparent shortly after this excerpt, when NL asks her about situations in which she might “feel Greek”. She expresses “great pride” in the “Greek cultural achievements” and closes her explanation with: *ai orive mkhare meamaq’eba khvdebi esets kartulits da berdnulits* “so, I’m proud of both sides, you understand? the Georgian and the Greek” (MC, 0:39:09). She thereby positions herself unambiguously as belonging multiply, being both GREEK and GEORGIAN.

This is expressed similarly by AK, who actually voices the image of “rootedness” I have already used often, also analyzed in Sideri (2006).

(37) I’m a Greek Georgian (AK, 0:30:01)

- 1 AK: *ya raz zhivu zdes’ uzhe stol’ko let ya tozhe schitayus’*
 I as live_I here already so_many years I also consider_myself_I
 2 *korennaya gruzinka << chuckling > uzhe > grecheskoy*
 rooted Georgian_F already Greek_F
 3 *gruzinkoy kak govoryat*
 Georgian_F how say_they
 ‘since I’ve lived here already so many years, I also consider myself
 already a native Georgian, a Greek Georgian as they say’

30 Note that *debili* ‘stupid’ is one of the less aggressive ways of expressing one’s doubt in the soundness of the interlocutor’s reasoning in Georgian.

As we have already seen in a number of other excerpts, AK cites the time she has spent living in Georgia *stol’ko let* “so many years” (1) as a reason to consider herself to be a *korennaya gruzinka* ‘rooted Georgian’ “native Georgian” (2).³¹ Again, this is not perceived to counter her GREEKNESS, which she clarifies by labeling herself *grecheskoy gruzinkoy* “Greek Georgian” (2-3). This is verified as an existing category, i.e. not something she came up with herself, by citing an unspecific general public with *kak govoryat* “as they say” (3). GREEK GEORGIAN is thus established as a “known” and therefore valid category encompassing both categories she perceives herself to be a member of. Importantly, this membership is not portrayed as challenged in Georgia, but instead affirmed through the use of a label she attributes to the societal majority. As in excerpt 17 analyzed in Chapter 6, AK NORMALIZES her experiences – here her identification – as “nothing out of the ordinary”.

Consultants thus consider themselves as BELONGING TO GEORGIA by virtue of it being their “homeland”, through their GEORGIAN CITIZENSHIP, and by “being rooted” through physical and emotional ties in Georgia. They further consider the categories GREEK and GEORGIAN to be very similar in what many consider to be a very important part of their identification, namely ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY, as well as in GREEKS having assimilated to “Georgian customs” over the time their community has lived there. This is, then, an instance of a boundary that might have been more relevant in the past but has lost much of its relevance today, thereby becoming permeable or even disappearing in certain contexts. For over a third of consultants, this implies self-identification as both GREEK and GEORGIAN that goes far deeper than citizenship.

D. Irreducible differences? “Religion” and “Ancestry”

In this final part of the analysis, I will focus on two attributes that are used with some frequency to establish “insurmountable” boundaries in the interview corpus: RELIGION and ANCESTRY. As with the other parts of the analysis, this does not hold for all consultants, nor do I claim it to be any more representative for self-identifying members of Georgia’s Greek community than other parts of the analysis. Both RELIGION and ANCESTRY emerge, however, as somehow omnirelevant in many interviews.

31 Cf. the discussion of the Soviet policies around *korenizatsiya* ‘putting down roots’ “nativization” in Chapter 2 and in Maisuradze (2015a).

Table 7.3: Is it acceptable to marry a person who is not “Greek”?

	yes		Muslims difficult		no Muslims		only Orthod.		better not		no answer	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
U urb	2	18.2	0	0	1	9.1	3	27.3	1	9.1	4	36.4
U rur	4	33.3	1	8.3	4	33.3	1	8.3	1	8.3	1	8.3
P urb	5	50	1	10	3	30	1	10	0	0	0	0
P rur	6	37.5	4	25	5	31.25	0	0	0	0	1	6.25
Total	17	34.7	6	12.2	13	26.4	5	10.2	2	4	6	12.2

We have seen in this Chapter how RELIGION is used both to explain the fundamental similarities between GREEKS and GEORGIANS (cf. Section C.) and to position ACH'ARIANS as fundamentally different from GEORGIANS and therefore also from their fellow ORTHODOX GREEKS (cf. Section B.). RELIGION and ANCESTRY also play an important role in arguing for LANGUAGE being not as important a marker of national identification by some consultants, as discussed in Chapter 5 and Section A. above. To avoid relying on this, I asked my consultants about the acceptability of “exogamous marriages”. The precise question was: *schitaete li vy priemlemym brak greka s chelovekom drugoy natsional'nosti* “do you consider marriage of a Greek with a person from another nationality to be acceptable?”. If they answered affirmatively, the follow-up question would be *i s musul'maninom* “and with a Muslim?”. The answers are summarized in Table 7.3.

