

THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY AND BELONGING: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT
OF GEORGIAN TURKISH ASSOCIATIONS

by

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Abstract

This research explores the role of Georgian-Turkish associations in the formation of identity amongst citizens of Georgian descent in Turkey. It focuses on identity construction at the local, national and transnational levels and in the context of both the homeland (Turkey) and the ancestral homeland (Georgia). The thesis adopts an inductive, ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis, and was carried out with two associations in Istanbul. The first empirical chapter accounts for the broader context in which the associations were created, with a special emphasis on the role of the Turkish state and citizens' concerns about being considered 'separatist' (at a time when possible state repressions remain a real threat). The following three empirical chapters address the associations' focus on particular 'cultural' activities in both Turkey and Georgia, showing how such activities serve to reinforce different dimensions of identities among Turkish citizens of Georgian ethnic descent.

The study contributes to the literature on ethnic associations and identity formation in two ways. Firstly, the study proposes that political and cultural factors external to the associations significantly shape the nature of the associations themselves and the way they influence identity formation processes. Secondly, the thesis shows that associations play an important role in the construction of identity and that different associations foster different types of identities depending on the background, educational levels, kinship structure and type of 'cultural' activities encouraged by the associations' elites, as well as the nature of members' engagement with the country of settlement and the country of origin.

To my beloved Mum, Dad

and

Cân Li/ber Nomad

Note on Translation and Transliteration

In transliterating Ottoman Turkish, Turkish and Georgian names, words, and expressions, I have used the modern Turkish orthographical system, officially adopted in Turkey in 1928. This system avoids diacritical marks. Some words that appear repeatedly in the thesis and have different pronunciations and spellings in academic articles, books and official documents are spelled throughout the thesis like this: Ajaria, Ajara, Adjaria, Acara as **Adjara**; Batum as **Batumi**; Muhacir, Macır as **Muhajir**. All translations from Turkish into English in this thesis are the work of the author, unless otherwise noted.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to understand empirically the role of Georgian (*Gürcü* in Turkish) Turkish associations in the formation of identity with respect to the homeland (Turkey) and ancestral homeland (Georgia). The thesis provides an in-depth analysis of how Georgian Turkish identity is shaped through associational activities in light of recent developments taking place at the local, national and transnational levels. The thesis also looks at how Georgian Turkish identities may be formed outside the associations. The thesis focuses on association members' 'concern of being misunderstood' (in the context of possible state repressions), as well as on how understandings of 'cultural' activities and religion influence the ethnic group's associational activities and thus reinforce different dimensions of their identities. The thesis employs an inductive, ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis, relying heavily on participant observation and in-depth interviews. It approaches the role of associations from a constructivist perspective. Such a holistic approach allows us to see how associations are also part of a broader political and cultural context.

This study extends and contributes to the existing literature by examining the role of associations established by immigrants in a social, cultural and political setting. However, it differs substantially from previous studies. Most studies on immigrant organisations have focused on communities living in the USA and Europe (Yalçın-Heckmann, 1997; Vermeulen, 2005; Vermeulen and Keskiner, 2017; Yurdakul, 2006; Caponio, 2005; Christiansen, 2008; Giugni et al., 2014; Iskander, 2015; Orozco and Garcia-Zanello, 2009). Moreover, the majority of these studies have been conducted with regard to established diasporas in these countries. Georgian Turks have received little attention, both in the Turkish literature and more broadly in the Western literature on immigrant organisations, migration and diasporas (Çiloğlu 1993;

Magnarella, 1976, 1979; Putkaradze 1998a; Toumarkine, 2001; Özel, 2010; Kasap, 2010; Smolnik et al., 2017). Thus, this study is, to the author's best knowledge, the first ethnographic account of Georgian Turkish associations.

The main research question that guides this research is, therefore:

- What is the role of Georgian Turkish associations in the formation of identity amongst their members, with respect to their homeland and ancestral homeland?

This thesis argues firstly that political and cultural factors external to the associations significantly shape the nature of the associations themselves and the way they influence identity formation processes. Second, identity is also constructed by associations and different associations foster different types of identities depending on the educational levels, kinship relations and understandings of the cultural activities of association of board members, as well as their links with the country of settlement and the country of origin.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first provides brief background information about Georgian Turks (with a focus on the migration of their ancestors and their settlement in Turkey) and the rise of Georgian Turkish associations in Turkey. The second section provides an overview of chapters 2-8.

1.1 Background of the Study

During fieldwork, I repeatedly came across Turkish citizens of Georgian descent, who I refer to as Georgian Turks (as shorthand). It is estimated that they number between 1 million and 3.5 million people. There is, however, no accurate number available, largely because no systematic and reliable records are found in the archives. Nor are there any accurate official

statistics provided by Turkey as to the number of Georgian Turks living in the country.¹ According to Ottoman archives, the number of migrants coming from the Adjara region of Georgia to Anatolia after the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 was more than 150,000 (Karpat, 1985; Demirel, 2009; Özel, 2010; Kasap, 2010). They were, like all other Caucasian immigrants, categorised as ‘migrant’ (*muhajir*²) by Ottoman officials at that time (Özel, 2010; Karpat, 1985; Çiloğlu, 1993). They settled in different parts of Anatolia, particularly in rural areas along the Black Sea coast (see figure 2). This immigration has continued in a small way until the present day. Today, Turkey is considered to have the largest ethnic Georgian population outside of Georgia; it is estimated to be over 1 million, (Çiloğlu, 1993; Putkaradze, 1998b).³ However, in multi-ethnic Turkey, Georgian Turks as an ethnic group have received little attention, despite their numerical significance.

Georgian Turks originally came to Anatolia from the Adjara (*Acara* in Turkish) region of Georgia (see figure 1). Adjara, officially known as the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, is a historical, geographic and political-administrative region of Georgia. It was part of Georgia until 1614 and was then captured by the Ottoman Empire. It later became part of the Russian Empire after the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877-1878, also known as ‘93 Harbi’ in Ottoman

¹ Previous estimates of total number of the Georgians living in Turkey have been controversial. According to the 1965 Turkish census, the number of Georgians living in Turkey was about 83,306 (34,330 declared persons speaking Georgian as mother-tongue and 48,796 declared persons speaking Georgian as second language) (Andrews, 1989). However, the estimate given by Çiloğlu (1993) is totally different from others; he claims that there are roughly 1-1.5 million Georgians in Turkey. Nevertheless, he does not provide any source of information for this figure.

² A term used to refer to Ottoman Muslim citizens, and their descendants (including Albanians, Bosniaks, Circassians, Georgians, Crimean Tatars, and Pomaks) who immigrated to Anatolia from the late 18th century until the end of the 20th century, mainly to escape ongoing persecution in their ancestral homelands (Karpat, 1985).

³ The Georgian government defines Georgian Turks as a ‘historical diaspora’ that is estimated to be over 2 million (GIZ, 2013). This estimated figure does not include of those who left Georgia because of economic reasons after the 1990s, most notably after visa (2006) and passport free (2011) regime between the two countries. According to Ministry of Diaspora of Georgia, the number of economic migrants is estimated to be more than 150 thousand (TurkStat, 2017, GIZ, 2013).

sources (De Waal, 2010; Coene, 2010; Kasap, 2010). After the Russian-Turkish War of 1877-1878, both sides agreed to sign the Treaty of Berlin in 1878. The Ottoman Empire agreed to submit Batumi, Kars and Ardahan (Three Provinces, *Elviye-i Selase* in Ottoman Turkish) as reparation to the Russian Empire (Karpas, 1985). Finally, Adjara was ceded to Georgia after the Kars Treaty (1921) was signed between Turkey and the South Caucasian republics, wherein Kars and Ardahan became part of Turkey (King, 2008). During Ottoman rule, an overwhelming majority of people living in Adjara adopted Islam (Coene, 2010). Moreover, Adjara was the only autonomous region of the Soviet Union that gained autonomy on the ground of religion rather than ethnicity, largely due to Turkey's influence (Coene, 2010). Today, Adjara is an autonomous republic of Georgia and Batumi is its capital.



Figure 1: Map of Turkey, Georgia and Adjara.⁴

⁴ Sources: <https://www.worldatlas.com>, <https://en.wikipedia.org>, <http://www.sras.org>, accessed 28 January 2018. The borders are highly contested in the Caucasus (Coene, 2010). Therefore, this figure is only for illustrative purposes and does not imply claims on the territorial boundaries' legal status.

Georgian Turks can be categorised into two groups, according to when they immigrated and the circumstances under which they did so. The first group is those who live in Artvin (a city which shares a border with the city of Batumi in Georgia) (see figure 2). They have autochthonous claims to this land (Putkaradze, 1998a). The second group, which constitutes the largest group, is those who specifically call themselves ‘Chveneburi’⁵, which means *like us* or *one of ours* (Çiloğlu, 1992; Putkaradze, 1998a; Okrostsvaridze, 2014). They immigrated after the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 and settled in different cities in Anatolia, including Istanbul, Sakarya, Kocaeli, Samsun, Ordu, Bursa, Düzce, Yalova (see figure 2) (Çiloğlu, 1992; Özel, 2010; Putkaradze, 1998b). It is worth mentioning the Georgian Catholics, who lived mainly in Istanbul (see figure 2). They immigrated to Istanbul at different times during the Ottoman Era (Çiloğlu, 1992; Natsvlshvili, 2015). The majority of this group moved to the USA, Australia, Canada and France after the riots between the 6th and 7th September 1955 against non-Muslims in Istanbul (Çiloğlu, 1994; Mills, 2010; Bayir, 2016). The present study focuses on those who migrated from Adjara to Turkey (i.e. the second group), especially from the Batumi region of Georgia and its surroundings.



⁵ The Ingiloy, an ethnic Muslim group of Georgian descent living in north-western Azerbaijan, also call themselves and their language Chveneburi, see more Aivazishvili-Gehne, 2013.

Figure 2: Current demographic distribution of Georgian Turks in Turkey (Derived from Index-Anatolicus, 2018).⁶

After the 1980s, a Georgian ethnic resurgence has become gradually apparent, particularly in the cities where Georgian Turks are concentrated (e.g. Istanbul, Bursa, Kocaeli, Ordu and Yalova; see figure 4). In other words, their associations appeared in Turkey almost a century after the original migration took place. Since then, several associations (*dernek* in Turkish) were founded to mobilise Georgian Turks living in Turkey. There are officially 24 registered associations founded by Turkish citizens of Georgian descent in nine different cities across Turkey (see figure 3 and 4) (Department of Associations, 2018)⁷. However, for the purpose of this study, I predominantly focus on two of them: the International Georgian Association (henceforth the IGA) and the Bringing Georgians Together Cultural Association (henceforth the BGCA).⁸ The associations' members were born in Turkey, share the same religion and denomination with Turkish Muslims, are citizens of Turkey and are fluent in Turkish. The (second) ancestral language spoken by some of the members, which includes many words from Turkish, is the most obvious factor differentiating them from Turks. They otherwise share a remarkable amount in common. Both associations adopted a more conservative and 'Turkish nationalist' political stance.⁹

⁶ Source: www.nisanyanmap.com, accessed 25 March 2018).

⁷ <https://www.dernekler.gov.tr/tr/Anasayfalinkler/illere-gore-faal-dernekler.aspx>, accessed 10 April 2018.

⁸ The associations are in Istanbul and their names are changed for confidentiality purposes.

⁹ In Istanbul, there are two other 'active' Georgian Turkish associations established by those who are mainly from Artvin and mostly from the left of the political spectrum. They would like to associate with all Georgians in Georgia rather than only Muslim Georgians. They connect themselves to Georgia through ethnicity rather than through religion. This group constitutes a small portion of Georgian Turks. They accept Ahmet Özkan, one of the founders of first Georgian Turkish village association (see Chapter 4), as an important figure in reviving their ethnic Georgian identity in Turkey. Their sense of Georgianness is stronger compared with Georgian Turks, who are the focus of my study, who prioritise their Muslim-Turkish identity.

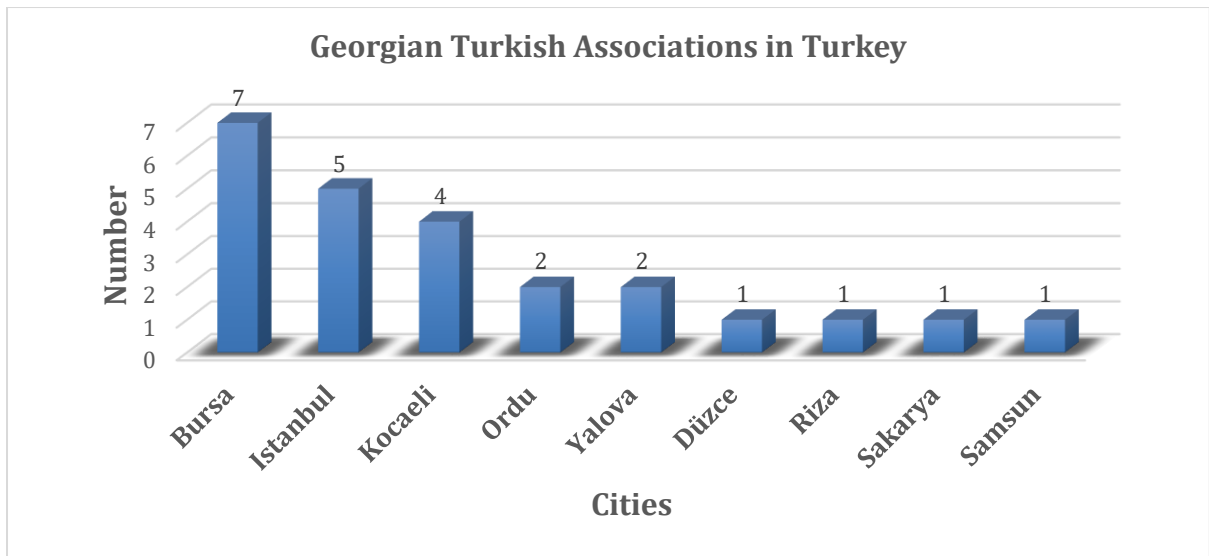


Figure 3: Officially registered Georgian Turkish associations in various cities (Derived from the Department of Associations' website, 2018).



