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## SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Quest for ethnic identity in the modern world—The Georgian case

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**Abstract:** Research shows that ethnic identity is a stable phenomenon that endures transformations through time and changing environments; however, it is dynamic. This article offers insights into the meaning of ethnic identity for Georgians and identifies the main signs signifying their common identity. This thesis shows that ethnic belonging is important for Georgians and is marked by familism, loyalty to conservative sexual behavior and an extremely demonstrative form of self-expression. Ethnic identity and associated discourses influence people's behavior, lifestyle, and values. Research reveals the nonessential nature of Georgians' ethnic identity. None of the signs identifying Georgian identity is unique because they can be found in other cultures. Ethnic bonding is based on (1) the *belief that* the configuration of signs identifying Georgian identity is unique and (2) an untold/unconscious agreement between the members of the group to have such a group. Belief in a long common history consolidates and legitimates Georgians' ethnic bonding. However, respondents are oriented on contemporary challenges and do not reflect much on past events during their everyday life. They construct and reconstruct narratives and traditional rituals to effectively overcome ongoing personal and collective tasks. To obtain an inside view and to achieve a deep understanding of ethnic phenomena, the emic approach was used. The main methods used were individual in-depth interviews and focus groups. The data were analyzed using the qualitative content analysis method.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vladimer Gamsakhurdia has obtained PhD in psychological anthropology from Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University in July, 2016. He is holding the position of an assistant-professor at the same university. His research interests are associated with the sociocultural processes and cultural changes. He is interested in interrelation between culture and personality. He has been worked as a fellow at The university of Fribourg, at The university of Chicago and at the University of Basque Country recently.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Ethnic identity increasingly plays major role in people's live. It influences values, norms and defines lifestyles. Ethnicity drives peoples action. Ethnicity provides people with roadmap for their lives and grants them with sense of live.

Georgians are a small ethnos living in the post-soviet area and are on the way of their self-definition through the process of building independence country. Georgians believe to have a long history coming from ancient times and eternal future.

Georgians have traditional society emphasizing high importance of familism and conservative sexual behavior. They are building traditional households, where children live and play together with their grandparents. However, the thing that makes them unic is their lifestyle and the emotional and very expressive way of self-expression. They take everything very close to their hurt.

Research shows that ethnic identity can reconcile different religion groups, orthodox Christian and Muslim identities in one society.

**Subjects:** Area Studies; Central Asian, Russian & Eastern European Studies; Ethnic Identity; Self & Social Identity

**Keywords:** Georgia; ethnicity; social identity; indigenous studies; social boundaries; social identity complexity; emic approach; south Caucasus; qualitative study

## 1. Introduction

People today live in an extremely rapidly changing world (Valsiner, 2012a; Wagoner, Jensen, & Oldmeadow, 2012). Despite assumptions made decades ago, ethnic identity has not disappeared, and despite globalization, it is gaining in importance (Eller, 2009). Ethnicity helps to define oneself (Greig, 2003; Stefanenko, 2009).

Ethnic identity is an essential part of personality that identifies and symbolizes the social boundaries of any group (Eller, 2009, pp. 314–336). This study investigated the meaning, signs and means of expressing ethnic identity and is one of the first empirical studies on Georgian ethnic identity. The research aims were (1) to identify what ethnic identity means for ethnic Georgians, (2) to determine the respondents' relation to ethnicity, and (3) to determine which signs signify Georgian identity and whether channels exist for manifesting this phenomenon.

Moreover, this article posits the problem of theory fragmentation and asserts that despite the long history of ethnicity research, this area of research has been disjointed and dispersed among various disciplines (social/cultural anthropology, sociology and psychology) until now. Each ethnicity theory emphasizes and grants dominance to only one element of the personal or sociocultural world and leaves out other, less attended aspects. Some socially oriented theories emphasize the importance of social structure and equate ethnicity to mechanical social boundaries/categories, some concentrate on the interests of political elites, and pseudo “essentialists” focus on the significance of an imagined common past and pseudo primordial ties (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996). We argue that all these factors are complementary.

This research presents ethnic Georgian respondents' interpretations of the meaning of ethnicity, political interests that are possibly associated with a common identity and the interviewees' perceptions of social boundaries. Additionally, the significance of beliefs about a common past/memory, meaningful values/traditions and their meaning for ethnic identity were investigated.

Methodologically, the focal objective was obtaining an inside view and to test the agreement of various theories with the data within a particular context. Essentially, this article relies on semiotic cultural psychological methodological assumptions that indicate the high importance of local context, subjectivity and particular cases (Valsiner, 2012b).