The endpoints of the “acceptability continuum” are consultants giving a clear “yes” answer on the one hand and those answering what might be summarized as “only Orthodox” or “better not” on the other. About a third of all consultants consider it completely acceptable if a “Greek” person marries someone they would not categorize as “Greek”, regardless of that person’s religious affiliation. Notably, consultants’ age does not correlate with a “yes” answer – even though some of the younger consultants position themselves as “more progressive” by stating that it might pose a problem “for older people”. Most consultants stating “yes” tell us that it would be up to the people in question, in variations of *serdsu ne prikazhesh* “you don’t command the heart” (SC, 0:58:15) or *bog odin* “God is one” (NP, 0:28:32). Overall, Pontic Greeks in the corpus appear to be a little more open than Urum Greeks to marriages with “non-Greeks”. Interestingly, urban Urum Greek consultants appear to be the most focused on “Greek marriage”, with

four of them (36.4%) answering “better not” or “only Orthodox”. Note that the latter also excludes any other “Christian” denominations like members of the “Armenian Apostolic Church” or “Catholics” – which were usually only brought up in the conversation because I was perceived to be “Catholic” due to my German nationality.³² Crucially, the problem with “marrying a non-Greek” is established as hinging on that person’s religious affiliation, instead of on their national affiliation – which my question had established as a possibility – or any other feature of their personality. This is, of course, also apparent in those answers that find a marriage with “Muslims” to be “difficult” or that outrightly reject this possibility. This sometimes occurs prior to me asking, as in the case of the interview with EC, which I discuss in detail in Höfler (2018b). Some consultants expressed surprise that I would even raise such a possibility, or responded with a curt *ne mozhet byt’* “it cannot be” (LV, 0:22:47). While I did not ask consultants for their reasons, those who went on to justify their rejection usually referred to the “practical difficulties” such a trans-religious marriage would entail. Numbering 19 consultants (38.7%), those skeptical of marriage to a person with “Muslim” background take up the largest portion in the sample. Adding the five consultants who answered “only Orthodox” – an even stricter criterion of religious affiliation – the number rises to 24 consultants (48.9%), almost half of the sample.

These marriage preferences again suggest that for many consultants RELIGION is an omnirelevant device in the more expansive sense introduced in Chapter 5 (cf. Sacks, 1992). Since it is ultimately the analyst who has to decide whether or not to attribute omnirelevance to a sequence, this is done sparingly in MCA literature, mainly in order to analyze interlocutors’ orientation to things very clearly referenced within the interactional context (Fitzgerald et al., 2009; Fitzgerald / Rintel, 2013). However, having seen how consultants make use of RELIGION as a device to order their social world, the concept of omnirelevance offers a deeper understanding of how consultants categorize people as falling unambiguously into one of two broad categories: CHRISTIAN or MUSLIM. This emerged across contexts, as consultants spoke about their provenance in the Ottoman Empire; their language use both individually and as a community; their belonging to and in Georgia – also and especially in Ts’alk’a, where this belonging and self-identification is

32 In the conversation with DP and FP in Ts’alk’a, a lively discussion ensued over the question of whether “Catholics” could be considered “real Christians” or not. It was settled by NL pointing out that “Catholics also go to church”, which was evaluated as sufficient “proof” of “Christianity” (DP, 0:33:06-0:34:31).

sometimes contested; their struggle to be recognized in Greece; the blurring of boundaries with “Georgians” that is partly based on a perception of shared religious affiliation; and finally their marriage preferences. In all of these contexts, not only do consultants ascribe very different – mostly opposing – attributes to these categories, they also orient very differently towards individuals to whom they attribute different category memberships. Finally these categories are afforded very different degrees of internal differentiation: while CHRISTIANS appear in a number of religious and national denominations, this is drastically reduced with regard to MUSLIMS who are in many instances simply positioned as a homogeneous out-group.³³ The repeated reference to their community’s ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY, then, emerges as an important narrative legitimizing my consultants’ self-identification and tracing their story through the centuries, i.e. it is a tidemark deeply enmeshed in who they portray themselves to be (cf. Green 2009).

The other fundamental point of identification I suggest treating as omnirelevant is ANCESTRY, which has emerged in this role time and again in the analysis, especially in terms of negating the importance of LANGUAGE for their self-identification and of struggling – to different degrees of involvement – for recognition in Greece. ANCESTRY has also come up, perhaps unexpectedly, in the results given in Table 7.2, exploring the answers given to whether consultants could find situations in which they would feel “especially Georgian”. 22 consultants (45%) said they could only “be Greek” in the context of these questions, despite in other contexts positioning themselves as BELONGING TO GEORGIA in deeper ways than CITIZENSHIP.³⁴

Importantly, the question is taken by many consultants who state they “could not be Georgian” to be a question about their ANCESTRY and not about their individual feeling of belonging. EC, for instance, explains for a whole minute what might be summarized by one of her utterances: *ya ne gruzinka kak ya mogu gruzinkoy chuvstvovat* ‘I’m not Georgian, how could I feel like a Georgian?’ (EC, 0:50:21). “Feeling Georgian” is therefore impossible for someone who “is Greek”. This evaluation is shared by most consultants who answer similarly. Thus NP asserts: *ya grekom rodilsya grekom umru* ‘I was born Greek, I will die Greek’ (NP, 0:25:14) – suggesting ANCESTRY as the

33 On out-group homogenization cf. Dijk (1987); Roth (2005); Tajfel (1981); Wodak et al. (2009).

34 Cf. the discussion of excerpts 14 in Chapter 5 and 35 in Section C..

crucial point in this context.³⁵ Recall also SC’s joke about a person “having to be born Greek” in order to take pride in it (excerpt 7 in Chapter 5). A further case in point is the interview with IP and TV, who deplore the continued reliance on ANCESTRY as an attribute determining someone’s belonging “here” in the post-Soviet space, with TV establishing this question as “a delicate matter” (excerpt 26 in Section A.).