Figure 4: Distribution of Georgian Turkish associations by geographical location in Turkey (Derived from the Department of Associations' website, 2018).

Both associations examined in this study have been active for at least ten years and carry out various activities throughout the year. They are also well known by Georgian Turks in Turkey. The two associations actively use online space to get in touch with the members and provide information regarding their activities and information relating to Georgia. The IGA was

formally set up in 2004 by a small number of professional Georgian Turks in Istanbul (with a total of 8 founder members, all except three of whom are still active). The IGA has over 100 ordinary members aged between 20 and 80, but only a few of these are women. The main aim of the IGA is to maintain good relations between Turkey and Georgia, to develop and strengthen the extant historical sense of kinship, friendship and brotherhood between the two countries' people. The IGA is transnational in its orientation, with its target areas including both Turkey and Georgia. It organises different activities, such as language courses, book and magazine publishing, celebrations of national and religious holidays, and provides bursaries for students from poor families, both in Turkey and Georgia. The IGA organises its activities in different cities in Turkey and Georgia, some of which are organised in collaboration with international governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The BGCA was started by a group of local Georgian Turks in Istanbul in 1997. The association was established by 9 founder members. The BGCA has approximately 360 listed ordinary members) aged between 20 and 80 (only 15 of whom are women). The BGCA aims to arrange associational activities to bring together local Georgian Turks, and to analyse and observe the arrival of their ancestors in Turkey in its historical context. The BGCA is a local association and its target group is Georgian Turks living around the association premises. The BGCA organises many activities, such as periodic meetings, Ramadan activities, welfare benefit activities designed to promote culture, home visits in order to strengthen bonds between the members, and food festivals. It provides bursaries for students from poor families in the community living in Turkey. All activities are held in the district and some of the activities are carried out either in collaboration with other local associations or the district municipality. It is worth adding that the BGCA has also started to connect its members to their place of origin,

since the acceptance of passport (2011) and visa free (2006) regimes¹⁰ between Turkey and Georgia.

The membership types in both associations are: full membership, honorary membership, and voluntary membership. Membership is open to all Turkish citizens who accept and share the values stated in the statutes for both associations (see the appendix). Both associations require ordinary members to pay a monthly membership fee, which is five Turkish liras (£1 was equal to four Turkish liras in 2016). However, the directors complain about members not regularly paying their small monthly membership subscription fees. Thus, membership subscription is not an important source of income for the associations. Nevertheless, getting updates regarding membership subscriptions helps maintain the values shared by the broader community. Becoming a registered member further strengthens the person's position in the association by opening up possibilities to participate in the planning and decision-making process.

The activities of these associations are primarily aimed at Georgian Turks, including Muslim Georgians in Georgia in the case of the IGA, rather than newly arrived immigrants in Turkey. Through these activities, as specified in their statutes, the principal aim is to preserve some aspects of their ancestral cultural traditions and create a sense of awareness with respect to their ancestral homeland. Unlike other Caucasian groups, for example the Circassians (Kaya, 2004; Shami, 2007), Georgian Turks did not consider returning to their place of origin. They see Turkey as their homeland, despite their sentiments towards the ancestral homeland, which is the source of much of their culture and customs (Magnarella, 1976, 1979). It is worth also mentioning that it is arguable whether Georgian Turks can be identified as a diaspora or not in light of the distinctive characteristics attributed to diaspora groups by Safran (1991), Cohen

¹⁰ Nationals of Georgia and Turkey do not need to show their passports at the border. While entering each other's countries via the Sarp Border Gate (between Artvin and Batumi cities). Instead, they can use their ID cards.

(2008) and Esman (2009).¹¹ The discussion of this issue, however, is beyond the scope of this study.¹²

Although the Caucasian diasporas—notably the Circassians—are actively involved in political life and lobbying activities (Kaya, 2004; Çelikpala, 2006), Georgian Turkish associations are still mainly oriented towards activities such as language courses, book publishing, food festivals, picnics, folk dances, the celebration of national days abroad and providing help to Muslim Georgians in Georgia. Therefore, Georgian Turks have chosen to mobilise behind ‘cultural’ rather than ‘political’ activities. This is a way of using ancestral culture as a strategising tool to inform a particular form of politics, or to shape their political involvement strategies (Kaya, 2004: 228). The legal and political structure of the receiving country appears to be an important factor influencing Georgian Turks’ decision to do so (Kaya, 2004: 231); legal and political mobilisations are not always possible in Turkey due to Turkey’s own internal dynamics, which I discuss in Chapter 4.

Despite legal and political constraints, Georgian Turkish associations have also adopted a political stance on the developments taking place in Georgia, especially following the collapse of the Soviet Union and rise of independent Georgia, and began getting involved in different activities covering political, social, cultural and economic dimensions of social life (Çelikpala, 2006; Toumarkine, 2001). Although Georgian Turks living in Turkey have strong emotional,

¹¹ Diaspora scholars, like Safran (1991), Brubaker (2005), Cohen (2008), and Esman (2009), developed several criteria for defining diasporic groups, such as dispersal from the homeland to at least two different locations; being outside the homeland for a long period of time or permanently; harbouring a desire to return to the homeland; maintaining a relationship between the new home and the country of origin, whether along social, cultural, political and economic lines. Although Georgian Turks came to Anatolia a long time ago, this does not automatically mean that the group is a diaspora. Therefore, it seems difficult to consider the Georgians Turks a diasporic group. Furthermore, as the Georgian Turks’ associations began to appear in the 1980s, it seems more suitable to employ the literature on immigrant associations from post-1960s countries rather than the classical diaspora literature.

¹² For a discussion on whether Georgian Turks can be defined as a diasporic community, see Erdemli, 2012; Weiss, 2016.

religious, national, kinship and historical relationships with Batumi and its surroundings in particular - rather than Georgia more generally (Magnarella, 1979) - they want to keep themselves informed about the developments taking place, not only in the Batumi region, but also in Georgia itself. As a result, one can expect that these factors may directly affect the associations' positions and activities (Çelikpala, 2006; Toumarkine, 2001).

The original migration took place long before the foundation of modern Turkey (1923). Therefore, Georgian Turks consider themselves to be a constituent group of the country. They developed their own understanding about belonging to the Turkish state and society during the nation-building process in Turkey. However, the Turkish state's oppressive policies towards ethnic groups, especially those in the last decades, have affected their ability to develop a Turkish nationalistic identity. Their interest in their ancestral homeland increased after the dissolution of the USSR (1991) and the independence of Georgia (1991), which allowed them to establish direct links with their ancestral home. However, they claim to have a strong sense of loyalty to the Turkish state and distance themselves from those ethnic groups in Turkey, most notably the Kurds, whose associational activities are considered as a threat to national unity. This situation has influenced their associational activities and relationships with Turkey and Georgia.

The developments taking place in recent decades at the local, national and transnational levels are key in understanding the importance of Georgian Turkish associations in Turkey and Turkish Georgian identity. Firstly, the rise of an independent Georgian state led to several initial developments: the celebration of Georgian Independence Day in Turkey; the celebration of Georgian Language Day in Turkey, Deda Ena (in 2012); the organisation of comprehensive academic events concerning Georgian history, culture, literature, language and diaspora; the organisation of various academic activities regarding the Deda Ena; and the translation of the Quran into the Georgian language by a Muslim Georgian (in 2013). Secondly, the changing

relationship between Turkey and Georgia is also important. For example, the visa and passport free regimes (in 2006 and 2011 respectively) between the two countries, the freedom to visit the ancestral homeland, the first translation of the Quran into the Georgian language and the entitlement of approximately one thousand Turkish citizens of Georgian origin to Georgian citizenship (dual Turkish-Georgian citizenship is permitted) have influenced the nature of Georgian Turkish associations.¹³ Thirdly, the events in Turkey relating to EU accession negotiations,¹⁴ such as the Kurdish peace process (between 2009-2015), the opening of three Georgian Language and Literature departments at different Turkish universities, the opening of optional Georgian language courses at public schools (in 2014), the emergence of the word ‘Georgian’ in associations’ titles (in 2004), Georgian language courses run by associations (in 2009), the preparation of a long documentary on Georgian Turks’ migration (in 2013), and the publication of several books about the history of Georgian Turks and translation of many Georgian books into Turkish.

In contrast to the numerous cases of immigrant associations analysed in the available literature (Rex et al., 1987; Wahlbeck, 1999; Moya, 2005; Lacroix, 2012; Pries and Sezgin, 2012; Portes and Fernandez, 2015), the ancestors of Georgian Turks fled from Adjara to Turkey in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, primarily for ‘religious’ reasons (Çiloğlu, 1993; Putkaradze, 1998a; Özel, 2010). Belonging to Sunni Islam is a distinctive characteristic of this group, one which distinguishes them from non-Muslim Georgians and brings them closer to Muslim, Turkish society. Religion is thus expected to continue to play an important role in shaping Georgian Turkish identity, a theme I discuss further in Chapters 6 and 7.

¹³ For an extensive discussion regarding the post-90s Turkish migrants from Bulgaria to Turkey and their ambivalence towards the ancestral homeland and connecting with kinsfolk they had not seen for many decades, see Parla, 2011.

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion about the EU’s impact on domestic political actors and policy change in Central and Eastern Europe, see Houghton, 2007.

In the conclusion to this general background section, I would like to also explain some terminological issues. Turkish citizens of Georgian origin have been often labelled as “Turkish Georgians” in the past (Magnarella, 1976, 1979; Pelkmans, 2006; Weiss, 2016). However, it seems more accurate to use the term “Georgian Turks”. Their baseline identity is one of being Turkish and Muslim; they are born in Turkey, they are Turkish citizen and they see Turkey as their homeland. What I am interested in this thesis is ethnic identity and ethnic feelings. Thus, I take the citizenship as the base, while ethnicity is a ‘variable’ that is central to identity and which this study seeks to explain. Therefore, in the general parts of the study the terms ‘Georgian Turks’, ‘Georgian Turkish’, ‘Georgian immigrants’, ‘Turkish citizenship of Georgian descent/origin’, ‘Georgian Turkish Community’, ‘Georgians living in Turkey’ are preferred, since these are more easily understood by the reader. These terms are also generally accepted and widely used by Georgian Turks in Turkey. The term ‘Muslim Georgians’ refers to those who are Muslim, citizens of Georgia, ethnically Georgian and living in Georgia.

In this study, the terms ‘homeland’ and ‘ancestral/historical home/land’ are used in such a way that the former refers to Turkey and the latter to Georgia (or, more specifically, to the Batumi region of Georgia). These associations, (by defining the country of origin in terms of their *ancestral* homeland rather than homeland) diverge from other ethnic associations studied in the literature (Kaya, 2014; Çelikpala, 2006; Moya, 2005; Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005). The term ‘Adjara’ and ‘Batumi’ are used in this study to describe the region from which the research participants’ ancestors came. However, the term ‘Georgia’ is used when referring to the country.

1.2 Overview of the Chapters

The study begins in Chapter 2 by summarising and critically analysing the existing literature on associations established by immigrants and the concept of ethnicity as a source of identity

formation, as well as their potential contribution in framing the empirical research for this thesis. In this respect, the chapter specifically engages with academic works analysing the role of associations in the formation of identity, with respect to the country of origin and the destination country.

Chapter 3 engages with the methodological approach that guides this study and provides an explanation of the research process, including: the choice of methods; the data collection process; data analysis; and ethical concerns. I also discuss my positionality in the field. The chapter argues that ethnography is the most suitable approach to provide answers to the research question. This is because, firstly, ethnography provides a more holistic picture of the phenomenon under investigation and allows for a trusting relationship to be built with the research participants, who operate in a sensitive political climate. Secondly, the case of Georgian Turkish associations is not clearly understood and well-documented.

The next four chapters outline the main empirical data of this thesis. Chapter 4 looks at the broader context in which associations were created and developed. The chapter discusses the historical and thematic account of ethnic associations in the Turkish context in the light of certain key events and developments over the last centuries, and looks at the factors that led to the emergence and formation of Georgian Turkish associations. Particular attention is paid to understanding why Georgian Turkish associations emerged relatively late compared to other Caucasian associations. This is in order to understand the wider framework affecting the identity construction process amongst the research participants.

Chapter 5 shifts the focus to the activities of the two associations within Turkey. They both carry out 'cultural' activities, but this chapter shows how these differ between each association. I argue that each is developing a differing understanding of what 'cultural activities' are. The chapter further shows that this understanding is being shaped significantly by association board

members' socio-economic and educational backgrounds, kinship relations and available resources, as well as by the local and national contexts in which they operate.