## 2. A review of theories associated with ethnicity research

The first scientific attempts to investigate ethnicity are traceable to the roots of psychological science during the second part of the nineteenth century (Lindholm, 2007; Wundt, 2007). However, neither Steintal's and Lazarus's nor Wilhelm Wundt's idealistic quests found firm empirical ground or popularity. In Europe, later research on significant sociocultural groups was mostly focused on quantitative measurements and on the search for universal cultural elements and typologies (Stefanenko, 2009).

The main focus of ethnicity research during the first half of twentieth century was a belief in the stability of ethnoses and in the traits ascribed to them. The first cultural researchers conceived ethnoses and cultures as unchangeable unified entities (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996; Jenkins, 2008). In those times, terms such as race, ethnos and culture were regarded as almost synonymous. Implicitly, it was thought that ethnic belonging passes from generation to generation (Bock, 1999). Such attitudes were named primordial. The inappropriateness of that approach became unacceptable after Nazi discourse was rejected after the Second World War.

## 2.1. Modern social identity and ethnicity research

In cross-cultural and social psychologies, rich material can be found on social/collective identity research, a term that covers a wider area than ethnicity. “The need to belong” is regarded as a fundamental motivation. A sense of unity and belonging to a group facilitates psychological comfort and mental health generally (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Ethnic identity is regarded as a form of social/collective identity (Cameron, 2004; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Generally, psychologists focus on finding regularities that are associated not only with ethnoses, but with groups in general. Nevertheless, the findings of social identity research can strongly contribute to our understanding of the nature of ethnic identity.

According to well-known social/collective identity theory and minimal group paradigm/experiments (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), a sense of group identity and social/collective identity appears even after a mechanical and meaningless allocation of people to different clusters. Symbolic signs of social identity are formed even if members of the group have no common traits or common experience. I assume that this idea consolidates socially constructivist ideas on the nonessential nature of ethnic identity, which was developed in the last decades of the twentieth century (social constructivist ideas will be discussed below in more detail) (Barth, 1969; Jenkins, 2008).

The sense of belonging to (larger) groups is an indissoluble part of “self” and plays an important role in personality formation. Marilyn B. Brewer and Wendi Gardner define collective identity as one of the facets of self and regard it as a more “impersonal ... social category” (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Triandis highlights three dimensions of the self: “private”, “public” and “collective” (Triandis, 1989). In accordance with these views, ethnic identity can be regarded as collective identity, signifying belongingness to large collectives. Collective identity is less personal; however, it influences personal feelings, mindset and behavior. Collective identity is an essential part of self.

Modern individuals may have various ethnic, religious, professional and other types of identities; they may belong to various groups, and thus bear “social identity complexities”. In such cases, such individuals need to reconcile several social identities in their selves (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

People are more or less strongly invested in their connections with various groups. James E. Cameron offered a multidimensional model of social identity that distinguished the main aspects associated with social identity. The sense of social belonging includes different levels of cognitive centrality, in-group affect and group ties (Cameron, 2004).

Regarding social/cultural anthropology, there are two main (radical) directions in modern ethnicity research: one is oriented on the social aspect of ethnic identity and does not value culture; the other emphasizes the role of culture and collective memory. Both of those directions pay less attention to the self, personal intentions and the psychological aspects of ethnicity. Here, we will try to show that personal, social and cultural elements are inseparable.

### 2.1.1. Social constructivism

Modern ethnicity research appears to conflict with primordial views and is mostly associated with socially oriented approaches (Anderson, 2006; Barth, 1969; Brubaker, 2006; Haan, 2011; Horowitz, 2001; Wetherell, 2009). The appearance of socially oriented ethnicity research is associated with Fredrik Barth (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996; Jenkins, 2008), who regarded ethnicity as a symbol and as an organizing factor that unites people in groups. Barth thought that ethnicity defines a person’s place in the social world, which is populated by different groups (Barth, 1969).

Fredrik Barth argues that signs identifying ethnos and its social boundaries change continuously (Jenkins, 2008; Nagel, 1994). Changes might not be drastic and easily noticeable, but they happen

continuously; e.g. stereotypes about Germans and their self-perception have meaningfully changed over time. Medieval Germans were regarded as romantic and not very practical; however, Germany is currently considered one of the most well-ordered and pedantic of nations (Barth, 1969; Eller, 2009). Fredrik Barth thought that cultural elements are not fundamental factors for the functioning of ethnic identity. Barth insisted on the dynamism of ethnicity (Barth, 1969).