Analyzing ANCESTRY as an omnirelevant device is made further plausible by the fact that a number of consultants refer to their categorization as “Greek” in their Soviet passport in contexts ranging from language use through negative experiences in Greece and on to questions about “feeling Georgian”. In the latter context, I was also told that consultants “would never change their surname”, i.e. change a “Greek surname” to a “Georgian surname” so as to pass as GEORGIAN. Some attribute the practice of surname-changing to “other minorities” in Georgia or to “Georgians” in Greece and evaluate it negatively as a “betrayal”, committed in order to gain advantages by passing as a member of the respective societal majority (cf. Hewitt, 1989; Sideri, 2006). ANCESTRY might therefore be analyzed as yet another trace (cf. Green 2009) of the Soviet way of evaluating behavior in terms of its “adequacy” to one’s national affiliation – which was based exclusively on ancestry and could only be changed by children in “mixed marriages” (cf. Arel, 2003; Brubaker, 1996; Slezkine, 1994; Suny, 1993).

Thus, while I had intended the question to be about emotional attachment, these answers point to the undiminished importance of ANCESTRY for some of my consultants today. In most everyday contexts, this might be conceptualized as a “thin line on the ground” that can be “stepped over”, blurring the boundary between GREEKS and GEORGIANS to the point of disappearance. In other contexts, like the one apparently established by my question, it is instead perceived to be “uncrossable” since trying to pass as “Georgian” would betray both “Georgians” and “Greeks”.

As they have emerged to be of varying but usually high levels of importance in most of the conversational contexts we have looked at, I therefore propose to treat both RELIGION and ANCESTRY as omnirelevant devices. As such, consultants use them to order their social world and to make it intelligible to themselves and the outsider in the context of our interview conversation.

35 Only one consultant, AL, explains this less in terms of “being born that way”, i.e. ANCESTRY, but in terms of not being well versed enough in “Georgian traditions” to claim membership in that category.

Chapter 8: Discussion

The processes through which identification and belonging are constructed in Georgia's Greek community has now been analyzed with focus on positioning through LANGUAGE, post-Soviet transformations, and the (un)making of boundaries. In this Chapter I integrate these threads, and show how the analysis contributes to our theoretical understanding of such processes more generally. I will firstly delineate how an analytical focus on PLACE and TIME supports an analysis of the emergence of the SOCIAL categories established in the interview conversations. Secondly, I will look at the interactional devices my consultants use in the corpus in order to position themselves, their community and "others", to draw and contest boundaries, and to speak about these topics in interview conversations with two outsiders. Thirdly, I will explore the boundaries emerging and dissolving in the interviews in terms of their quality and what is related by them, and discuss how this contributes to a deeper understanding of boundary (un)making.

Regarding how PLACE, TIME and the SOCIAL are related and used by my consultants in speaking about their identification and belonging, the most relevant and pervasive (social) categories established in the corpus are being GREEK and BELONGING TO GEORGIA. The latter both in terms of a deep emotional attachment – articulated as ROOTEDNESS – and in terms of holding CITIZENSHIP and positioning the speaker and their community as GOOD CITIZENS. I now explore the spatial and the temporal dimensions of both, before synthesizing them with their social aspect.

In the analyzed excerpts, PLACE emerges as relevant in three ways. Firstly, consultants highlight their BELONGING to a specific village, a region in Georgia (Ts'alk'a or Tetrts'q'aro for instance), the Georgian nation state or the post-Soviet space as a whole, which is conceptualized as unified through the shared experiences of Soviet administration. Consultants frequently underscore their BELONGING TO GEORGIA, which they achieve mainly in two ways. The first one is to emphasize their strong relationship with the *zemlya* 'land', which by ROOTING them in their place establishes both their BELONGING and in its lived facticity crucially also their right to belong – to Georgia as much as to their region or village. While this process of ROOTING a community in a particular place is only achieved with time, this is not always stressed in the corpus. The second way of establishing BELONGING TO GEORGIA does

center explicitly on this temporal dimension, i.e. the time consultants and their community have spent in a particular place and/or Georgia. In this view, the everyday experiences of having lived in that place and of experiencing its changing circumstances either contribute to belonging or are the main factor in establishing it. The metaphor of being *ROOTED* is not only mentioned explicitly by AK in excerpt 37 (Chapter 7),¹ but also helps us understand the process of emigration as one of painful “uprooting”. Many consultants express not wishing to go through this process themselves, even though they might speak about loneliness after their family members’ emigration (cf. Chapter 6). From an interactional point of view, this sense of *BELONGING TO GEORGIA* is usually conveyed in the interviews in a matter-of-fact, albeit not necessarily unemotional, way. Interactively, this makes it almost inconceivable for their interlocutor to cast any doubt on their belonging. In contrast to the extreme case formulations used in many of the excerpts discussed in the preceding chapters, we might analyze these as “normal case formulations”, specifically consultants’ successful attempts to *NORMALIZE* their *BELONGING TO GEORGIA*.

The second way *PLACE* is used in the interviews is to establish a contrast between “here” and “there”. “There” most frequently refers to “Greece”, which at times is used as a *pars pro toto* to denote “Europe”. “Here” in most contexts refers to a specific region in Georgia, the Georgian nation state or the post-Soviet space. By establishing juxtaposed spaces, consultants are able to compare alternative ways of “doing things” and to evaluate one of them as offering a better solution to a given problem. The excerpts analyzed in Chapter 7 provide poignantly divergent evaluations of the spaces being compared.