Chapter 6 continues to focus on the activities of both associations, as in chapter 5. However, here the focus is on their activities with respect to Georgia. The chapter reveals an important difference between the two associations in terms of connecting their members to the ancestral homeland. While the IGA creates transnational relations based on religion, the BGCA has trans-local relations based on kinship. Both serve to generate different forms of connections between the members of the associations and the ancestral homeland. Thus, there are two types of identity that have been constructed by the associations. While the IGA fosters a trans-national Georgian Turkish identity, the BGCA creates a trans-local Georgian Turkish identity.

Chapter 7 brings together all of the empirical chapters and discusses what we can say about identities being constructed by associations for this ethnic group. The chapter illustrates how members of both associations' present themselves according different features of their identities, as opposed to other Turks and non-Muslim Georgians.

The concluding chapter summarises the main findings of the thesis, outlines the contribution of the research as a whole and reflects upon its implications for the future development of identity construction amongst Georgian Turks and other ethnic groups. It then outlines areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to summarise and critically analyse the existing literature on associations established by immigrants and the concept of ethnicity as a source of identity formation. This study focuses on how Georgian Turkish associations influence the way identity is constructed, perceived and used in everyday life in Turkey. Thus, this chapter engages specifically with academic works that analyse the role of associations in the formation of identity with respect to the country of origin and the destination country. This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first deals with the literature on immigrant organisations, with a particular focus on their appearance, roles and functions. The second deals with the concept of ethnicity.

2.2 Conceptualising Immigrant Associations

Although immigrant associations are a worldwide phenomenon, the overwhelming majority of studies focus on specific migrant groups in particular host countries, such as Latino and Jewish migrants in the USA (Orozco, 2000; Soyer, 1997; Escobar, 2015; Iskander, 2015), Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese immigrants in European countries (Yalçın-Heckmann, 1997; Yurdakul, 2009; Lacroix and Dumont, 2015; Vermeulen et al., 2016; Vermeulen and Keskiner, 2017), Angolan, Brazilian and Eastern European communities in Portugal (Sardinha, 2009), Nigerian, Latin American, Indian and Polish immigrants in the UK (Lampert, 2013; Pero, 2008; Lacroix, 2012), and the North Caucasian diaspora and Bulgarian Turkish migrants in Turkey (Kaya, 2004, 2005, 2014; Çelikpala, 2006; Chochiev, 2007; Besleney, 2014; Kaşlı, 2016). Moreover, most research on immigrant associations has been carried out within a conceptual framework of migration, remittance, development, political participation, and transnationalism

(Çağlar, 2006: 3; Portes et al., 2008; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2015; Kaya, 2004; Giugni et al, 2014). Such research adopts a policy perspective and treats migrants as the object rather than subject of politics (see Pero, 2008). With the development of information and communication technologies, many immigrant associations now actively use social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and community-based web sites to engage with their members and host societies (Oiarzabal, 2012). Therefore, several researchers have also started paying attention to this field (see Oiarzabel, 2012). Consequently, the immigrant association concept seems to be an important tool to explore immigrant or ethnic communities from different angles, regardless of whether the focus lies on political involvement, identity formation or relations with the country of origin.¹⁵

In her case study of associations formed by Mexican immigrants in the USA, Iskander (2015: 112-113) argues that immigrant associations cannot be thought of as independent entities. Rather, they “are in fact arenas of contestation, where migrants, state officials, and local communities ... wrestle with questions of identity, belonging, political power, and resources” (Iskander, 2015: 112-113). Thus, immigrant associations are significant for the study of “complex and dynamic developments that take place within immigrant communities” in the context of both host and home countries (Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005: 823; Kaşlı, 2016: 1999). As a result, studies over the past decades have provided important information on the significance of immigrant associations for the immigrants themselves and the complex relationship they establish between the host and home countries (Breton, 1964; Schoeneberg,

¹⁵ The literature on immigrant associations assumes that there are clear borders. In the case of Georgian Turks whose ancestors came to western and northern parts of Anatolia, the border with the Soviet Union was contested and fluctuating due to ongoing conflict. Furthermore, Georgian Turks’ ancestors came as refugees, fleeing before or during the wars. They were integrated into the new Turkish state as constituent elements, as my informants referred to it, and not as immigrants to a new state. One can argue that it is anachronistic to talk about associations founded by fourth (or later) generation Georgian Turks being relevant for this historical context. However, their associational activities begun to appear at the local, national and transnational level, most notably after the independence of Georgia. Thus, the idea of the immigrant association seems to be an important tool for exploring the role of Georgian Turks’ associations in the construction of identity.

1985; Rex, 1973; Shrover and Vermeulen, 2005; Wahlbeck, 1999; Moya, 2005; Vermeulen, 2006; Predelli, 2008; Sardinha, 2009; Pries and Sezgin, 2012; Giugni et al., 2014; Strunk, 2014; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2015; Kaşlı, 2016; Vermeulen et al., 2016; Triviño-Salazar, 2017).¹⁶ Nevertheless, the majority of these studies deal with the post-1960 migrants and their associational activities in well developed countries, where immigrants and their associations are well documented.¹⁷

Having said that, however, a number of empirical studies over the past decades have provided important insights into the various roles and functions of immigrant associations in the immigrants' social, cultural, political and economic life, in both country of origin and country of settlement. There are, for example, studies that emphasise the important role that immigrant associations play in strengthening their group's ethnic identity and acting as bridge-builders between the host society and their community (Cordero-Guzman, 2005; Fennema, 2004; Rex et al., 1987; Vermeulen, 2005; Strunk, 2014; Fauser, 2014). There are also other studies that discuss the role of associations in providing immigrants with access to the socioeconomic realm of the receiving society (Bloemraad, 2005; Jenkins, 1988). The participation of immigrant associations in political activities is another area of interest that other researchers have focused on (Odmalm, 2004; Caponio, 2005). Associations founded by immigrants have created important transnational links between immigrant groups and their home countries (Christiansen, 2008; Portes et al., 2008). Thus, a number of studies have been conducted that investigate the relations between immigrant associations and countries of origin, whether in

¹⁶ Depending on their changing conditions, many scholars have focused on associations formed by immigrants on the basis of a number of factors, including: ethnicity, culture, language and religion in the discourse of modernisation, globalisation, urbanisation, dependency, adaptive mechanisms, the articulation of political participation, development, social capital, and the nation state (Kumaran, 1992; Odmalm, 2004; Lacroix, 2015; Takle, 2015).

¹⁷ The existing literature shows that the pre-1930 migrants have been principally studied by historians and post-1960 migrants have become the focus of sociologists, anthropologists and political scientists (Moya, 2005: 855).

terms of social, cultural, economic and transnational factors (Wahlbeck, 1999; Çağlar, 2006; Mercer et al., 2009; Christiansen, 2008; Orozco and Garcia-Zanello, 2009; Lampert, 2013; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2015).

Furthermore, data from several studies have shown the importance of immigrant associations for their communities in the country of reception (Vermeulen and Brünger, 2014: 979). Immigrant associations, for example, protect their members from isolation and alienation in the host society (Rex and Drury, 1994) and support their members when facing problems with education and employment, for example (Moya, 2005). These organisations have also influenced immigrants' social, political and economic participation in the host countries (Cordero-Guzman, 2005; Vermeulen, 2006; Akis and Kalaylioglu, 2010; Michon and Vermeulen, 2013). In most cases, although these associations may be enthusiastic about getting in touch with their ethno-cultural roots, they combine their specific cultures in various ways with the established cultural practices of the host country (Rex, 1994). In this way, they create attachments to the place in which they are based.

Most of these studies, however, fail to address some important issues and questions that the present research aims to engage with. Firstly, these studies focus on associations formed by immigrants who migrated after the 1960s from underdeveloped to more developed countries to find work or, more broadly, to have a better life (e.g. Pries and Sezgin, 2012; Moya, 2005; Çağlar, 2006). Therefore, these studies have not dealt with the meanings ascribed to the place of origin and place of destination amongst fourth (or later) generation immigrants, who gradually start losing interest in their ancestral homeland (Vermeulen, 2006). Secondly, the majority of these studies view immigrant organisations as already developed, well-structured entities, and neglect the factors that affect their late emergence and development process.

Furthermore, less attention has been placed on understanding the impact of the receiving country on this process and how the state delays the emergence and development of associations. Thirdly, none of these studies appear to explore the relationship between transnationalism and religion in terms of immigrants' religious-oriented activities in the country of origin (rather than in the receiving society). It is also important to add that in almost all of these cases, immigrants share the same religion with that in the country of origin and have a religion different to that which predominates in the host country. Finally, almost all of these studies have failed to discuss the emergence of multiple identities in much detail. This study thus fills these gaps in the literature by empirically exploring the importance of associations in the formation of identity amongst fourth (or later) generations who have begun to become more interested in their ethnic roots. In doing so, it zooms in on the relationship between the process of individual identity construction and the broader political and cultural context. It does so by using a holistic, ethnographic approach.

2.2.1 Changing Definitions Across Generations

The associations formed by Georgian immigrants in Turkey vary in terms of their development process, organisational structure and activities. Additionally, they are formed by fourth (or later) generation Turkish citizens of Georgian descent. Hence, it is important to discuss how immigrant associations are defined in the existing literature if we are to recognise those differences. The main aim of this review, however, is to shed light on what the term “an association established by immigrants” means. In order to do so, this section discusses the phenomenon of immigrant associations by discussing relevant academic studies. In doing so, it uncovers the main concepts upon which this study is based.

Immigrant associations—both in host and home countries—and the characteristics of their board members are defined differently in the literature, largely because of their differing

functions and structures. Even though they differ from one another, the majority share common features (Moya, 2005, 839). Moya argues that “immigrant associations are more circumscribed than an entire society or the whole world” (2005; 835). In the same way, Sardinha (2009: 65) — by addressing Moya’s restricted space examples — suggests that immigrant associations “are defined by a people, a place, a cause or an identity” which generally reflects characteristics of immigrant groups. In this sense, organisations founded by immigrants provide a space where members can strengthen their ties with the group from which they perceive themselves to originate. For example, in their study of organisations founded by second-generation Turkish migrants in the Netherlands and France, Vermeulen and Keskiner (2017: 317-318) found that the activities of these associations strengthen ties between like-minded individuals from similar backgrounds and allow them to develop strategies and social identities.

To address the definitional question, Vermeulen (2006: 22) distinguishes “organisations established *by* immigrants and organisations established *for* immigrants” (which mainly includes organisations founded to provide social welfare and which are often subsidised by the state). Furthermore, organisations that were originally established by local people but which were taken over by immigrants, he claims, cannot be defined as genuine immigrant organisations. Based on these distinctions, and through reference to the definition of Jewish organisations in America¹⁸, Vermeulen (2006: 22) defines organisations formed by immigrants as “formal non-profit organisations (officially registered), of which at least half of the board members originate from one single immigrant group (first or second generation)”. Like Moya (2005), Vermeulen (2006) suggests that immigrant associations should be defined as ethnic

¹⁸ Moya (2005: 834) emphasises that the main concern is to be able to provide a somewhat well-defined definition for the term ‘immigrant’ rather than ‘organisation’. Regarding the question of how to define the term ‘immigrant’, the case of Jewish organisations in the USA provides a potential definition. These organisations, Moya (2005: 834) articulates, are over time defined more “as ‘ethnic’ than ‘immigrant’ associations” by scholars and the public. However, he further argues that the key problem with this explanation is that “the point at which this shift in identification happens is not clear” (Moya, 2005: 834).

associations if the founders are third (or later) generation immigrants. However, since existing studies focusing on ethnic associations are limited, I also include those studies that look at associations established by early-generation immigrants.

Organisations formed by immigrants “may evolve and change over time” and also change their target audience (Yalçın-Heckmann, 1997; Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005; Cordero-Guzman, 2005; Sardinha, 2009). Furthermore, the last 30 years have seen different types of immigrant associations, constructing communities at multiple scales, whether local, regional, national or transnational (Strunk, 2014). These developments, it could be argued, have affected not only the structures and functions of associations, but also their membership, target groups and activities. These circumstances inevitably lead to the emergence of new definitions related to associations formed by immigrants in the literature.

Data from several studies suggests that new organisational forms have emerged, for example, amongst Chinese and Mexican immigrants in the USA. These new types of organisations can be defined as regional associations and are linked not to a town or village but instead to a region (Iskander, 2015; Zhou and Lee, 2015; Itzigsohn, 2017). The emergence of these new types of associations have been attributed to the interest of state authorities in engaging with regional associations rather than individuals (Iskander, 2015; Itzigsohn, 2017). As the titles of almost all Georgian Turkish associations indicate, they do not represent a specific village or town but rather the entire region from which their ancestors originate (for example, Batumi and its surroundings) (Toumarkine, 2001). In this sense, Georgian Turkish associations might be categorised as regional associations. However, their emergence differs from that of other associations discussed in the literature. They preferred to use the names of their places of origin because of the structural context in which they operated and, more specifically, to overcome to the problem of raising attention and being perceived as a threat to the state (the emergence of

Georgian Turkish associations in the Turkish context will be discussed in detail in the following chapter).

As can be seen from the above, there is no single and commonly agreed upon definition of organisations founded by immigrants in the literature. This is because of their complex and dynamic nature.¹⁹ For the purpose of the study, however, the term ‘association’ refers to an association that is founded and developed in the host country by fourth (or later) generation immigrants who have continuously resided in the receiving country as citizens and who have common identities because they come from the same country of origin and share the same religion. It brings people together in order to achieve specific goals or aims, such as maintaining the ancestral language, managing members’ problems, and reinforcing links with the place of origin (Kim, 2006: 49-50). This also reflects the definition provided in the statutes of both associations (see the appendix).