Recently, even more radical social constructivist ideas have emerged, which consider ethnicity simply an instrument for the mobilization of groups by elites (Brubaker, 2006; Cohen, 1969). Rogers Brubaker argues that ethnicity has no importance in people's daily routine; for him, ethnos is just a category and is not a stable group. Brubaker denies the possibility of the existence of stable configurations and thinks that we can deal only with temporary discourses (Brubaker, 2006).

Brubaker's data shows that political actors activate ethnic feelings only when they need to, for example, during elections. Moreover, ethnic activation is achieved quickly and dissipates rapidly. The political factor is clearly meaningful, but I doubt that it can singlehandedly be decisive. I think it is questionable that ethnic sentiments can occasionally be provoked among the general public in a short time unless the willingness exists to follow such a call. Furthermore, how is it possible that a group of people can stably answer one type of call all the time and not another one? For example, some people always participate in Romanian collective action while others participate in Hungarian collective action. Apparently, political interest might initiate the activation of ethnic identity only when there is an (ethnic) group willing to respond to that call.

Assumedly, ethnic identity is a dynamic phenomenon and that the signs identifying it may change through time as social constructivism posits; however, on the other hand, it is also evident that ethnos maintain uniformity, at least for a reasonable period, as we could see on the example of Hungarians who maintain their ethnic identity despite having "silent" periods, when their sense of ethnic belonging is less activated or totally passive. People are emigrating around the world and their struggle for acculturation and adjustment of their identity sets to new environments is one of the hottest topics nowadays. Proposed research shows that Georgian emigrants are maintaining their Georgian identity despite having more profitable options in the west world. This topic will be elaborated in the consideration of results, subsequently in the article.

Moreover, socially oriented research has not paid attention to the emotional aspect associated with the sense of ethnic belonging (Connor, 1993). Furthermore, social constructivism does not take note of the fact that myths are spread about common ancestry all over the world.

Resuming the discussion, social constructivism offers a general frame that describes how ethnos operate; however, it leaves unexplained essential regularities that characterize ethnic groups. To explain these aspects of ethnic identity, we need to consider the significance of those aspects of ethnicity.

## **2.2. On a common past and emotional bonding**

Numerous ethnic groups believe that they share a common history. Typically, ethnic groups have beliefs about a common ancestry. Max Weber was one of the first to indicate the importance and fictionality of such beliefs (Weber, 1978). More recently, Clifford Geertz also emphasized the significance of the idea of having common founders/ancestry for maintaining ethnic groups (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996). Myths about a shared past consolidate social bonds and gives emotional meaning to group connection (Anderson, 2006; Horowitz, 2001; Smith, 1991). Erik Hobsbawm's theory about invented traditions strengthens the latter point (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

Assumedly, people create myths and legends to justify and legitimize their unity. These myths and legends give content to otherwise meaningless social structures and animate them. These aspects ground emotional bonding to ethnic groups.

If we consider the significance of pseudo or actual “essential” material, ethnic bonding does not seem as mechanical and meaningless as it is according to socially oriented theories. Belief in a common past increases the sense of solidarity among group members.

### 3. Interim resume

Assumedly, ethnic identity defines social boundaries and a person’s place in the world. It informs the person to which collective he belongs. Signs that signify his own group inform him as to how he can distinguish compatriots from “others”. However, social structure does not exist without cultural material to fill it with meaning.

Cultural material may comprise common legends, beliefs about common ancestry, narratives about the past of a group, rituals, and lifestyle, etc. That material provides a person with a sense of continuity and renders a complex world more understandable.

### 4. Research methodology

It was intended to grasp respondents’ interpretations on the research topic and its related sociocultural context. An emic approach was used to obtain an inside view of the respondents’ ethnic identity and to identify related narratives (Markee, 2013; Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999). Grounding the study in an emic approach leads to the use of qualitative methods.

#### 4.1. Methods

Two research methods were used—(1) individual narrative interviews and (2) focus groups. Secondary data analysis was also conducted (historical data/manuals, modern press material).

*The research guideline* comprised open-ended questions. Respondents were encouraged to provide their own reflections on the raised questions and were free to offer their own items for consideration if they regarded them as useful for more fully answering research-related questions (Bauer, 1996). Projective techniques were used to identify unconscious attitudes, and the interaction was free from any professional terminology.