Somewhat obviously, a third way *PLACE* emerges as relevant is in shaping consultants’ experiences. For the Pontic Greek community along Georgia’s Black Sea coast, this is in many cases the (personal or family) experience of deportation after WWII. For the (Urum and Pontic) Greek community in Kvemo Kartli (encompassing Ts’alk’a and Tetrts’q’aro), internal migration from Svaneti and Ach’ara influences which boundaries they draw and which attributes they foreground, in terms of both *BELONGING TO GEORGIA* and their *GREEK* or *GEORGIAN* category membership.²

1 And *korennoy* ‘being at the root’ is a conventionalized way of expressing “nativeness” in Russian, cf. the discussion on *korenizatsiya* in Chapter 2.

2 While fundamental differences between the experiences of living in urban and rural spaces in Georgia abound, these are not particular to Georgia’s Greek community, and so are not examined in this book.

Finally, consultants evoking the post-Soviet sphere as a relevant point of comparison put the spotlight on both *PLACE* and *TIME*. Like no other topic in the corpus, the post-Soviet context allows us to focus on the temporal dimension of *BELONGING TO GEORGIA* and on the challenges consultants narrate as having arisen to their self-identification as *GREEK*. There are four perspectives on *TIME* that I want to explore here. As discussed in Chapter 6, the researcher may firstly focus on the tidemarks of the Soviet experience. In the corpus, these are noticeable in consultants' language competence and in how they evaluate the necessity of speaking a certain language in order to be *GREEK*. The Soviet focus on *ANCESTRY* in establishing national affiliation constituted it as detached from other attributes, such as *LANGUAGE*. However, this focus is not limited to the Soviet Union – it also reveals traces of the Russian Empire's categorization practices. The Russian and Ottoman Empires alike categorized their subjects based on religious affiliation. This "imperial discourse", as I named it in Chapter 5, helps explain the verdict of those consultants who discount the importance of speaking a language associated with a certain national category for membership in said category.³ A tidemark attributed to the Ottoman Empire is furthermore found in the conventionalized narrative of how Urum Greeks came to speak a Turkish rather than a Greek variety as their heritage language, a narrative revisited below.

Another tidemark of the Soviet experience is the frequently voiced perception that national affiliation was not important in everyday life.⁴ Consultants frequently contrast their positive recollections about this and other aspects of "Soviet life" with what came to replace them, thereby establishing the end of the Soviet Union as a temporal threshold. This threshold is constructed as a temporal boundary relating *TODAY* to a very different *YESTERDAY* (cf. Tilly, 2004), as explored in Chapter 6. This is the second perspective on *TIME* emerging from the interviews. The fundamental differences consultants perceive between *TODAY* and *YESTERDAY* make the Soviet Union the most important temporal point of comparison. In tracing the changes this fundamental political, economic, and social transformation engendered for my

3 Consultants evaluating *LANGUAGE* as constitutive for national affiliation may be argued to draw on a discourse that became pervasive with the advent of the modern nation state (cf. Chapter 5).

4 Even the dissenting view of *IP* and *TV* who deplore the tenacity of "Soviet chauvinism" in Chapter 7 centers on the way *NATIONALITY* as constructed in the Soviet Union left its traces (here viewed as problematic) in the post-Soviet conceptualization of *NATIONALITY* and *CITIZENSHIP*.

consultants and their community, I chose to follow the metaphor of FAMILY BREAKDOWN that emerged in the interviews (cf. Chapter 6). As they tell it, the BREAKDOWN took place on two levels. The first is the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a “family of nations”, which is perceived as a loss by some consultants and, in the case of the Georgian nation state, as instantiated by rising nationalism. They describe how this is perceptible on the level of everyday interactions and summarize it in the phrase *gruziya dlya gruzin* “Georgia for Georgians”, which they interpret as questioning their BELONGING TO GEORGIA. On the second level, all my consultants experienced the BREAKDOWN in the individual, highly tangible form of family dissolution, as their family members emigrated to Greece. This also marked the beginning of internal migration from Svaneti and Ach’ara into the regions of Tetrts’q’aro and Ts’alk’a. The massive emigration, the communicative networks between those who left and those who stayed, as well as the personal experiences of some of my consultants in Greece, all make “Greece” as an instantiation of “Europe” the relevant spatial point of comparison.

Relating things on either side of the (temporal) boundary is not the same as focusing on the threshold itself. In Georgia, the post-Soviet transition not only brought profound changes to all spheres of life – political, economical, social – it was also a time of profound insecurity on all these levels, to the point of a civil war in the early 1990s. In many accounts of this time (as exemplified in Chapter 6, excerpt 17) the *liminality* of this phase with its dangerous uncertainties make this topic difficult, or even impossible, to articulate in interviews with an outsider. Importantly, it appears to be the dangerously profound nature of these changes that makes them difficult to speak about, rather than change in itself. Thus, in contrast, many consultants speak with apparent ease about the reforms led by Mikheil Saakashvili following the so-called *Rose Revolution*.