Those associations that are founded by third (or later) generation immigrants are generally defined “as ‘ethnic’ rather than ‘immigrant’ associations” (Moya, 2005: 834; Vermeulen, 2006: 21). However, it is not easy to ascertain the transition from an immigrant to a distinct ethnic organisation (Moya, 2005: 834). My participants see Turkey as their homeland and the titles of their associations reflect their Georgian identity, which refers to their ethnic roots (see Chapter 4). From this perspective, since the associations selected for the purpose of this study were founded by the fourth (or later) Georgian Turks, I chose to think of these entities as ethnic rather than immigrant associations. It is important to note, however, that the majority of organisations founded by different immigrant generations share common features (Moya,

¹⁹ Scholars studying these organisations employ multiple terms: private groups, grass-root movements, goal-oriented associations, public interest groups, intermediary organisations, and non-profits (Moya, 2005). Particular attention has been paid to immigrant organisations, specifically in the form of "community-based organisations" (Cordero-Guzman, 2005), "hometown associations" (HTAs) (Okamura, 1988; Kliger, 1992; Christiansen, 2008; Strunk, 2014), "ethnic organisations/associations" (Jenkins, 1988; Attah-Poku, 1996; Hein, 1997), and "immigrant associations" (Rex et al., 1987; Soyer, 1997; Li, 1999; Sardinha, 2009; Yurdakul, 2009).

2005; Schrover and Vermeulen: 2005). In this study, it is also important to understand how the research participants define these organisations.

2.2.2 Factors Influencing the Formation of Immigrant Associations

Different views are available regarding the question of what triggers the establishment of associations amongst immigrants. On the one hand, immigrant associations were interpreted “as continuations of pre-migratory ethnic communal practices” (Briggs, 1978; Mormino and Pozzetta, 1987; cited in Moya, 2005: 837-838) which would not apply to fourth (or later) generation immigrants. On the other hand, their growth was attributed to “a particular stage of modernisation” (Curtis et al., 2001; cited in Moya, 2005: 837). Robert E. Park similarly argues that immigrants formed organisations “as part of their adjustment to a modern society” (Hein, 1997; 279). However, it is still unclear whether the pre-migratory experience of immigrants is the main impetus for associational activity or rather the host country's environment itself, or both. One of the reasons may be that immigrant groups have different pre-arrival practices and conditions in the host countries are not always the same. Thus, Schrover and Vermeulen (2005: 828) suggest that “the characteristics of the immigrant communities and political or institutional opportunities in the host and sending societies” are the most influential factors in explaining the origin of these organisations.

Breton (1964: 204), in his article “Institutional completeness of ethnic communities and the personal relations of immigrants”, suggests three factors that influence the formation of an ethnic association: cultural or social differences with the host society; “the level of resources amongst the members of the ethnic group”; and “the pattern of migration”. Cultural differences between immigrants and natives were seen as a significant factor stimulating the establishment of organisations formed by immigrants, first by Breton, but later by other scholars (Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005; Cordero-Guzman, 2005). Departing from Breton (1964), Schrover and

Vermeulen (2005: 826) suggest three different factors: the process of migration (which is similar to “the pattern of migration” discussed by Breton); the host country’s opportunity structure; and the features of the immigrant group (of which “the level of resources” that they have in their possession is just one component).

Of these three factors, Moya (2005) attaches preferential importance to the first. Through discussion of German, Italian, Lebanese, Chinese, Japanese, Jewish and Greek immigrant cases, Moya (2005: 839) concludes that “the impetus for associational activity” cannot be explained by “pre-migratory ethnic communal practices”. According to Moya (2005: 839), “the principal stimulus for associational activity thus derived not from the cultural backgrounds of the emigrants or the civic habits of their hosts but from a more universal source: the migration process itself.” This implies that the process of migration itself is necessary for the creation of immigrant associations.

This appears not to apply, however, to the Georgian Turkish case. Although other ethnic groups—notably the Circassians²⁰ —founded their associations soon after they arrived in Anatolia, Georgian Turks formed their first association in 1961 (nearly 80 years after their arrival) (Magnarella, 1976). Therefore, referral solely to one of these factors is inadequate when explaining the principal stimulus for the formation of Georgian Turkish associations. It seems that the characteristics of Georgian Turks, the circumstances in the host environment (Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005: 824) and the migration process have, to a certain extent, had an impact on the associational activities of Georgian Turks in the homeland (I discuss this in detail in the following chapter). The following section of this chapter will go on to discuss the various roles and functions that associations have played in different contexts.

²⁰ In this study, I often compare Georgian Turks with Circassians. They are the most studied Caucasian group in terms of their associational activities in Turkey (Çelikpala, 2006; Kaya, 2014, Besleney, 2014). It is also the largest Caucasian group in Turkey, with a population of approximately 2.5 million (Kaya, 2014).

2.3 Associations as a Space for Immigrants

Immigrant associations have different roles, but are commonly established in order to preserve members' identity and culture by mobilising a sense of belonging to the group's ancestral homeland (Rex et al., 1987; Vermeulen, 2006). In this vein, Schrover and Vermeulen (2005:823) argue that "immigrants set up organisations to create, express and maintain a collective identity." As Rex (1991: 67) claims, identity is an important instrument in the process of group formation that leads to a sense of belonging. He offers four main functions that immigrant associations fulfil. Firstly, they help their members overcome social isolation. Secondly, they support individuals in dealing with personal and material problems. Thirdly, they play a role in defending the group's interests in the host society. Finally, they play a role in retaining and developing shared patterns of meaning (Rex, 1991: 69). These functions attract individuals to take part in associational activities (Rex, 1973; Sardinha, 2009).

At the same time, these organisations sometimes function as a barrier between their members' ethnic or national identity and others living in the receiving country (Marquez, 2001). They not only encourage the inclusion of their members into the host society, but also play an important role in preserving ancestral ethnic identity and culture (Saksela-Bergholm, 2009: 29). In doing so, they play two opposite roles in the integration process of the community, one defensive and one offensive (Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005: 824-825) or, put differently, one assimilative and one segregative (Sardinha, 2009: 77). This may result in the formation of different types of identities and belonging within the community.

Although ethnicity-based identity seems to be one of the most important determinants in mobilising immigrant groups, it may not be the fundamental factor in some cases. For example, based on the results of an online survey and interviews with members and board members of two organisations formed by Turkish migrants in the Netherlands and France, Vermeulen and

Keskiner (2017: 317) conclude that ethnicity is not the key factor in successful second generation's organisation processes. For this group, the authors argue, the main reasons affecting organisation processes are “educational trajectories, overlapping individual ambitions, a shared feeling of responsibility for fellow individuals of migrant descent [...] and newly acquired socioeconomic status” (Vermeulen and Keskiner, 2017: 317). In other words, these are the reasons behind the foundation of associations that shape their roles and activities.

2.3.1 Political Involvement through Culture

Immigrant associations are considered to be an effective means through which to encourage the social integration and political participation of immigrants at multiple scales (Paxton, 2002; Myrberg: 2011). In recent years, the importance of immigrant associations as a source of social capital has been the subject of much attention by researchers (Guigni et al., 2014). The concept of social capital has been gaining significance in research on the political involvement of immigrants, particularly because of the work of Fennema and Tillie (1999, 2001). These two authors argue that “differences in political participation of ethnic minorities are linked to differences in ‘civic community’, primarily seen as the amount of ‘ethnic’ social capital (participation in ethnic associational life) of the relevant group” (Jacobs and Tillie, 2004: 419). Furthermore, their research showed a correlation between the political involvement and trust of ethnic groups and the concentration of the networks within ethnic associations (Jacobs and Tillie, 2004: 420). On the basis of their sociological research, they contend, “voluntary associations create social trust, which spills over into political trust and higher political participation” (Jacobs and Tillie, 2004: 420; Giugni et al., 2014: 1595). Several other empirical studies conducted on ethnic associations have also shown that involvement in associations both strongly and positively affects the political participation of immigrants (Myrberg, 2011:101; Takle, 2013; Giugni et al, 2014; 1593; Pilati and Morales, 2016: 2812). Thus, these

organisations become the voice of their members and represent their interests in political life (Sardinha, 2009: 80).

Therefore, immigrant associations are the fulcrum point for understanding the prominence of immigrant communities in the politics of the host state (Yurdakul, 2006: 436). For example, to better understand the link between immigrant associations and mainstream political parties in the host country, Yurdakul (2006) focuses on Turkish immigrant associations in Germany. Similarly, Pero (2008) looks at the organisations established by Latin American immigrants in the UK. These studies conclude that immigrant associations are actively involved in the host country's political system, especially through engagement with political parties. They do this in order to defend their interests. Yurdakul (2006) and Pero (2008) further claim that in the context of relations between immigrant organisations and political parties, "immigrant elites become important political actors to negotiate rights and memberships" on behalf of their respective community (Yurdakul, 2006: 437-438; Pero, 2008: 85-87). Nevertheless, in the political and economic domain, the internal dynamics of the host country prevail in the determination of the rules of the game (Yurdakul, 2006: 437). Hence, immigrant associations "do not have full bargaining power vis-à-vis state authorities" when acting as representatives of immigrant groups (Yurdakul, 2006: 437-438; Pero, 2008: 85-87).

Similarly, in an effort to apply Fennema and Tillie's (1999, 2001) hypotheses in the European context, some researchers have conducted studies that look further into the connection between ethnic associational involvement and political engagement. These use the same approach, but take into account other important explanatory factors, such as education, gender, employment status, faith and language proficiency (Jacobs and Tillie, 2004; Eggert and Guigni, 2011; Myrberg, 2011). By taking into account religion as an explanatory factor, for example, Guigni et al. (2014) look at the relationship between associational involvement and political participation amongst Muslim immigrants in Switzerland. The survey-based study of Muslim

residents scrutinises how associational involvement influences their involvement in protest activities and thus political participation. To do so, Guigni et al. (2014) try to examine whether religiosity has an impact on associational involvement amongst Muslim immigrants in Switzerland. Their findings suggest that in the Swiss context, Muslim immigrants who are involved in associations formed along ethnic lines are more likely to engage in the realm of politics (Guigni et al., 2014: 1608).

Several studies have shown that immigrants have organised themselves along the lines of the various cultural activities they engage in (Attah-Poku, 1996; Danese, 2001; Saksela-Bergholm, 2009). Although a variety of interests and objectives might be available for the members of immigrant associations (Sardinha, 2009: 81), one explanatory factor may be the interest that members in maintaining their ethnic identity and in strengthening it through the association's activities (Vermeulen, 2005; Saksela-Bergholm, 2009). Cultural practices are important for immigrant communities when faced with cultural differences (i.e. those that differ from those of the host society (Breton 1964:205)) and when forming identities. Nonetheless, the tendency among immigrant associations to concentrate on cultural activities shows an inclination towards the strategic use of *cultural identity* (Hall, 1990) in order to receive funds, satisfy needs and not be perceived as a threat to national unity (Danese, 2001: 88; Kaya, 2014: 53). In doing so, they not only participate in political life, but also, to a certain degree, control how they are perceived.

As the above studies show, different factors affect the political participation of immigrants in the host country. This is also the case for Georgian Turks in Turkey, especially in the last decade. For instance, firstly, the former president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, visited Turkey in 2013 in order to give a offer nationality certificates to Georgian Turks. Most of the associations helped Saakashvili with the organisation of the trip. At the same time, the Office

of the State Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues²¹ approved a draft document related to the national strategy for migration, which sought to increase the strength of its relationship with the diaspora (GIZ, 2013).²² However, both associations I studied were not involved in a scheme to encourage Turkish citizens of Georgian origin to apply for dual nationality, but they did host officials from the Office and invited them to their activities.

Secondly, Georgian Turks, through their associations, began to be involved in the developments taking place in the ancestral homeland. For example, Georgian Turks were, for the first time, officially invited to attend a meeting held in Istanbul in 1999 organised to solve the conflict between Abkhazia and Georgia, alongside participants from Turkey, the UN, OSCE and representatives of Abkhazia and Georgia (Çelikpala, 2006). This could be seen as an initial step for the future activities of Georgian Turkish associations. Thereafter, the Georgian Turks began to declare their opinions related to the ongoing processes in the region, for example the South Ossetia War (2008) and the minaret crisis (2013) (see Chapter 6). In this sense, the involvement of the Georgian Turkish association in foreign political events is important because it gives them an international dimension (see Chapter 6). Nevertheless, it also shows that they are probably ‘instruments’ working for/with the Turkish state in line with its policy towards the region.

Finally, Turkey’s 24th general election was held in June 2015. Two board members from IGA applied to the Ruling Party (the Justice and Development Party²³) to run for election, but they were not selected as candidates. The youngest board member of the BGCA also actively

²¹ This department was closed down in 2017. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Georgia will hereafter take over the activities of the department. For a detailed discussion of why states establish institutions devoted to emigrants and their descendants, see Gamlen, et al., 2017.

²² The Georgian Government defines Georgian Turks as a ‘historical diaspora’ (GIZ, 2013).