*The questionnaire* contained several sections that were intended to identify the meaning of ethnic identity and its grounding elements. (1) The first section was oriented on individual self-reflection, and respondents were asked to define who they are, how they define/feel themselves, what their important values in life are, and what their main goals in life are. The interviewer did not mention ethnicity at that time, aiming to reveal whether the respondents would name ethnic identity themselves as part of their self-definition or among the things that they valued in their lives. (2) If the respondents mentioned ethnicity in the first section (this occurred during almost all interviews), then, in the next section, the interview would naturally flow to that topic; if not, the interviewer would ask directly about ethnicity then. In the second section, the respondents were asked about their associations regarding ethnic identity, what it means and how important it is for them. Further, the respondents were asked to define what it means to be Georgian, including their associations, related discourses, narratives, rituals, etc. (3) Subsequently, the respondents were asked to clarify the source of ethnic identity. Further, the respondents were requested to define what they think about the past and to name stories that are associated with Georgian identity. The aim was to reveal whether the respondents would mention the importance of a common past/history or ancestry by themselves, and if not (this occurred in almost all interviews), they were finally asked directly about that topic.

The obtained data were processed by the qualitative *content analysis* method. Data analysis progressed through the following steps: (1) Initially, the data were reviewed and categorized. (2) Codes were defined based on meanings. (3) Then, the codes were grouped based on the logical connections and relations between them. Based on these combinations of codes, themes were created. Themes are the widest semantic unity used in this study. (4) Subsequently, to test the adequacy of the defined themes, the codes and interrelations between the codes and the obtained data were reviewed once more. After this review, names/semantic markers were defined for each theme (e.g. familism). (5) Finally, the relations between the defined themes and their relation to the entire data corpus were investigated.

### 5. Sampling

The quota sampling method was used to adequately represent the internal variety of the Georgians' ethnic group (Coyne, 1997). The sample comprised all main subcultural groups. Specifically, the *sample was constructed based on following preconditions*

Because the primary research goal was to investigate Georgians' ethnic identity signifiers, it was crucial to interview people who identify themselves as Georgians.

**Religious identity**—The Georgian ethnos is composed mainly of the two biggest religious groups. A huge majority of ethnic Georgians is Orthodox Christian. Muslims are the second largest religious group among ethnic Georgians. Muslim Georgians mostly reside in the southwestern regions, Guria and Adjara (Caucasus, n.d.; Caucasus Research Resource Centers, n.d.). Due to pre-conditions, the sample included Orthodox Christians and Muslims.

**Emigration**—According to the 2014 census, 88,704 persons are officially emigrants (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2015). However, the exact number of illegal migrants is unknown, although the number is significant. Emigrants mainly live in the post-Soviet area, Europe, and the USA. Therefore, the research sample includes Georgians living worldwide.

The age of respondents varied from 21 to 60, and all generations were studied (except minors).

Forty-eight in-depth interviews and four focus group discussions were held (Table 1).

**Table 1. Description of respondents' sample of individual in depth interviews**

Place of permanent residence	Number	Notice
Tbilisi	16	Six of respondents living in Georgia have experience of short term visits abroad
Imereti	4	
Samegrelo	2	
Achara	3	
Kakheti	3	
Shida Kartli	3	
Munich	1	
Boston	1	
San Francisco	1	
Bilbao	2	
San Sebastian	2	
Sum	38	
Focus groups		

Notes: Four focus groups consisted of Muslim Georgians were conducted. Two group was attended by 21–35 years old people, the another one contained people of 35+ age group.



## 6. Data reliability

Data reliability was ensured by various types of triangulation. (1) Methodological triangulation was achieved by conducting two types of interviews, both individually and in groups. (2) Source triangulation was achieved by interviewing people in various occupations (administrative workers, managers at different levels, representatives of academic circles, students, civil activists, NGO workers, bank workers, etc.) and of various origins—residents of all regions of Georgia and emigrants living in 6 countries. (3) Environmental triangulation was guaranteed by conducting interviews in six locations (Tbilisi; Kutaisi; Guria; Batumi; San Sebastian-Donostia; Bilbao). (4) Investigator triangulation was ensured partially because the coding and analysis was performed by only one author, but these were also reviewed by another professor, at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.

## 7. Respondent recruitment and research ethics

Respondents were recruited using the *snowball method* (Coyne, 1997). An announcement was made on social networks, and the word was spread through personal social/professional networks about the desired profile of the respondents. All candidates were pre-interviewed to check if they satisfied the desired criteria; only after that, were they interviewed.

The respondents were informed about the primary goals and methods of the research. All gave their consent and were free to refuse any question or to stop the interviews; however, these never occurred. All personal data remained confidential, and the anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed.