The fourth and final temporal phenomenon I want to highlight is the potential for TIME to further BELONGING and to diminish social boundaries, sometimes to the point of dissolution. As mentioned above, consultants frequently refer to the time their community has spent in Georgia as furthering their indubitable BELONGING TO GEORGIA. This “long time” also becomes relevant when consultants wish to emphasize a blurring of boundaries between GREEKS and GEORGIANS in order to deny any differences between them. At stake for some consultants is not merely their BELONGING TO GEORGIA or the equivalence of their and GEORGIANS’ way of life, but also their multiple self-identification as both GREEK and GEORGIAN, explored in Chapter 7. TIME is also made relevant in speaking about the processes of being accepted

as GREEKS in Greece, especially in terms of improving Georgian Greeks' competence in SMG to a level at which they can pass as "Greek Greeks", and in terms of citizenship requirements. Finally, in Ts'alk'a TIME is established as an important factor enabling people to "get used to each other", thereby calming the economic conflicts attributed to the early phase of internal migration. Especially in the last case, we can see how the fact that a boundary loses its conflictual relevance in everyday life does not necessarily entail its immediate permeability, a dissolution of the categories employed, or a more favorable evaluation of the ascriptions made to them, however.

I will now focus on the social constellations my consultants narrate and co-create. What is crucial about the positions consultants speak of occupying in Greece is that many of them perceive their self-identification as Greek to be denied recognition – at times brutally so. It is not simply the experience of emigration but this social boundary consultants find themselves having to cope with, and they achieve this by contesting and/or embracing it in various ways, as explored in Chapter 7. In cases where the boundary is interactively construed as insurmountably durable, consultants can be seen as either "turning away" or contesting it. In cases where the boundary is construed as permeable, consultants may advocate assimilation to the ways in which they perceive BELONGING to be achieved "there", often by taking the necessary time and changing one's conceptualization of "nationality" and "citizenship".

Secondly, in Ts'alk'a, consultants draw durable boundaries not because village life is "different" or "harsher", but rather based on whether they feel they must defend their GREEK category membership and the right to "their land". As in Greece, a core aspect of this defense is to emphasize their ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY and the time they have spent on the land in question, while DOWNPLAYING LANGUAGE as a relevant marker of national affiliation. In the Pontic Greek villages in Western Georgia, contrastingly, cohabitation of GREEKS and GEORGIANS is portrayed as having "always been" peaceful and harmonious. This is reflected in the reported language competencies of the villagers: GREEKS are assessed as speaking Georgian with native level competence, which is said to hold *vice versa* for their GEORGIAN counterparts' competence in Pontic Greek. Note that while this enables the perception of boundaries as blurred to the point of non-recognition in everyday life, the same does not necessarily hold for contexts in which ANCESTRY is perceived to be foregrounded, as shown in Table 7.2 and discussed in Chapter 7.

Speaking about their self-identification as GREEK, consultants in many cases and across various contexts voice their self-identification in terms of

ANCESTRY and historical trajectory, as well as RESILIENCE in holding on to their RELIGION. This is not to say that LANGUAGE is not afforded a substantial role by some consultants, either to indubitably position them as GREEK or as a desideratum. LANGUAGE in the form of competence in the state language Georgian is also considered important for being a GOOD CITIZEN of the Georgian nation state. Consultants who do not speak Georgian very well therefore say it would be desirable to improve their proficiency. Thus, LANGUAGE is not infrequently assessed as “important” in the context of speaking about their language competence and perhaps even when asked to evaluate a certain variety’s “importance” for their self-identification. However, when consultants describe being challenged, they foreground ANCESTRY and RELIGION as “proof” that their self-identification is well-founded. While in some cases this may have to do with a challenge based on someone’s seemingly “deviant” language use, this recourse to ANCESTRY is also made relevant in narratives of alienation in Greece as told by Pontic Greek consultants, for instance OP in Chapter 7.

It is impossible now to establish how my consultants would have spoken about their BELONGING in the Soviet Union, i.e. which regional, social, and political categories they might have emphasized or downplayed in various contexts. What is very clear, however, is that in interviews almost 25 years after its dissolution, their political belonging – in terms of the rights and obligations perceived to be engendered by CITIZENSHIP – is portrayed as indubitably tied to the Georgian nation state, as is their BELONGING TO GEORGIA.

Having discussed *what* consultants make relevant in our interviews, I will now turn to *how* this is achieved. To this end, I will summarize the most important interactional devices consultants use to speak about their identification, their belonging, and the boundaries they perceive and (un)make in their social world. I will not dwell on the basic processes of categorization, ascription and evaluation, which I have elucidated throughout the analysis. Two devices are used across all contexts, while others are specific to certain topics in this corpus. The most pervasive device is to CONTRAST spaces, time spans, and social categories, i.e. “groups” of people. This CONTRAST involves the juxtaposition of two entities that are constructed as very different, with one of them evaluated as superior, morally and thereby normatively. It is usually the first established item that is evaluated positively while the second is constructed as deviating from the established norm.

The second device is to establish a GENERAL RULE about how the topic at hand is “generally” dealt with, i.e. the rule is established as emerging

not from the opinion, experiences, wishes, or desires of the speaker, but from broadly accepted social norms. Not infrequently, this GENERAL RULE is evaluated positively, which marks deviation from it as normatively inferior. GENERAL RULES may be established in a number of ways, for instance by simply stating the rule without any argumentative support as to why and how this rule should apply. Most frequently, however, consultants adduce examples as “proof” of the rule’s application. These might take the form of extreme case formulations, as we have seen with some frequency in this book, i.e. by showing that the GENERAL RULE also applies in cases established as “far flung”. The other form comprises examples generated from the immediate interview context or from narrating one’s own experiences. “Proving” the rule in this way makes it next to impossible for the interlocutor to question it without risking loss of face (cf. Roth, 2005).