²³ A Turkish Islamist party that came to power in 2002 and –at the time of writing- is still in power.

engaged in political campaigning on behalf of the Ruling Party. Nevertheless, the majority of the research participants still distanced themselves from political affairs, because of the possibility of being perceived as a threat to national unity (see Chapter 4). They predominantly organise themselves along cultural and educational lines in order not to be perceived as a threat to the national unity. This ultimately affects the way they express their identity and belonging (see Chapter 7). In this sense, this study also contributes to the literature by exploring how associational involvement influences political participation in the Turkish context.

2.3.2 Transnationalism, Religion and the State

In this study, broadly speaking, “‘transnationalism’ refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of” two countries (Vertovec, 1999: 447). Transnational practices, however, are not necessarily practiced by all migrants (Vertovec, 2009: 13). Through immigrant associations, migrants engage with their ancestral homelands and thus participate in transnational practices (Zhou and Lee, 2013: 45). Transnational migration has changed the relationship between immigrants, the countries from which they originate and the countries in which they have settled (Glick Schiller et al., 1995; Çağlar, 2006; Orozco and Garcia-Zanello, 2009; Glick Schiller, 2010). It has been argued that associations formed by immigrants have proliferated because of this new transnational context (Orozco and Garcia-Zanello, 2009). Empirical studies focusing on the actions of immigrant organisations from a transnational perspective have shown the importance of these organisations for social, cultural, political and economic development in the sending country and for the immigrants’ incorporation into the receiving society (Portes, 2015: 3; Itzigsohn, 2017: 465- 470; Orozco and Garcia-Zanello, 2009; Duquette-Rury, 2016; Wihtol de Wenden, 2017). They “act as a link between the sending country and the receiving one”, and play an important role in maintaining relationships between ethnic groups, countries or regions (Odmalm, 2004: 473). They aim to contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of both their homelands and host

countries (Çağlar, 2006: 1; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2015). However, some studies suggest that immigrant organisations “make a limited, almost marginal economic contribution” to the country of origin’s development (Lampert, 2013: 829; Iskander, 2015). Although this question remains beyond the scope of this study, it is worth mentioning that both the role of studied associations and individual members in the economic development of the ancestral homeland seem to be minimal.

Empirical studies on transnationalism and migration show that immigrants maintain regular contact with their homelands to transmit new set of norms and values adopted in the host society.²⁴ This is done either through ‘returnees’ or diaspora networks to the sending country and in the form of economic, political, social and cultural transnational activities (OECD, 2016; Portes, 2015: 7; Itzigsohn, 2017: 467-468). However, these activities tend to be conducted by organisations, rather than individuals (Portes, 2015: 7-8). Empirical studies have repeatedly found that these organisations are generally led by better educated immigrants, those with higher occupational status, and those who are legally secure in the host country (Portes, 2015: 8-9; Waldinger, 2015: 171).

Immigrant associations can be transnational social spaces that function as transmitters of identity (Sardinha, 2009: 86; Vertovec, 2001). It is important to note that in the present case, the transnational space was created *after* the founding of the associations. In the concluding chapter to “The State and the Grassroots”, Fernandez-Kelly (2015) suggests that “immigrant organisations engaged in transnational development initiatives” can theoretically be studied “as means for the intergenerational transmission of economic advantages and identity formation” (the temporal vector) and “as a bridge connecting migrants abroad to their homelands” (the spatial vector) (Guarnizo, 2017: 461-462). Fernandez-Kelly concludes that these organisations

²⁴ As mentioned previously, although Georgian Turks were prohibited from any contact with their ancestral homeland for some 70 years, they began to establish regular connections with Georgia from the 1990s onwards.

are not only “channels for development abroad”, but also “facilitate immigrants’ assimilation and the recasting of their own identity” (461-462). Fernandez-Kelly, for example, points out that “the second generation tends to engage in such activities mainly for identity-related reasons, rather than out of an interest in the development of their parents’ homeland” (Guarnizo, 2017: 463). The Georgian Turkish associations, most notably the IGA, also play an important role in connecting their members to the ancestral homeland. This will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Although some authors use the terms translocalism and transnationalism interchangeably, the former “serves to overcome some of the conceptual weaknesses” of the latter (Greiner and Sakdapolrak, 2013: 373-380; Tenhunen, 2011). For example, Mandaville (2002: 204) preferred to use the term translocal instead of transnational and defined translocal as “a space in which new forms of (post)national identity are constituted.” By emphasising two key aspects of translocalism: *mobility* and *place* (Greiner and Sakdapolrak, 2013: 373), Oakes and Schein (2006: xiii) define translocality as “being identified with more than one location”. Thus, translocality refers to the multiple meanings of identity and the relation between identities, subjectivity and networks connecting places together (Oakes and Schein, 2006: xiii). This understanding of translocality challenges the regional limitations and emphasises that the world is constituted through processes crossing borders at different scales (Greiner and Sakdapolrak, 2013: 375). With this in mind, the BGCA’s trans-local relationships will also be discussed in Chapter 6.

2.3.2.1 The Importance of Religion

Religion and ethnic identification are intertwined with each other (Brubaker, 2015: 5). Organising cultural activities is a way of expressing this type of identity. Thus, immigrant associations (excluding religious associations established only for religious purposes) also

engage in religious practices that reflect the traditional cultural practices of their members (Attah-Poku, 1996: 66). These religious practices are important for the members as they encourage socialisation (Baumann, 2002) and provide occasions for immigrants to meet and establish long-term relationships with their co-ethnic peers (Attah-Poku, 1996: 66). Nevertheless, in the present case, religious practices play a different role, one which connects the participants both to the sending and receiving countries (Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the importance of religion). In this sense, religious faith is used as a means to mobilise members of the associations and thus maintain ethnic identity (De Vos, 1995: 21).

Immigrants' transnational economic, political, and socio-cultural practices have been studied elsewhere (Levitt and Schiller, 2004). Nevertheless, the relationship between transnationalism and religion is rarely addressed. The majority of studies conducted on religious transnationalisation have concentrated on the activities of transmigrants or of church missionaries (Frigerio, 2013; Levitt, 2004) and religion as a transnational movement (Wanner, 2007). What we know about the transnationalisation of religion is largely based on studies that investigate how immigrants practice their religion in the receiving society, how their religion changes over time, and how they affect the receiving society's religious landscape (Meintel and Hernandez, 2013:225). Although analysis of religious trans-nationalisation has revealed the various ways in which religion transcends borders (Vertovec, 2001; Levitt, 2004; Wanner, 2007; Frigerio, 2013; Saraiva, 2013; Meintel and Hernandez, 2013), transnational religious activities conducted by ethnic associations in this process are neglected in the literature. I hope to contribute to this topic by exploring how Georgian Turkish associations, especially the IGA, carry out religious-oriented activities in the ancestral homeland.

Islam is a distinctive characteristic of Georgian Turks, separating them from Georgians in Georgia. Under Ottoman rule, an overwhelming majority of the people living in Adjara (the area from which my informants came) adopted Islam (Coene, 2010). Moreover, Adjara was

the only autonomous region of the Soviet Union that was organised along religious rather than on ethno-linguistic lines (Coene, 2010; Hoch and Kopecek, 2011).²⁵ After the Russian-Ottoman war of 1877-1878, the majority of the residents moved to Anatolia rather than live under Russian Empire's rule, especially because of the implications for their freedom to practice their religion (Özel, 2010, Magnarella, 1974, Çiloğlu, 1993). My participants also shared the same faith (Sunni-Hanafi Islam) as the majority of the host society. To a certain extent this gives them a privileged position compared to some other ethnic groups (Kaya, 2014: 52).

These factors differentiate the present case from available empirical studies in the existing literature and make it noteworthy. In this sense, the present study also explores how the associations that are the focus of this study use religion to shape their identity, associational activities and to access their Muslim co-ethnic peers living in the ancestral homeland (De Vos, 1995: 21).

2.3.2.2 The importance of the State

Developments initiated by state have been influential in the organising processes of ethnic groups (Bellér-Hann and Hann, 2001: 30). Various empirical studies show that the state constitutes a significant dimension in the formation and analysis of immigrant transnational organisations, both in sending and receiving countries (Iskander, 2015; Portes, 2015). These studies document the dynamics and implications of official intervention by the state of origin at different levels (national, regional, and local) to encourage migrants to contribute to development in their country of origin. "This intervention ranges from granting dual citizenship and voting rights from abroad, to allocating official migrant representation in the national

²⁵ It is argued that Adjara was not the only one. For example, the Jewish Autonomous Region in the Far East was also sometimes considered a religious-based entity inside the USSR. However, the Autonomous Region appeared to be an ethno-linguistic autonomy, because it was set up for Jews (Hoch and Kopecek, 2011: 63-34).

parliament, to schemes encouraging private investment and the funding of civic projects in the countries of origin” (Guarnizo, 2017: 463).

As sending countries “seek to exert political and economic control over migrants and their organisations, and as destination states try to use them to regulate migrants’ spatial mobility and maintain political control”, [...] state policies both at home and in destination countries [...] have generated concerns” (Guarnizo, 2017: 463). Although the entry of state agencies into the transnational field changed it profoundly, this has so far been neglected in the emerging literature on immigrant organisations (Portes, 2015: 14-19; Guarnizo, 2017: 462). Four empirical chapters of this study (Chapters 4- 7, but most notably Chapter 4) explores the role that the state has played on Georgian Turkish associations at the national and transnational level. In doing so, this study seeks to also contribute to the current literature that disusses this issue.

From the beginning of the 1980s until the present day, a number of factors present both in Turkey and in the international arena have influenced not only the associational activities of Georgian Turks, but those of all immigrant groups in Turkey (Chochiev, 2007). These factors include: the collapse of the Soviet Union; the Georgian declaration of independence (1991), which allowed establishing direct contacts between the immigrants and the ancestral homeland; the opening of Turkey’s EU accession negotiations (from 1995 onwards), which led to the creation of a better democratic environment; and the creation of visa and passport free regimes between Turkey and Georgia in 2006 and 2011 respectively (I discuss these factors in detail in the following chapter). These new factors may offer opportunities to Georgian Turkish associations to transnationally connect with the country of origin. For example, as a sign of exemplary mutual relations, in 2006 the citizens of Turkey and Georgia were able to enjoy visa-free touristic travel. In addition, in accordance with a protocol signed on the 31st May 2011, the two countries’ citizens became able to travel to each other’s country using only their

national identity documents (i.e. without a passport). Furthermore, Turkey and Georgia jointly operate Batumi Airport (Ter-Matevosyan, 2014).²⁶ These measures have led to a large increase in the number of visitors entering Turkey from Georgia, and vice versa. For example, in 2017 over one million Turkish citizens visited Georgia (one around two thousand people did so in 2003) and over two million Georgian citizens came to Turkey (than two-hundred thousand did so in 2003) (TURKSTAT, 2017). As I observed during fieldwork, some of these newcomers began to get in touch with the Georgian Turkish associations. Thus, one could expect changes in the activities, roles and target audience of these associations.

Other factors include: the 12 September 1980 military coup and shutdown of the majority associations (particularly the associations which had a non-Turkish cultural discourse); the economic development of Turkey in the first half of the 1980s; the actualisation of Turkey's geopolitical interests in the Caucasus; the migratory influx in the 1990s from rural to urban areas; and important amendments in the law on associations in 2004 (these factors will be discussed in detail in the following chapter) (Chochiev, 2007; Çelikpala, 2006; Kaya, 2004; Aras and Akpınar, 2011; Gökay, 2006; Gökay and Aybak, 2016).

Several studies have highlighted the importance of ethnic associations as providers of social services for newly arrived immigrants in different countries (Jenkins, 1988; Massey et al., 1987; Cordero-Guzman, 2005). The findings of these studies suggest that although the national social plans and policies of the host countries are influential in associations' opportunities, ethnic associations play an important role in serving as an advocate for the new immigrants by providing important information and outlining social-services on offer (Jenkins, 1988:2). In a similar example, Cordero-Guzman (2005: 889), based on surveys and in-depth interviews, looked at the role of community-based organisations in "the immigration process and in the

²⁶ <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/reactions-between-turkey-and-georgia.en.mfa>, accessed 7 April 2017).

social, cultural, political and economic adaptation and incorporation of immigrants”. The author concludes that immigrant associations provide important social functions for their members, such as the reconstruction of social ties, helping with orientation, adaptation and incorporation and representation in politics. These are funded using metropolitan and private resources, or other forms of funding (Cordero-Guzman 2005: 908). Nevertheless, Georgian Turkish associations in the Turkish context do not play an effective role with respect to newcomers when it comes to the provision of these types of services as they mainly target Turkish citizens of Georgian origin. Despite the fact that more recently, both associations, especially the IGA, have to some extent begun to offer these kinds of services to newcomers (see Chapter 5).

There is a close relationship between immigrant associations and local public authorities (district municipalities and governorships) in Turkey (Çelikpala, 2006; Kaya, 2004; Chochiev, 2007; Taymaz, 2001; Toumarkine and Hersant, 2005). Although Turkish public authorities provide free places to these associations to organise their ‘social’ and ‘cultural’ activities, there is no direct public funding available to them. In contrast to other literature on the topic, these collaborative activities are directed at creating a religious and cultural consciousness among members and Muslim co-ethnics in the country of origin (i.e. Georgia) rather than providing social services for newcomers. The associations, most notably the IGA, play a role in Georgia, not Turkey itself.