## 8. Data analysis

### 8.1. On the meaning of ethnicity

The data revealed a great importance and stability of ethnic identity. A sense of ethnic belonging is maintained even among emigrants who have lived abroad for tens of years. After living in a different environment (mostly in the Western cultural space), meaningful changes occur; however, ethnic bonding remains. According to the majority of respondents (31 out of 38), the main difference between Georgian and western societies is the social burden which is present in Georgia. It is hard to be independent and to feel free during living among Georgian society as they are often checking on you, asking to follow conservative traditions and generally, to act in accordance with conservative norms. Emigrant respondents feel more free and happy in some way. All of them say that by means of emigration to west they liberated themselves from a strong social burden that is oriented on the homogenization of Georgian society. Georgian living in a liberal USA/European environment is more free to behave in a way as he or she wants than in Georgia, e.g. they are free to have premarital sex without being judged for it. However, changes don't demolish all values and identities obtained during enculturation. Emigrant respondents still feel themselves Georgian and are keeping following some essential things defining Georgianness. First of all, strong connection with family is meant here. Most, importantly emigrant respondents still regard themselves Georgian and can't imagine to lose that sense and they care about their homeland. These data show that ethnic identity is flexible and somehow values associated with it may change, but nevertheless, it is stable and can survive substantial renovations.

I feel really individually revived after emigrating; you know ... that stuff ... family ... society all time controls you there. But, on the other hand, I still feel connected ... I think about Tbilisi, family, the life that I had there ... I still feel Georgian, you know ... (female, 21, Emigrant, emigrated from Georgia to USA 5 years ago).

I have lived in Munich for more than 9–10 years at this point. Of course I speak with my family less often, but I still care about them much. I will never be German you know ... I speak the language fluently, I fit here well ... like here ... but when I am among people I feel different. They are German and I am Georgian ... It's just as it is ... I feel Georgian despite all these years and adaptation ... (female, 33, Emigrant, Emigrated from Georgia To Germany)

The sense of ethnic belonging is quite important for the respondents. Some of them are very happy and even proud to be Georgian; however, ethnic belonging is not necessarily associated with fanatical bonding. Respondents living in their homeland or in emigration have the same feeling in this sense. These result consolidates above mentioned statement on the stability and robustness of ethnic identity.

When I hear our anthem at Olympics, I feel pride. We are there ... (male, 33, lives in Georgia)

I love Georgia. But, I can't say that I am crazy about it and dream to sacrifice myself (female, 52, Lives in Spain).

Interestingly, the sense of ethnic belonging rarely comes to the fore during the daily routine. In this way, research shows the same picture as that revealed by Brubaker in Romania (Brubaker, 2006). Respondents don't think about their ethnicity or Georgia or even something similar during habitual activities. They happily live their lives without unnecessary addressing to their collective identity. According to respondents, ethnic identity is activated only when one needs self-representation. Such situations occur mostly while meeting people with different ethnic identities or when there is necessity for self-identification because of some reason. We can see that ethnic identity serves as a cognitive guide and signifies social boundaries as is predicted by socially oriented theories (Eller, 2009).

I almost never think or talk as if I were Georgian ... maybe only when I meet a foreigner. I was traveling last year and people were asking where I was from; then I remembered that I am Georgian ù (female, 27, lives in Georgia).

While in Georgia, I had never thought about it. But here, in Spain, I have to explain who I am all the time (male, 24, emigrant, lives in USA).

### **9. Modern Georgians' ethnic identity signs**

Ethnicity might be signified by one or several signs. For instance, the ethnic identity of the Basque people is signified merely by their language. The Basque word "Euskaldunak" signifies an ethnically Basque person in their own language, and its literal translation refers to a person who speaks Euskara—the Basque language (Conversi, 2000). For some ethnicities, language plays no role in forming ethnic identity; for example, Swiss people are generally bilingual.

Research reveals that Georgian ethnicity is signified by several signs. Values and lifestyle may signify ethnic identity. Ethnicity is associated with almost all fields and guides people's lives. Almost everything that is personally important for the respondents at the personal level also serves as a sign of ethnic identity. For example, all respondents indicated a high importance of familism, which is also firmly associated with Georgian identity. We will consider signifiers of ethnicity in detail below.