In addition to supporting the construction of GENERAL RULES, NARRATING one’s own experiences serves a number of further interactive purposes in the corpus. First and foremost, this device enables the narrator to tell their perspective on the narrated events and thereby “set the record straight”, for instance in regard to past injustices (cf. Czyżewsky et al., 1995). There are two ways in which these narratives are relevant for the (un)making of boundaries. One is to tell a story about a categorization or boundary that the narrator perceives to be wrong, thus attempting to unmake said boundary. The aim of such a narration is to depict and subsequently question the category system, ascriptions, evaluations, and boundaries established by others. We have encountered this especially in connection with boundaries drawn by “Greek Greeks” in Greece, which challenged consultants’ self-identification as GREEK, and with the struggle for belonging in Ts’alk’a. In both contexts, consultants make a point of explicating exactly where they perceive their counterparts to have wronged them.

In contrast, the other way NARRATIVES are used in the corpus is to establish boundaries. This is usually achieved by narrating a story in which the speaker ascribes a fundamental “lack of basic civility” to a person representing the relevant out-group. This might be a person perceived to wrongly exclude them from GREEK category membership (in this case including a re-evaluation of the hierarchy established by the out-group member), members of the ACH’ARIAN out-group in Ts’alk’a “misbehaving” and “destroying things”, a perpetrator of a “mindless nationalistic” attack, or an Urum Greek person speaking their heritage variety in Greece.

There appears to be, thirdly, a conventionalized narrative in the community about how Urum Greeks came to speak a Turkish variety. Consultants relate

how their ancestors in the Ottoman Empire were forced to “choose” between giving up their (Greek) language or their (Orthodox Christian) religion. In portraying their ancestors as having “chosen” RELIGION over LANGUAGE, speakers both position RELIGION as more relevant for their GREEK category membership, and imbue their community with a certain RESILIENCE in holding on to their faith in the face of substantial adversity. That Urum Greeks speak a Turkish variety to this day should therefore be considered as another tidemark, accounted for in narratives of subjugation and displacement.

Attributing RESILIENCE to oneself or one’s community is another communicative device used with some frequency in the corpus. We have encountered it mostly in connection with how consultants speak about the liminal phase following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Consultants make it relevant in terms of adapting to profound transformations, countering nationalist attacks, and coping with the emigration of family members. This is also the context in which consultants most frequently NORMALIZE their experiences, thereby DOWNPLAYING their individuality and/or their community being in any way exceptional. This is achieved, for instance, by emphasizing that the transformations were “difficult for everybody”, making their personal experiences somehow not “interesting” enough to talk about. This is the opposite of establishing a GENERAL RULE, since it DOWNPLAYS the speaker’s experiences rather than elevating them to the level of being imbued with explanatory force of how “things work”.

The final interactional device we frequently encounter is to SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY to forces outside of the individual’s or their community’s field of influence. The narrative of “choosing between language and religion” is an instance of this method, which is mostly used to explain the community’s perceived shortcomings in terms of competence in languages considered to be “important” either for their self-identification as GREEK or their BELONGING TO GEORGIA, as discussed in Chapter 5.

What, then, does this study contribute to the theoretical discussion on positioning, identification, belonging, and the (un)making of boundaries? Crucially, it underscores the importance of the sequential context for positioning and boundary (un)making. I have analyzed two illustrative examples of this. First, there is IP, who in tracing the historical trajectory of his community and their heritage variety Pontic Greek initially emphasizes the proximity of “Ancient Greek” and “Pontic Greek” (cf. excerpt 4, Chapter 5). In this, “Pontic Greek” is positioned as closer to “Ancient Greek” than to “Modern Greek”, thereby strengthening his community’s link to antiquity and thus their GREEK category membership. In the same excerpt IP also compares

“Modern Greek” and “Pontic Greek”, establishing that as “Pontic Greeks” his community also understands some “Modern Greek”, thereby also construing a link to “contemporary Greece”. When asking about the languages he is competent in, I later pick up on this difference he had established between “Modern Greek” and “Pontic Greek”. This takes place right after he has explained how “Georgian Greeks” were not recognized as “genuine Greeks” in Greece and is understood by IP to be a very different conversational context. This becomes apparent when he diverges from his earlier assessment and states that “Pontic Greek” and “Modern Greek” are basically the same language (just prior to excerpt 26, Chapter 7). In this context, his focus is on establishing that, in his view, “Georgian Greeks” conceptualize the relationship between “nationality” and “citizenship” differently (and incorrectly) compared to how these matters are handled in Greece (correctly). Thus, his argument about his in-group’s “deviant” conceptualizations is supported by him downplaying the importance of the linguistic differences for how his in-group is perceived in Greece. The linguistic difference is, hence, positioned as basically non-existent in correcting my question about his language competence. Here, it is not the existence of *difference* itself – in this case linguistic – which establishes a boundary. Instead, it is the difference that is conversationally made relevant – namely the different conceptualization of “nationality” and “citizenship” – that establishes the boundary, in line with observations made since Barth (1969).