2.4 Associations in the Turkish Context

Currently, there are few academic works that focus upon Georgian Turkish associations in Turkey. However, in the Turkish context, there is an emerging and growing literature on other immigrant organisations (e.g. the North Caucasians, Abkhazians, Turkish immigrants from the

Balkans and Crimea²⁷) and hometown associations or village associations formed by internal migrants (Buran, 1993; Çelikpala, 2006; Kaya, 2004; Chochiev, 2007; Taymaz, 2001; Toumarkine and Hersant, 2005; Arabacı, 2006; Kurtoğlu, 2005; Çaymaz, 2005; Fliche, 2005; Özgür, 2008; Besleney, 2014; Kaşlı, 2016).²⁸ Furthermore, several studies have been conducted by the Turkish Ministry of Interior Department of Associations. These use a conceptual framework that focuses upon civil society, development, adaptive mechanisms, gender and remittances (Department of Associations, 2015).

Nevertheless, the Georgian Turkish case is somewhat different, in the sense that immigrants see Turkey as their ‘homeland’ and their country of origin as their ‘ancestral’ or ‘historical homeland’. Besides, they have no intention of returning to Georgia. This is one of the most important elements differentiating the Georgian Turkish community from, for example, Circassians (Kaya, 2014; Besleney, 2014) and Abkhazians (Özgür, 2008) in Turkey. In other words, the idea of repatriation appeared to be crucial in shaping ethnic groups’ associational activities. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and EU accession process seem to be the most important factor triggering the repatriation of Caucasians in Turkey. Nonetheless, these factors do not motivate the Georgian Turks to repatriate (the following chapter will explain the impact of these developments in more detail).

The North Caucasians, widely known as the Circassians or Cherkess, have a population of approximately 2.5 million. They are also represented by a large number of associations in

²⁷ Arabacı’s PhD research (2006) is dedicated to investigating the political, social, cultural and economic activities of the associations in Turkey founded by Crimean Turkish immigrants, who were deported in 1944 by Stalin from their homeland. He divides the activities of these associations into two phases: before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The associations were culturally oriented in the first phase (Arabacı, 2006). However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Crimean Turks got the chance to return to their homeland. In this new context, the number of Crimean associations dramatically increased, and they became particularly active in political rather than cultural activities (Arabacı, 2006). He concludes that today, the Crimean Turks’ associations play a significant role in providing social and financial help to those who wish to return to their homeland. He also asserts that these associations struggle to shape Turkish foreign policy towards the region (Arabacı, 2006).

²⁸ As my participants told me, Georgian Turks did not form any hometown or village association early on when they moved from the villages to the big cities.

Turkey (Toumarkine, 2001; Taymaz, 2001; Kaya, 2014). These associations are involved in social, cultural and political activities, and also in all types of developments happening in their homeland (Çelikpala, 2006: 426). In the beginning, these associations were aimed at sustaining their own existence, encouraging solidarity amongst their own immigrant communities and “preserv[ing] their identities through cultural activities” (Çelikpala, 2006: 428; Kaya, 2014: 53). However, over time, associational activities have changed, largely due to new developments taking place in the North Caucasus. These associations, now acting as pressure groups, attempted to become more active in Turkey’s domestic politics and foreign policies directed towards the region. They also became involved in lobbying activities (Çelikpala, 2006: 428; Kaya, 2014: 55).²⁹ The distinction between homeland and host country is clear amongst Circassians. While they see Turkey as a host country, their homeland is their place of origin. Furthermore, they have maintained a continued attachment to their homeland, and many have expressed an interest in returning to the homeland. Some of them have indeed repatriated (Wiley, 2015: 142-154; Kaya, 2014: 54).

Chochiev (2007: 226) proposes that the North Caucasian associations nowadays have three aims: to be granted status as an ethnic minority in Turkey, to further develop relationships with the North Caucasus and to generate social, political and legal conditions for the repatriation of the Circassians to their ancestral homeland. As a result, Turkey has recognised the importance of these organisations as a source of foreign policy input and started to use them when shaping its policy towards the region (Çelikpala, 2006: 429). In other words, the state encourages such associations in order to ‘use’ them to further its own interests with respect to its foreign policy.

²⁹ It is important to note that the Cherkess have been a source of conflict during the early phase of the formation of the Republic of Turkey. With the Cherkess Ethem revolt (1920-1921), the Cherkess became a rival to Kuvay-i Milliye (the national forces) (Besleney, 2014). Thus, in this sense, their position was different from other smaller ethnic groups from the Caucasus.

Kaya (2004; 2014) suggests that there has been a resurgence of interest in ethnicity, particularly in the urban space (this will be explored in detail in the following chapter).³⁰ The increase in the number of Circassian associations is a result of this resurgence (Kaya, 2004: 234). These associations provide their members with a safe place in the urban area and organise different activities, such as cultural evenings, language courses, folk dances and tours to the homeland, thus making a contribution to the “construction and articulation of Circassian identity” (Kaya, 2004: 234-235). Another study regarding the Circassians in Turkey was carried out by Besleney (2014)³¹, who argues that the fall of the Soviet Union and Turkey’s EU accession process are two important developments in the strengthening of the sense of identity and belonging that the Circassians have towards their ancestral homeland. While the former allowed Circassians to establish direct links with their homeland, the latter provided them with the opportunity to raise their agenda on the international stage.

In contrast to the other Caucasian groups and Turkish immigrants from the Balkans and Crimea, there is much less information about Turkish citizens of Georgian origin. A search of the literature reveals few studies that focus specifically on Georgians in Turkey. Although some research has been carried out on the history of Georgian Turks, their immigration, their village life and the divided border (Mehmed Arif, 2002; Özel, 2010, Magnarella, 1974, Çiloğlu, 1993; Saydam, 1997; Pelkmans, 2006; Kasap 2010; Denizci, 2010; Yildiztaş, 2012), no empirical study exists that concentrates on their associational activities.

³⁰ Kumaran (1992: 11) suggests that immigrants aim at preserving their traditional institutions within the cities. This means that various types of associations are developed over time by immigrants in order to cope with changing circumstances (Kumaran, 1992: 11).

³¹ The study in particular claims that Turkey’s EU accession process has made a contribution to the diaspora activities of the Circassians. During the process, several meetings were held between Turkish Circassian groups and EU delegates, and financial aid was granted for cultural and linguistic projects which increased the visibility of Turkey’s Circassians (Besleney, 2014: 41-82).

A few articles very briefly touch upon Georgian Turkish associations. One of these was written by Alexandre Toumarkine (Toumarkine, 2001). The author mainly focuses on immigrant associations pertaining to immigrants from the Caucasus and the Balkans, but spends two pages discussing associations founded by Georgian Turks. According to this article, the first Georgian Turkish associations was founded in 1987 in Istanbul. In the 1980s, there were 12 associations formed by Georgian Turks (also called Batumi Muhajirs) in Istanbul, Bursa, Kocaeli and Ordu. The article only provides the name of these associations. He asserts that Georgian Turks gradually emphasised the Georgian dimension of their identity, in parallel with the identity seeking process that was taking place in modern Turkey. The author also suggests that the association formation process was already developing in this direction. However, he makes these claims on the basis of studies on associations formed by immigrants from the Caucasus and the Balkans. Thus, as there is no empirical work available, his findings cannot be generalised to the Georgian Turks.

The country of origin may have an impact on group's associational activities in the host country (Vermeulen, 2006: 37). For instance, many Turkish organisations in the Netherlands and Germany were established in the 1980s with financial backing from Turkey and with the goal of strengthening their position in the receiving society (Vermeulen, 2006: 37-38). Similarly, Çelikpala (2006: 433) very briefly discusses the mobilisation process of Georgian Turks, in particular after the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict at the beginning of the 1990s. He further states that with the Georgian government's backing, a Georgian MP mobilised Turkish citizens of Georgian origin to form associations and to act as a pressure group in Turkey. Accordingly, three Georgian organisations³² were founded in an effort to balance the North Caucasians'

³² “[With] the participation of leading political figures [...], a group of Georgian businessmen founded a Turkish–Georgian Culture and Solidarity Foundation (*Türk-Gürcü Kültür ve Dayanışma Vakfı*) and worked as a balancing pressure group. Similarly, some other new groups with a close connection with Georgia like the Turkish–Georgian Association of Friendship and Solidarity (*Türk- Gürcü Dostluk ve Dayanışma Derneği*) and the Eduard

activities, a counterbalance against the invasion of Abkhazia by Georgia in 1992 and which aimed at influencing Turkey's foreign policy towards the region (Çelikpala, 2006: 433).³³ However, the author claims that, in comparison with their North Caucasian counterparts, these associations did not have much impact on the Turkish government and policy makers (Çelikpala, 2006: 434). Nevertheless, Turkish foreign policy, which supports Georgia's territorial integrity (Aras and Akpınar, 2011; Gökay, 2013), is in line with these three organisations' desires.

The common denominator for all of these studies is that none are directly related to Georgian Turks' associational activities and the majority are not based on empirical research. Furthermore, the studies carried out in the Turkish context predominantly focus on the North Caucasian diaspora associations and their roles in political participation and transnational activities. Another important point is that restrictions on "equal access to political and cultural rights [in Turkey] affect not only non-Muslims, Kurds, and Alevis" but also Caucasian groups (Kaya, 2014: 52) and the Turkish migrants from the Balkans living in Turkey.

The present research contributes to the literature in so much as it is the first academic study, to the best of the author's knowledge, that focuses on Georgian Turkish associations and which uses original, first-hand empirical data collected from the field. The study sets out to explore the Georgian Turkish associations' role in the construction of identity amongst their members with regards to the homeland, Turkey, and the historical homeland, Georgia. Although the present research focuses on the period between 2013-2016, I also explore the late emergence and development of Georgian Turkish associations in Turkey in the light of recent

Shevardnadze Friendship and Solidarity Association (*Eduard Shevardnadze Dostluk ve Dayanışma Derneği*) were also established in this period. [...] With the intensification of all these lobbying activities, the then foreign minister [of Turkey] Hikmet Cetin warned both sides against allowing ethnic disputes in the region to spill over into Turkey" (Çelikpala, 2006: 433-434).

³³ The associations selected for the purpose of this study are not those that were established in this period.

developments (e.g. the breakup of the Soviet Union, Georgia's independence, Turkey's ambition to join the EU and the emergence of the free visa and passport regime between the two countries) (see Chapter 4). It is important to note that the study does not focus on the time after the attempted coup in Turkey in July 2016.

2.5 Ethnicity as a Source of Identity Formation

Turkish citizens of Georgian origin have been living in Turkey for more than a century. Today, fourth (or later) generation Georgian Turks live in different areas around Turkey. Ethnic origin is considered to be a key element in the process of identity formation amongst Georgian Turks. In this study, I consider ethnic identity as an important factor stimulating associational activities amongst Georgians in Turkey and a significant variable in the construction of both individual and community identity. Therefore, before I discuss the concept of ethnicity, I will attempt to explain the way in which I am using the term "ethnicity" in this study. It is worth adding that Georgian Turks share the same religion as the host country, Islam. They hold Turkish citizenship and their primary language is Turkish. Therefore, ethnic background is an important marker for them if they are to distinguish themselves from wider Turkish society. With that in mind, this section will attempt to situate ethnicity as a source of identity formation.

As human beings, we live in the world with multiple identities. These identities are what make us who we are. Gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and religion are just some of the variables that make up these identities (Sardinha, 2009; Banks, 2003; Brubaker, 2006). Anthias argues that "all individuals have an ethnicity" (2001: 629). Although "ethnicity cannot be confined to questions of culture and identity, since it is evident that culture and identity need not take an ethnic form" (Anthias, 2001: 629), arguably, "ethnicity is the most common variable in the make-up of group identity" (Sardinha, 2009: 54). Moreover, a shared collective identity is an essential characteristic of ethnic group belonging (Brubaker, 2006: 34; Hutchinson and Smith,

1996: 5; Weber, 1978; cited in Seol, 2008). “Identity is constructed through belonging” which often includes a strong attachment to the group and place of origin (Guibernau, 2013: 27-48; Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Thus, ‘belonging’ is part of identity formation process.

The term ethnicity has proliferated in the literature since the late 1960s and has remained widely used in recent studies (Guibernau and Rex, 2003: 1; Eriksen, 2010: 1). The proliferation of the term is partly due to changing postcolonial geopolitics and the increase in ethnic minorities' activism in many industrialised countries (Sokolovskii and Tishkov, 2002). For instance, after the twentieth century, millions of people migrated from less developed countries to Europe and North America as labour migrants and refugees (Eriksen, 2010: 3).³⁴ While living in their new countries, immigrants became more aware of the differences that separated them from their host’s society (Rex, 2003). As Watson (1977) points out, it is only when two or more different ethnic groups begin to interact that ethnicity gains its meaning. This led immigrants to start using ethnicity as a tool to identify themselves, by emphasising their distinctive features (Eriksen, 2010: Brubaker, 2006). As a result of these developments, the construction of identity through ethnicity has become more relevant in many societies (Eriksen, 2010: 2; Pultar, 2014: 4).