#### **9.1. Special value of the family**

According to the majority respondents (35 out of 38), the most salient sign of Georgian identity is that their strongest attachment is to family and close relatives. Respondents have intensive contact with their relatives. There is widespread in Georgia to live in the form of extended families. Traditional households is typical for Georgia. Close relatives play enormous role in Georgians lives, they influence decisions, share sufferings and success. Research shows that the main life-goal for Georgians is to marry, nobody is regarded as fully successful if he or she is not married. Georgians maintain a firm bond with their family for their whole life and are sensitive about how other people talk and behave with respect to their close relatives. If a person neglects his/her own family and does not express adequate respect to them through his/her behavior or speech, his/her Georgian identity may



be questioned. 48% of youth (under 29 years old) make decisions only after consultations with family members and 91% of them thinks that having a good family is important in life (htt). The live of Georgians turns around their families. They need to have successful families to feel happy. Even Emigrant respondents say that they maintain strong emotional connection with their family.

Family is everything for me. I live for my family (female, 52).

I dream to become a grandpa; I want to sit with grandchildren and tell them stories about life ... you know? Whatever you do in your life, family is the most important thing (male, 25).

### 9.1.1. *Conservative sexual codex*

The second most significant sign of Georgian ethnic identity is the declaration of loyalty to the codex of traditional/conservative sexual behavior. 34 out of 38 respondents think, sexual behavior and forms of verbal expression on that topic are limited among Georgians. The taboo regarding sexuality exists by unspoken agreement and is maintained by strong social pressure. One of the most well-known restrictions implies that a girl must keep her virginity intact until marriage. According to youth research, only 1% of young girls (under 29 years old) had sexual intercourse with more than one partner. Noticeably, this value has been modernizing in recent decades and has significantly decreased, especially in the urban environment, although it retains meaningful importance.

People don't talk about sex. Sex is not a topic to talk about in Georgia (male, 35).

I won't have sex until marriage. I met one guy who wanted it and I broke up with him. Traditions are very important to me (female, 23).

Emmm ... How can I say ... sorry, I can't talk about that topic (sexual behavior) with you (with a boy who is not my boyfriend in public setting). I feel shame. You are Georgian; you will surely understand me (female, 22).

### 9.2. *Demonstrativeness—Épater la bourgeoisie*

Another salient sign of Georgian identity is a demonstrative manner of self-expression, talking and behavior. Respondents emphasize that Georgians tend to exaggerate and radicalize almost everything. Supposedly, capturing an audience's attention and the desire for showing off are the main motivations for demonstrative activity. Ethnic Georgians continuously attempt to demonstrate their merit and importance in public. Particular expressions of "Épater la bourgeoisie" (for example, irrational altruism and selflessness) strengthens in-group coherence.

People may fight in public transport over "treating" each other and trying to pay for someone else's (acquaintance; friend) transportation. In this way, they show that they are good people. Or, a person may spend a huge amount of money for arranging luxury cemetery for a deceased relative to show off, whereas his house may be in an awful condition (female, 35).

Boys provoke fights in weddings where everyone is supposed to be happy. They fight to attract everyone's attention ... not only of girls ... they show off their strength, kind of ...

### 9.3. *On beliefs about a common past and ancestry*

Respondents had little information about ordinary Georgians' living experience in the far past. In fact, it was difficult for them to talk about this topic. The respondents appeared not to reflect much on this subject. However, they emphasized a long/great history of Georgia and the bravery of some heroes/kings, which provided a sense of continuity and specialness to some degree.

I really don't know what to say about past. Don't think much about it. People were more or less the same I guess ... maybe just a bit braver ... I can say that generally country is very old and it's remarkable (male, 33).

We have only a history of kings. We have no idea how Georgians really were in the past. But I feel proud as we survived, whereas a lot of empires disappeared (male, 29).

Herein, we can deduce that (1) beliefs about a common past do not greatly influence the mental processes of modern living persons. People do not reflect much on the past and are more oriented to contemporary feelings, needs, and challenges. We can assume that ethnic identity will remain even if the belief in a common past disappears. (2) The fact of having a long history provides the sense of specialness. These deductions are in accordance with the ideas of Fredrik Bartlet on memory and with the more recent works of Brady Wagoner.

### 10. The factor of religious belonging

The majority of ethnic Georgians are Orthodox Christians (Caucasus, n.d.; Caucasus Research Resource Centers, n.d.). Due to historical circumstances, Orthodox Christianity is strongly bonded with Georgians' ethnic identity. According to widespread discourse, Georgian identity is strongly associated with Orthodox Christianity. As the majority of respondents claim, to be an Orthodox Christian symbolically expresses a belonging and loyalty to Georgian identity.

Christianity is very important to us. It came from ancient times with us (female, 28).

Generally, it is assumed that if you are a Georgian, you are a Christian (male, 27).