The second example comes from the interview with MP, who declares Georgia to be “his country”, expresses his wish to speak Georgian (excerpt 14, Chapter 5), and further positions himself as GEORGIAN due to the time his community has spent in Georgia, which he exemplifies by his “dancing the Georgian way” (excerpt 35, Chapter 7). Thus, in the context of establishing his BELONGING TO GEORGIA and in answering my question about potential differences between “Greeks” and “Georgians”, MP emphasizes their similarity and the blurring of boundaries between GEORGIAN GREEKS and GEORGIANS. In the context of asking whether there are situations in which he might *feel* “Georgian”, he denies this, however, and makes his GREEK ANCESTRY relevant (cf. Section D. of Chapter 7). This turns the question from one of personal emotional attachment and rootedness into one probing a trace of the Soviet system of categorizing its subjects’ national affiliation in terms of their ancestry, as discussed above. It is therefore a heavily context-dependent boundary and one that in many contexts is blurred and permeable to the point of being imperceptible.

Examining more closely the qualities of the boundaries that are made and unmade in the interviews allows us to appraise the boundary theories introduced in Chapter 3. First of all, there does, indeed, appear to be a distinction between *difference* and *boundary*, with the latter carrying more consequential – at times painful – implications for ordering the social world. Further to the two examples above, which illustrate this and show how boundaries are context-dependent, the differences between the categories GREEK and GEORGIAN are not perceived as equally *consequential* for all consultants. Consultants may also underscore their multiple belongings and self-identify as GREEK GEORGIANS. Thus, from a theoretical perspective, some consultants establish a *boundary* – i.e. a difference with consequences – between these two categories, while for others this is established as merely a matter of – inconsequential – *difference* (cf. Barth 1969; Lamont / Molnár 2002).

Secondly, the boundaries established in the interviews vary not only across conversational contexts but also across the categories that are made relevant. An approach centering on *adding* boundary layers but theoretically accounting neither for how they are related to each other nor for their removal (cf. Haselsberger, 2014) does not help explain how category-bound predicates and activities are made more or less relevant in a conversation. It also does not offer an explanation for processes of diminishing and/or shifting boundaries. Both issues, however, clearly emerge in the analysis. Approaches taking into account the historical (un)making of boundaries are much more promising in this respect (cf. Green, 2009; Hirschauer, 2014). This historical perspective is championed for instance by Wimmer (2008, 2013), though he does little to account for the interactional boundary (un)making on which I have focused. Analyzing the conversationally established and contested boundaries multidimensionally (cf. Schiffauer et al. 2018) has shown to be very productive in exploring their full breadth and complexity (cf. Gerst et al., 2018b).

From a methodological perspective, finally, these findings highlight the importance of combining an approach that is on the one hand open enough to enable consultants to establish what is relevant to them and to let these relevancies emerge without explicitly asking for them, while including more probing questions on the other. In the present case, not asking consultants to evaluate the importance of Georgian or Russian, for instance, has proven immensely fruitful in allowing them to articulate their BELONGING TO GEORGIA precisely because I did not ask for it. On the other hand, asking sometimes very direct questions has been advantageous in corroborating points emerging from the open parts of the conversation. This was especially the case when

consultants quite clearly understood different questions as creating contexts that foregrounded very different relevancies.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

In this book I have investigated identification, belonging and boundary (un)making in Georgia's Greek community by analyzing how my 49 consultants interactively position themselves, their community and the relevant out-groups they establish. In Chapter 2, I outlined the historical background necessary for understanding the historical resources consultants draw on more or less explicitly in their positioning and boundary work, focusing in particular on the (im)possibilities for identification and belonging in the various spatial and political spheres spanning the last two hundred years. Chapter 3 provided the necessary theoretical and methodological considerations, grounding my research in an approach that analyzes identification, belonging and the (un)making of boundaries as context-dependent and interactively constituted, negotiated and contested. In Chapter 4, I made transparent the processes of establishing the field, interviewing and analyzing the interview conversations. Chapters 5 to 8 were devoted to the analysis proper of the corpus. Chapter 5 addressed the first research question, namely how consultants make the languages they speak relevant for their identification and belonging. The most important finding is that consultants differ in whether they position LANGUAGE as the central category-bound predicate for GREEK category membership or whether they establish RELIGION and/or ANCESTRY to be the crucial defining attribute. The second research question, which asks about the temporal dimension of belonging, was explored in Chapter 6. The investigation showed that the end of the Soviet Union must be understood as a liminal phase of profound uncertainty; that the Soviet Union is established as a temporal point of comparison consultants use to elucidate a TODAY that they construct to be very different from the Soviet YESTERDAY; and that the end of the Soviet Union is spoken about in terms of a FAMILY BREAKDOWN both on the governmental and the personal level. Chapter 7 dealt specifically with the third research question about the (un)making of boundaries, whose connecting quality already featured explicitly in Chapter 5. Here, I showed that consultants differ greatly in how they interactively deal with the boundary many perceive to be imposed on their community in Greece. I also investigated their BELONGING TO GEORGIA in conceptualizations of ROOTEDNESS based on the time Georgian Greeks have lived on Georgian territory and how this time has led to the blurring of the already permeable

boundary between the categories GREEK and GEORGIAN, without, however, completely dissolving it for all consultants. Chapter 8 answered the fourth research question in bringing together the analysis of the preceding Chapters. I explained how positioning, identification, belonging and boundaries are established and contested in interaction, and are context-dependent, both in the lifeworlds narrated in the interviews and in the interview interaction itself. In delineating the interactional devices consultants use, I unfolded not only *what* they make relevant in terms of these questions, but also *how*.