In social anthropology, ethnicity has been used in this sense and basically denotes the dimensions of social interactions between groups whose members consider themselves as culturally distinct from other groups with whom they interact (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996: 5; Eriksen, 2010: 16-17; Spencer, 2006: 46). From this point of view, it seems that cultural differences (the set of norms, values, preferences and practices used by immigrant groups to see themselves different from the receiving societies) are essential to the notion of ethnicity. Eriksen (2010: 16) notes, however, that “contrary to a widespread common-sense view, the

³⁴ According to current global estimate there were over 240 million international migrants in the world in 2015 (IOM, 2018).

existence of cultural differences between two groups is not the decisive feature of ethnicity.” In a similar vein, by separating ethnicity from culture, Barth argues that discussion should be focused not on the cultural characteristics of ethnic groups, but on the ‘boundaries’ between them (Barth, 1998: 15; Jenkins, 2008: 12). In doing so, Barth emphasises that ethnicity is something which is created and constructed in the course of having relations between groups who perceive themselves to be different in some way (Barth, 1998: 15-16; Jenkins, 2008: 12). This interaction itself enables differences to be highlighted between those groups, with the different ‘cultural traits’ resulting in the formation of boundaries that distinguish “us” from “them” (Banks, 2003: 14; Wan and Vanderwerf, 2009: 11).

Within this context, ethnicity became something that is reinvented and reinterpreted by each generation (Fischer, 1986: 195). As a result, many researchers from different fields have begun to focus on the reinvention and reinterpretation of ethnicity in multi-ethnic societies for the purpose of better understanding the nature of it (Eriksen, 2010: 1; Spencer, 2006; Hutchinson and Smith, 1996). Therefore, different definitions of ethnicity exist within different disciplines. However, due to “its dependence on long-term fieldwork and its bottom-up perspective on social life, anthropology has the advantage of generating first-hand knowledge of social life at the level of daily interaction”; the level in which ethnicity is created and re-created (Eriksen, 2010: 1). Furthermore, anthropological perspectives enable researchers “to explore the ways in which ethnic relations are being defined and perceived by people; how they talk and think about their own groups and its salient and [distinctive] characteristics” (Eriksen, 2010: 2).³⁵

³⁵ There has been an ongoing debate concerning how we can define ethnicity and whether ethnicity is subjective or the product of objective perception (Isajiw, 1974; Jones, 2003). On the one hand, ethnicity is widely regarded as a given entity and a naturally developed phenomenon based on some objective characteristics such as physical resemblances and culture by “objectivists” (Jones, 2003; Hornborg and Hill, 2011). On the other hand, ethnicity is subjective, due to its being “a matter of identification or a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group” (Yetman, 1991: 2; cited in Yang, 2000: 40), which is, in turn, is regarded as a “culturally constructed categorisation that inform[s] social interaction and behaviour” (Jones, 2003: 57).

2.5.1 Different Approaches

Scholars have developed different approaches to the concept of ethnicity since the 1960s (Guibernau and Rex, 2003; Spencer, 2006; Hutchinson and Smith, 1996). However, there is a significant body of literature showing that three competing approaches have dominated the extant ethnicity literature: primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist (Sokolovskii and Tishkov, 2002; Hornborg and Hill, 2011; Banks, 2003). Furthermore, several researchers have attempted to reformulate these three perspectives into a single theoretical framework; this has been called the 'integrated approach' (Yang, 2000; Jones, 2003).

2.5.1.1 'Static' Ethnic Identity

The primordial perspective argues that "ultimately there is some real, tangible, foundation for ethnic identification" (Sokolovskii and Tishkov, 2002; 291) which is claimed to be based on profound "primordial attachments to a group or culture", such as language, blood ties, religion, territory and culture (Jones, 2003: 23; Spencer, 2006: 77). Different arguments have emerged to explain this approach. Firstly, ethnicity is viewed as "an *ascribed* identity or assigned status, something inherited from one's ancestors" (Yang, 2000: 42). In other words, ethnicity is assigned at birth and primordial attachments already exist when a person is born (Banks, 2003: 18; Spencer, 2006: 76). For instance, if your ancestors are Georgian, then you are also Georgian, due to the fact that you have inherited your physical and cultural characteristics from those ancestors (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996; Yang, 2000). Secondly, ethnicity is treated as a 'static' and unchangeable part of someone's identity (Isajiw, 1974; Yang, 2000). For example, if a person was born Turkish, this will be an everlasting ethnic identity for him/her. They cannot terminate their membership to one ethnicity in order to join another. Finally, ethnicity is determined by common ancestry (Yang, 2000; Spencer, 2006). In general, the overall primordial perspective is that ethnicity is predominantly a biological phenomenon that is

explained on the basis of primordial attachments and kinship connections and that it is viewed as a product of culture (Sokolovskii and Tishkov, 2002; Parkin and Stone, 2004).

It has been argued, however, that primordialism has several drawbacks. First, such an approach cannot explain changes in the ethnic identities of individuals and groups in different social contexts (Jones, 2003; Hutchinson and Smith, 1996; Banks, 2003). Second, the emergence of new identities amongst biologically and culturally diverse groups, as well as the disappearance of ethnic identities, cannot be fully explained (Spencer, 2006; Yang, 2000). Third, knowledge about historical and structural circumstances “that construct/deconstruct and reinforce/undermine ethnic loyalties” is vague (Yang, 2000: 43). In other words, “the level of explanation fails to address the dynamic and fluid nature of ethnicity in varied social and historical contexts” (Jones, 2003: 72). Finally, the importance of economic and political realities in ethnicity is neglected (Yang, 2000; Banks, 2003). The emergence of different identifications amongst my participants, which I explain in Chapter 7, could not be explained using the primordialist approach. Thus, the Chapter 7 shows that construction of identity is a dynamic process and a combination of different factors influence it (Romanucci-Ross and De Vos, 1995; Guibernau and Rex, 2003; Brubaker, 2006).

Today, fourth (or later) generation Georgian Turks live in Turkey. There have been changes in their identity because of the dynamic character of their social life. For example, they identify themselves as both Muslims and Turkish citizens, although they also regard themselves as Georgian (Magnarella, 1979, 116). In this regard, Magnarella (1979, 116) considers the Georgians living in Turkey to be “a people with [a] partial ethnic identity” that is being eroded slowly. He makes this claim by taking into account indices of possible ethnic differences, such as language and religion (Magnarella, 1979). In a similar vein, Sinclair defined Georgian Turk villagers in Artvin province as, “Georgian by race [sharing biological or genetic characteristics] but Turkish by mentality and language” (1987: 135). Moreover, the social context changes

constantly at both the national and international levels. Therefore, the primordial perspective alone seems insufficient at understanding ethnicity-based identity construction in the Georgian Turkish context. Although Georgian Turks did not associate themselves as Georgian through official associations until 100 years after migration, this does not mean they did not carry out any ‘informal’ collective activities to showcase their ethnic origin (see Chapter 4).

2.5.1.2 The Strategic Use of Ethnic Identity

The instrumentalist perspective dominated the literature on ethnicity during the 1970s and 1980s. Instrumentalists see ethnicity as an instrument or strategic tool that can be changed, created or manipulated by cultural elites in pursuit of economic and political interests (Yang, 2000; Jones, 2003; Hutchinson and Smith, 1996). As Sokolovskii and Tishkov state (2002: 292), through competition for political and economic returns, cultural elites use ethnic groups’ “cultural forms, values, and practices [...] as resources”. These, the authors continue, become determinants of ethnic identification and affiliation of the members of a group (2002: 292). Therefore, political and economic interests are key factors in the creation of ethnic identity (Spencer, 2006). This approach suggests that people become ‘ethnic’ and persist to be ethnic if their ethnic background “yields significant returns to them” (Yang, 2000: 46). In the contemporary world, ethnic networks provide “the functional advantages of ethnicity [ranging] from moral and material support to political gains” (Yang, 2000:46). As a result, instrumentalists define ethnicity on the basis of interests (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996: 8-9).

Despite the value of this perspective, two problems can be identified regarding this approach. Firstly, the instrumentalist school tends to be reductionist, because it reduces the essence of ethnicity, not only to political and economic relations, but also to the mobilisation and politicisation of culture in ethnic organisations (Jones, 2003: 79). Moreover, Jones claims that, although instrumentalists define ethnic groups as interest groups, the distinction between ethnic groups and other interest groups is not clear (2003: 79). Secondly, the proponents of this

perspective do not adequately explain the relationship between culture and ethnicity (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996: 9; Spencer, 2006: 79; Jones, 2003: 79). According to this perspective, culture only has “a secondary role in the formation and transformation of ethnic identity” (Jones, 2003: 77).

In conclusion, it can be said that this approach may partly apply to the study of associations. For example, chairman or executive board members of associations might use the ethnicity, cultural values and practices of their members for their own needs and in order to realise their own political and economic interests (Gobbers, 2016: 231; Itzigsohn, 2017: 469). It is not necessarily just the executive board members of associations, however, using ethnicity as a strategic tool. In the context of the present study, nevertheless, the “legal and political constraints of the majority [Turkish] society” may lead them to do so as well (Kaya, 2004: 228). Therefore, board members of both associations studied here strategically shift across their multiple identities (see Chapter 7). In this sense, firstly, this approach may assist us in understanding how executive board members of both associations use ethnicity “as a social, political and cultural resource for different interests” (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996: 8). Secondly, it may assist us in understanding how the context in which they operate influences their decision within this process. As a result, the strategic use of ethnicity is relevant in my study, on several accounts. Firstly, for the government, it is a way of pursuing its foreign policy with Georgia. Secondly, within at least one of the associations, it is used as a way for the leadership to advance their own political interests.

2.5.1.3 Context-bound Ethnic Identity

The constructivist school views ethnicity “as a form of social organisation maintained by intergroup mechanisms” and emphasises the fluidity and subjectivity of ethnic identity – something that is constituted in specific social, cultural and historical contexts (Sokolovskii

and Tishkov, 2002: 293; Hornborg and Hill, 2011; Hall, 1990; Pultar, 2014). Put differently, constructionists have three core arguments. Firstly, ethnicity is seen as socially and politically constructed (May, 2001; Meer, 2014; Hutchinson and Smith, 1996; Yang, 2000; Brubaker, 2006). For example, Georgians living in Turkey might have the ability to construct their identities in specific Turkish social and cultural contexts. Secondly, in contrast to the primordialist approach, constructionists treat ethnicity as a dynamic entity; therefore, boundaries in ethnicity are flexible or unfixed (Barth, 1998; Yang, 2000; Banks, 2003). Finally, the emergence of ethnicity is attributed to changes occurring in the social environment (Yang, 2000; Hutchinson and Smith, 1996).

Thus, society is the sole determinant of ethnic affiliation or identification. In other words, when immigrants move to different places, their ethnicity emerges as a reaction to the change made to their social environment (Seol, 2008; Guibernau and Rex, 2003). Also, national policies create changes to the ‘environment’. These new structural conditions present in the receiving society have shaped the ethnic identities of immigrants. This points to the importance of economic and political interests in the construction of ethnic identity (Yang, 2000; Banks, 2003; Romanucci-Roass and De Vos, 1995). Even though individuals can change or deny their ethnicity in their new society, it seems difficult for them to “negate their ethnicity [...] because it is based on shared blood ties and historical and cultural experiences” (Seol, 2008: 344; Sokolovskii and Tishkov, 2002: 293). However, these factors are also perceived and constructed; they are not fixed givens.

To sum up, as shown above, the three competing approaches to understanding ethnicity have their advantages and disadvantages. Nevertheless, although they have several limitations, they all provide useful insights into the way we understand and attempt to explain ethnicity as a source of identity formation and a sense of belonging to a group (Spencer, 2006; Banks, 2003). Data from several empirical studies have shown that ethnicity can be understood by applying

these three approaches (Seol, 2008; Banks, 2003; Sokolovskii and Tishkov, 2002; Hutchinson and Smith, 1996). Therefore, many researchers have attempted to incorporate them into a single, ‘integrated’ perspective (Yang, 2000; Jones, 2003; Seol, 2008). According to Yang (2000: 48) “ethnicity is socially constructed partly on the basis of ancestry and more importantly by society that the interests of ethnic groups also partly determine ethnic affiliation, and that ethnic boundaries are relatively stable but undergo changes from time to time”. It seems that this definition applies to my case. For instance, even though the Georgian Turks firstly identify themselves as Georgian, then as Turks, the statute of the first Georgian Turkish association founded in Istanbul (in 1987) described members as Batumi Turks. Furthermore, since the 1980s, they have been increasingly emphasising their ethnic roots and their distinctive practices, thus separating themselves from ‘the others’ (Magnarella, 1979; Çiloğlu, 1993; Üstünyer, 2010). Consequently, it has been suggested that ancestral kinship³⁶, time, and the host society may play a role in ethnic identification, identity construction and the sense of belonging of Georgian Turks.

In light of the above discussion on ethnicity, this study adopts an integrated approach to the understanding of ethnicity which sees it as a source of identity and belonging. However, it leans heavily toward applying a constructivist perspective (Sokolovskii and Tishkov, 2002; Hornborg and Hill, 2011; Brubaker, 2006; Eriksen, 2010) and Barth’s boundary approach (Barth, 1998; Banks, 2003). Thus, this study treats ethnicity as socially and politically constructed (May, 2001; Hutchinson and Smith, 1996; Barth, 1998; Meer, 2014), meaning that its importance comes from the social, cultural, political and historical experiences that Georgian Turks have encountered. As a result, I argue that the associations influence the way ethnicity-based identity is being constructed, perceived and used in everyday life in Turkey.

³⁶ For an extensive anthropological study of kinship and its relationship to certain forms of social organisation, see Parkin and Stone (2004).