However, one Georgian region is mostly populated by Muslim ethnic Georgians. These people had also been Christians until the 17th–18th centuries but converted to Islam during the three hundred years of Ottoman Empire occupation. Because of the strong association between Georgian identity and Orthodox Christianity, differences in religious identity cause some tension between Christian and Muslim Georgians; however, a common ethnic identity remains. In the public arena, Muslim Georgians represent themselves as merely Georgians and do not emphasize their religious identity.

I am a Muslim, and I am a Georgian. I am as much Georgian as anyone in this country (Female, 45).

When I am traveling in other parts of Georgia, I don't need to speak about religion. I am just behaving as usual; in these terms, there is no difference between me and other Georgians. I am a typical Georgian. However, in my village we have some traditional Islamic rituals, for example, during Bairam, ... (Man, 45).

I am a Christian. Some people have strange feelings about Muslim Georgians, but they are the same Georgians as we are; they just have a bit more difficult history (female, 39).

The maintenance of a common collective identity becomes possible through the adoption by Muslim Georgians of the main markers signifying Georgian identity. They adjust their Muslim religion and lifestyle to the main signs of Georgian ethnic identity. Muslim Georgians share the crucial value of familism and conservative sexual behavior. Moreover, all Georgians prohibit sexual intercourse with all relatives (cousins), whereas typical Muslim societies do not (Turkey; Azerbaijan; Iran). The prohibition of sexual intercourse with relatives distinguishes Muslim Georgians from other Muslims and meaningfully associates them with Orthodox Christian Georgians. Also, many of the Muslim Georgians drink alcohol, which is prohibited by traditional Islam but is widely accepted and celebrated in the Christian part of Georgia.

Sit down with me at Supra and I will show you how Georgian I am. We need to drink together today (male, 25. Muslim).

I don't feel actually comfortable with Muslims from other countries. I traveled in Turkey; they are not hospitable, they don't drink wine ... By the way, you can't leave our village if you don't drink with us first! Have a Sufra with us. It will be better than these questions: D (Man, 55, Muslim).

However, it appears that the current settling of this controversy between ethnic and religious identities is not final and stable. There is a clear desire among Christian Georgians to make all Georgians Christians, to reconvert them to the native religion (as they regard it) of all Georgians.

Some radical Christians think that all true Georgians must convert to Christianity, but anyways, nobody has doubts that we are all Georgians (male, 27)

I have information that Muslims are gradually converting to Christianity. There is some kind of social pressure on them to become Christians. Implicitly, Christian Georgians regard Muslim Georgians as weird Georgians ... (Male. 33)

## 11. Discussion

According to the obtained data, a sense of ethnic identity is very important for Georgians. This sense of ethnic belonging is associated with positive emotions. Respondents feel that they are bonded with other Georgians and Georgian identity. They emphasize quite a strong collectivistic burden that is associated with Georgian identity. In this sense, tendencies revealed by this study indicate high levels of two aspects of the three-factor model of social identity—in-group affect and in-group ties. However, the third aspect—cognitive centrality—was found to be present at a lower level. People do not reflect much on their ethnic belonging in their everyday lives; they recall it only when a need for self-representation arises. In this sense, the obtained data are similar to the research findings of Roger Brubaker, which were obtained in the Romanian city of Cluj (Brubaker, 2006), where ethnic identity is activated only when the need for self-representation arises. Such situations occur mostly when meeting people with different ethnic identities. However, the obtained data are qualitative and not quantitative. Obtaining statistical measures of the level of these three factors of social identity for Georgians is a subject for future research.

Empirical research has demonstrated that ethnic identity signifies a social boundary and differentiates Georgians from other groups. However, it is not possible to consider social boundaries without reflecting on the cultural material that fills it with meaning. Ethnic identity is identified by signs, which are cultural elements that are shared by members of an ethnos (value, lifestyle, language, etc.). An ethnic group is not homogeneous, but some values and/or practices are widely accepted inside an ethnic group and serve as a sign/signal of common identity. These findings are in accordance with the main social constructivist ideas on ethnic identity (Barth, 1969; Hutchinson & Smith, 1996; Jenkins, 2008); however, on the other hand, the findings also indicate the disadvantages of that approach. We can determine the importance of pseudo primordial data (beliefs; traditions; rituals) for filling social constructions with meaning. The existence of ethnic identity alone as a social boundary does not seem possible without cultural elements and discourses being associated with it. Therefore, this article suggests using an integrative approach for future ethnicity research and to consider social and cultural factors as equally important for social identity formation/functioning and to protect oneself against bias in favor of sociologically or culturally oriented directions. Only overcoming one-sided orientation can yield adequate findings and holistic picturing.