The contribution of this book is threefold. First, it offers a methodologically novel and profound perspective to research on the severely understudied Greek community in Georgia. This account complements historical and anthropological accounts, as well as work from the field of linguistic typology. Secondly, this investigation contributes to regionally interested (post-Soviet) area studies of the Southern Caucasus and the post-Soviet Greek diaspora. Thirdly, it contributes to the transdisciplinary (linguistic, sociological, anthropological) body of research on the interactive construction of identification, belonging and boundary work. By investigating not only the interactive establishment of social categories but also their spatial and temporal dimensions, the present study provides fresh empirical and theoretical perspectives. Crucially, it is not the existence of observable differences – which in this study often take the form of diverging language use – that determines boundary (un)making, but whether these differences are made contextually relevant in establishing, negotiating and contesting boundaries.

Appendix A: Sociolinguistic metadata

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Acronym	Age	Place of residence	Gender	Heritage variety	Competent speaker?	Other languages spoken	personal experience of migration	education
AC	79	rural (Western Georgia)	male	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian, SMG	yes	secondary school
AD	65	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	male	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian	no	vocational training
AK	62	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	female	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian, SMG, Armenian	no	vocational training
AL	59	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	female	Pontic	yes	Russian, SMG, some Georgian	yes	university
AM	49	urban (Tbilisi)	female	Urum	yes	Russian, Georgian, little SMG, Armenian	no	university
AN	37	urban (Batumi)	male	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian, SMG	yes	secondary school
AT	46	urban (Batumi)	female	Pontic	no	Russian, Georgian, little SMG	no	university
DA	55	rural (Western Georgia)	male	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian	no	
DG	44	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	female	Pontic	yes	Russian	yes	secondary school
DL	27	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	female	Urum	yes	Russian, SMG, little Georgian	yes	university
DP	31	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	female	Urum	yes	Russian, some Georgian, little SMG	yes	secondary school
EA	34	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	female	Urum	yes	Russian, Georgian, some SMG	no	university
EC	37	urban (Tbilisi)	female	Urum	yes	Russian, SMG, some Georgian	yes	vocational training
ED	21	urban (Batumi)	female	Pontic	little	Russian, Georgian, little SMG	no	university
EM	65	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	female	Urum	yes	Russian, some Georgian, little SMG, Armenian	no	vocational training
EV	19	rural (Western Georgia)	female	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian, some SMG	no	vocational training
FN	81	rural (Western Georgia)	female	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian	no	vocational training
GA	32	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	male	Pontic	yes	Russian, SMG	yes	vocational training
IA	54	urban (Batumi)	female	Pontic	yes	Russian	no	university
IK	28	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	male	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian	no	university
IL	65	urban (Tbilisi)	male	Urum	little	Russian, Georgian		secondary school
IP	61	rural (Western Georgia)	male	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian, some SMG	yes	university
IS	53	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	male	Pontic	yes	Russian, SMG, some Georgian	yes	secondary school
KP	33	urban (Batumi)	female	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian, SMG, English, Turkish	yes	university

Acronym	Age	Place of residence	Gender	Heritage variety	Competent speaker?	Other languages spoken	personal experience of migration	education
LP	28	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	male	Urum	yes	Russian, Georgian, SMG	yes	secondary school
LT	51	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	female	Pontic	yes	Russian, some Georgian, some SMG	yes	university
LV	52	urban (Batumi)	female	Pontic	little	Russian, Georgian	no	university
MA	53	urban (Tbilisi)	male	Urum	yes	Russian, Georgian, little SMG, little Armenian	yes, SU	university
MC	34	urban (Tbilisi)	female	Urum	no	Russian, Georgian, SMG, English	yes	university
ME	53	urban (Tbilisi)	female	Urum	yes	Russian, Georgian	no	university
MI	19	urban (Tbilisi)	female	Urum	yes	Russian, Georgian, SMG, little English	no	university
MO	46	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	male	Urum	yes	Russian, Georgian, SMG	yes	secondary school
MP	34	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	male	Urum	yes	Russian, Georgian, little SMG	no	secondary school
MS	61	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	female	Urum	yes	Russian, Georgian, Azeri	no	university
NA	39	urban (Batumi)	female	Pontic	no	Georgian, some Russian	no	university
NB	28	urban (Tbilisi)	female	Urum	yes	Russian, Georgian, little SMG	no	university
ND	59	urban (Tbilisi)	male	Urum	yes	Russian, Georgian, Azeri	yes	vocational training
NP	63	rural (Western Georgia)	male	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian	no	secondary school
NV	59	rural (Western Georgia)	male	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian	no	university
OA	41	rural (Western Georgia)	female	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian, some SMG	no	secondary school
OK	50	urban (Tbilisi)	female	Urum	yes	Russian, Georgian, little English	yes	university
OP	62	urban (Batumi)	male	Pontic	yes	Russian, SMG, some Georgian	yes	university
PA	64	rural (Western Georgia)	male	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian, some SMG	no	secondary school
SC	71	rural (Kvemo Kartli)	male	Urum	yes	Russian, Georgian, SMG	yes	university
SM	23	rural (Western Georgia)	male	Pontic	yes	Russian, Georgian, SMG, Armenian	no	university
TS	28	urban (Tbilisi)	male	Urum	little	Russian, Georgian, English	no	university
VD	21	urban (Tbilisi)	female	Pontic	no	SMG, Georgian, English	yes	university
VE	77	urban (Tbilisi)	female	Urum	yes	Russian, Georgian, little SMG, Ossetian, Armenian	yes	vocational training
ZI	69	urban (Batumi)	male	Pontic	yes	Russian	no	secondary school

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