According to the respondents, the sense of ethnic belonging (identity) is a meaningful part of personality and provides them with tools for self-representation and a sense of continuity. In this respect, the obtained data are in accordance with some well-known hypotheses that describe the high importance of social identity for personality (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Brewer & Gardner,

1996). Ethnic identity is a part of indigenous “intentional world”-s (Shweder, 1991) of personalities and defines the main cultural orienteers in life. For example, the attribution of the highest value to familism, conservative sexual behavior and extremely expressive lifestyle are widely expected phenomena among Georgians and stimulate people to behave in accordance with these ideas. If someone does not follow those norms, he/she may be isolated by the group and be socially deprived. However, there is no need for coercion; all Georgians have internalized these significant values and desire to follow them.

Noticeably, signs signifying Georgian identity are far from unique. Other cultures also have conservative sexual values, familism (e.g. Italians, Jews, Spaniards, etc.) or expressive behavior. Most importantly, the obtained results show that ethnic identity is not essential/innate. Georgian ethnos exists only because group members agree to form the group and to maintain those signs that signify their distinctiveness. Anyone can be regarded as Georgian if one passed the road of enculturation and functions according to main markers of Georgianness. Signs are not essential in themselves but serve the function of self-definition and—representation, and their construction is continually under development. These data agree directly with classical social constructivist views on ethnicity (Barth, 1969; Eriksen, 2013; Jenkins, 2008).

The obtained data can be used as the basis for future research on the various social identities of Georgians; e.g. religious identity, regional identities, etc.

### **11.1. Social identity complexity**

The obtained data revealed that Georgians have “social identity complexities” and represents an additional example of the effectiveness of the model developed by Roccas and Brewer (2002). The majority of Georgians are Christians; however, a big Muslim minority is present in several regions. Christian and Muslim religious identities create different types of interrelations with Georgian ethnic identity, however, most of them regard themselves Georgians.

Orthodox Christian Georgians represent the “intersection” of ethnic and religious identities, which creates a unique type of identity—an Orthodox Christian Georgian. Both types of identity are undividable and indissoluble for them. According to the respondents, people having this type of identity think that other Georgians, who have different religious identities (e.g. Muslim identity) are not fully/true Georgians; that is, these people are viewed as somehow imperfect.

Respondents representing the Muslim minority grant more importance to ethnic identity than to religious identity and have a more “compartmentalized social identity complexity” (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Generally, in the public arena, they accentuate their Georgian identity and de-emphasize their Muslim religious identity; however, in their private areas, they preserve some Muslim traditions and rituals. This arrangement of different identities is made easier because Muslim Georgians share all main markers of ethnic identity, and it is quite difficult to distinguish Christian Georgians from Muslim Georgians in the public arena.

The supremacy of the Orthodox Christian identity is generally apparent among the Georgian ethnos. Its somehow implied that all Georgians must be orthodox Christians and that atmosphere may induce Muslim Georgians massive conversion to Christianity.

### **11.2. The impact of emigration**

Research has shown that during emigration, the bonding with ethnos loosens as the emigrants adapt to their new environment; nevertheless, the sense of their original ethnic identity remains to some degree. Emigrant Georgians follow only two of the three signs of Georgian identity. They do not retain their virginity until marriage; however, they remain quite loyal to familism and exhibit expressive behavior.

Additionally, emigrant Georgians are quite attached to orthodox Christianity. They periodically attend religious rituals, where they have opportunity to temporarily recreate a “Georgian atmosphere”, meet with other Georgian emigrants, and reactivate their Georgian identity. These data emphasize the high importance of religious identity for Georgian identity from another angle.

Despite the adaptation of emigrants to their new environment, they preserve their ethnic identity; this finding indicates the stability of this phenomenon. It is difficult to imagine that a person can totally lose his or her ethnic identity during their life (during one generation).

### 11.3. Limitations

This article presents the results of the one of the first studies on Georgian ethnic identity in a modern context. Therefore, the author had no meaningful point of departure before conducting this study. There is a lack of previous data for comparison and for considering the dynamics of Georgian social identity. The main value of this article is that it provides a basis for future investigations on the Georgian population and to serve as a departure point for such studies.

Moreover, the findings offers insights that directly contribute to the social constructivist approach and indicate some disadvantages, thus offering a more holistic approach that emphasizes the equal importance of social and cultural factors.

Due to the use of an emic approach and indigenous investigation, the findings are limited to Georgian ethnic identity and cannot be directly generalized to other populations. However, the study offers insights that can be applied in the future research of other populations and in future ethnic identity research.

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