Associations are a way to negotiate – in a state approved way – the identity of a group who see themselves as ‘ethnically’ different, although sharing the same religion and citizenship as Turkish society. In this sense, the present study looks at how ethnicity, as one dimension of identity, is reinforced and constructed by associations in a way that offers Georgian Turks a particular way to ‘belong’ in Turkey.

2.6 Conclusion

The literature on immigrants, their associational activities and ethnicity-based identity construction is extensive and diverse. However, despite the considerable volume of contributions on the subject, it remains the case that a range of contextual factors play their part in shaping associations’ role in the construction of identity and belonging with respect to both the sending and receiving countries. This chapter has attempted to outline and discuss concepts that will inform my analysis, and to discuss the relevant perspectives on associations founded by immigrants and ethnicity-based identity. I have discussed the different ways in which the immigrant associations have been studied and theorised. The existing literature has been reviewed by focusing on studies that underline the role of immigrant organisations in terms of identity construction, transnationalism and belonging. These studies consider these types of organisations as important entities in understanding migrant or ethnic communities’ complex nature.

The chapter has shown that despite numerous similarities, associations founded by Georgian Turks in Turkey assume a different role and exhibit different characteristics to other immigrant associations studied in the literature. These differences are as follows: firstly, in terms of the reasons behind the migration of their members and the timing of that migration; secondly, in terms of their late emergence and development and the impact of the state on their association-building process; thirdly, in terms of the importance of religion in shaping their associational

activities and relations with the country of origin; fourthly, with respect to different meanings attributed to the concepts of home and host countries; finally, with the emergence of multiple identities and the strategic use of them. Departing from these points, the following empirical chapters (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7) analyse Georgian Turkish associations in the light of the concepts discussed in this chapter and recent developments taking place at local, national and transnational levels to understand the role of these associations in the formation of identity and sense of belonging with regard to the group, the place in which they live and the place from which they came. In doing so, the present empirical study contributes to the literature on associations by further exploring the formation of individual identity in its wider political and cultural context. It also contributes to the existing literature by explaining how associations' members' different understandings of 'culture', educational level, kinship relations and perception of the ancestral homeland foster different types of identities.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological approach and research methods that were used. It argues that ethnography appears to be the most suitable approach to providing answers to the research question. The empirical data for this study is based on over thirteen months of data collection and involved extensive participant observation, in-depth, qualitative interviews³⁷ and analysis of the associations' printed materials and online activities, including their websites and social media accounts. The empirical data was collected both in Turkey and Georgia during the course of fieldwork trips that took place between August 2013 and May 2016. In addition, I regularly checked social media accounts, websites and new publications after the fieldwork, right up until I started writing up the thesis.

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section discusses the methodological approach that has guided the study, how access to the field was sought and the various stages involved in the fieldwork itself. The second section focuses on the methods and techniques used for data collection. The third section proceeds with a discussion on the factors affecting the relationship between the researcher and informants. The fourth section gives an account of how the data were analysed to answer the research question. The final section discusses ethical questions that arose during the course of the study.

³⁷ In this study, qualitative or in-depth interview refers to both semi-structured and unstructured interviewing (see Bryman, 2016: 201). Therefore, the terms qualitative and in-depth interview are used interchangeably throughout the thesis.

3.2 Research Approach

This study aims to explore Georgian Turkish associations' role in the process of identity formation among their respective community, both with regards to the homeland Turkey and the ancestral homeland Georgia. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first doctoral study related to Georgian Turkish associations in Turkey. Thus, one of the crucial aims of the study is to explore the viewpoint of the members of the group being studied.

Each method has its own respective benefits and drawbacks. Nevertheless, as Georgian Turkish associations are not yet clearly understood and well-documented, it would be premature to enter the field, for example, with a detailed and quantifiable survey instrument or questionnaire developed on the basis of the existing literature (Flick, 2007: 20). Furthermore, because of the sensitive political atmosphere in Turkey (see Chapter 4), ethnography seems the best method to gain the trust of people and to therefore increase the reliability of the data that is collected. The capacity of ethnography “to capture processes; to connect what people say with what they do; and to explore [...] the social worlds and daily lived experiences of individuals [...], makes it a valuable tool” (Hoolachan, 2016: 32-34). Departing from this point, I adopted an ethnographic approach, which provides the researcher with an opportunity to get as close to the research setting and participants as possible and thus get a sense of what is happening and why is it happening in a particular way, all the while being conscious of the social setting or situation in which it is taking place (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Bryman, 2016). A particular strength of ethnographic inquiry is to explore how individuals construct their world, more specifically, how they construct their identities through participation in activities (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). Therefore, despite its drawbacks and limitations, which I mention later on, the ethnographic approach provided the most appropriate framework for the purposes of this study.

Several definitions of ethnography have been offered in the literature (Brewer, 2000; Murchison, 2010; Marcus, 1998; Fetterman, 2010; Leyburn, 1931; Blommaert and Jie, 2010; Fife, 2005; Bernard, 2006; Heller, 2008 and Bryman, 2016). However, I would like to quote from Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), primarily in order to illustrate the importance of choosing this approach. According to their definition:

[Ethnographic research is] a particular method or set of methods which in its most characteristic form... involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; 3).

Ethnography facilitates in-depth study of a single setting or single group of people (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; 3). Similarly, as Brewer (2000: 11) points out, a key aim of the ethnographic research approach is for the researcher to become familiar with the day-to-day practices and the meanings of a particular social world. Furthermore, “finding out things that are not seen as significant but belong to the implicit structures of people's life” is one of the main aims of an ethnographic approach (Blommaert and Jie, 2010: 3).

In ethnography, data is gathered from a range of sources (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 3). The data collection process is based on fieldwork and involve techniques, such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, analysis of personal documents and those of official state organisations, and analysis of Internet resources. The goal is to access the meaning underpinning “social actions, observe manners and spend plenty of time with informants” and participate as an observer alongside them (Brewer, 2000: 11). When it comes to the analysis of

the collected data, this involves “interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; 3). Thus, ethnography allowed me to explore participants’ associational lives and identity formation processes, and how these connect to the broader social, political and cultural contexts in which they are shaped.

In this study, ethnography involves the study of Georgian Turkish associations in the natural settings in which they express themselves and where they engage in activities and come together with members and the wider community. Besides participant observation and in-depth interviews, I also managed to listen to and engage in numerous informal conversations with board and ordinary members and people who engaged in the activities of the associations. These conversations became a source of additional information and I afterwards recorded some of them in my field-notes. Throughout the fieldwork, I also participated in a number of the association’s events and activities. It was at these that I was able to observe the informants in their natural setting, the setting in which they construct and express their individual and collective identities and explore their sense of belonging. I was further invited to attend members’ personal events and homes, which allowed me to gather more detailed information. Participant observation was mainly carried out with the IGA and the BGCA, both of which were formed by Turkish citizens of Georgian origin. The ethnography of this study also included 26 in-depth interviews with the associations’ board and ordinary members, as well as those who attended the associations’ activities. The BGCA relies heavily on social media to inform followers about their activities; thus, I was also added to the association’s social media group. While gathering data for the study, I also used the associations’ webpages, which became an additional source of information. Finally, I also gathered other types of data, such as associations’ written statutes, newsletters and visual materials (e.g. photos and videos, and

so on). Unless stated otherwise, the photos used in this thesis were taken by myself during the course of the fieldwork.

In the following section, I discuss the difficulties I encountered at the beginning of the fieldwork process and how I selected the two associations that would be the focal point of the study.

3.3 Initial Challenges and Sampling

At the beginning of the study, I was aware of the complexity of the subject. I was also concerned that I would face challenges during fieldwork due to my Kurdish background. Turkey is a multi-ethnic society, home to nearly 50 different ethnic groups (Kaya, 2005: 135). One of the most sensitive issues in Turkey is either to talk about ethnicity or study any ethnic group. This can be perceived by government officials as a threat to national unity. Therefore, I was ready to face the challenges of doing fieldwork among a different ethnic group. As a Kurd and a UK-based doctoral researcher, I assumed it would be difficult to develop a trusting relationship with my participants.³⁸

At the very beginning of my research, two different encounters in particular that I experienced brought about cause for concern. These encounters are important in terms of understanding the context of the study.

Firstly, I was awarded a scholarship by the Turkish government in order to undertake doctoral research abroad while doing my Masters at Istanbul University. I visited one of my lecturers to talk about the topic I wanted to study. I explained that I would like to study the Georgian

³⁸ This is mainly because of two things: Firstly, due to the vast amount of the Kurdish population, the Kurds are one of the main ethnic groups, possibly the only one, that are perceived as a threat to the unity. Secondly, there has been an ongoing armed conflict in south-eastern of Turkey since 1984 (Ergil, 2000; Kirişci and Winrow, 2004).

Turks living in Turkey and asked for advice. I was shocked at what the lecturer said. By supposing that I am ethnically Georgian, he (in a sarcastic manner) said, *'Aha! How nice! You will soon raise the flag, too!'* I did not say anything and left the place. Although this could not be generalised to the whole population, it underlines the sensitivity and complexity of the topic. Since that day, I became aware that the research would bring challenges.

Secondly, when I was deciding upon which associations to study (Small, 2009), I visited Georgian Turkish associations located in different sites of Turkey. I was in Bursa (a city in the north-west of Turkey and which is home to a large number of Georgian Turks). I was sitting around a table with a few members of the association located in the city centre. One of the members was talking about how he decided to become part of the association. Suddenly, a member sitting around the table said *"While there is already a Kurdish issue in this country, we do not want to lead to a discord between Turkish and the Georgians living in Turkey. We have no problem with Turkey, and we are also proud to be Turkish."* I explain the impact of the Kurdish issue on Georgian Turks in the following chapter. After each of these encounters, I asked myself whether I should continue to study the Georgian Turks or not. However, after three months doing fieldwork amongst the Georgian Turks, I found that these challenges varied from one person to another. Since there is almost no research based on fieldwork about the Georgian Turkish associations in Turkey, it is to be expected that these kinds of challenges will emerge, especially at the early stages of the research.

According to data provided by the Department of Associations (2018)³⁹, there are 24 officially registered associations founded by Georgian Turks in nine different cities in Turkey. Almost half of these associations are inactive (i.e. they do not engage in or involve themselves in any

³⁹ The Department is part of the Ministry of Interiors. It was established in 2002 to carry out services with regard to Associations in Turkey as part of EU accession talks.

associational activity) and seem to be ‘shell associations’.⁴⁰ After visiting almost all active associations, I decided to focus on the IGA and the BGCA. There are several reasons why. Firstly, they are amongst the most active groups and organise various activities throughout the year. Both associations were also described by several other associations as being the most active. This shows that they are known by the Georgian community in Turkey. Secondly, both of them have websites that are used actively. The BGCA is also very active on social media. Thirdly, they have been active for at least ten years. Fourthly, whereas the IGA seems to be transnational and has strong ties with Georgia, especially with the country’s Batumi region, the BGCA seems instead to be a local association and that mainly targets those residing around the association’s centre. The scope for comparison this presented seemed to be an advantage. Fifthly, they are in contact with almost all other Georgian Turkish associations in the country. Finally, although ethnic background is crucial in their organising process, religion seems to be one of the key factors influencing their decisions and the types of activities they engage in. As a result, it was thought that studying both a local and a transnational Georgian Turkish association would add value in terms of achieving a more comprehensive understanding.

The associations I decided to study differ from one another in several respects. Firstly, they have different aims, as specified in their statutes. The main aim of the IGA is to maintain good relations between Turkey and Georgia, to develop and strengthen the existent historical feelings of kinship, friendship and brotherhood between the two countries’ people. The BGCA aims to arrange promotional activities in the homeland, to work in unity and solidarity with the community, and to analyse and observe their ancestors’ arrival in Turkey and its historical development, free from any political agenda.

⁴⁰ According to data provided by the Department of Association, Ministry of Interior of Turkey, there are in total 287,513 officially registered associations in Turkey. However, only 111,964 of them are active (continue to engage in associational activities) (as of 2018).

Secondly, as noted above, the IGA is more transnational in its outlook and thus targets areas in both Turkey and Georgia. It organises different activities, including language courses, book and magazine publishing, cultural tours, celebrations of national and religious holidays and provides bursary for students from poor families in Georgia. The IGA organises its activities in the different cities of Turkey and Georgia, some of which are organised in collaboration with international governmental and non-governmental organisations. The BGCA is a more local association and its target group is Georgian Turks living near the association's centre. The BGCA organises many activities, such as periodic meetings, Ramadan activities, welfare activities designed to promote culture and language, home visits, food festivals and provides bursaries for students from poor backgrounds among the community living in Turkey. All activities are held in the district where the association is located and some are carried out either in collaboration with other local associations or the district municipality. It is worth adding that the BGCA has also started to establish relationships with Georgia, most notably with Batumi, since the start of the passport and visa free regime (from 2011 and 2006 respectively) between Turkey and Georgia. Since I started my fieldwork, they also hosted several visitors from Adjara who would like to know more about Georgian Turks and their associational activities.

Finally, the board members of the IGA are unrelated and the members are mainly from middle-class backgrounds; some from traditional (small business owners) and some from the modern (white collar professionals and managers, including academics, teachers and lawyers). The sense of kinship between the members of the BGCA is much stronger. For example, there are several close relatives among the association's board and ordinary members. The board members are predominantly from backgrounds such as small-sized business owners and white-collar factory workers. These sort of differences, as we shall see, are important in highlighting different forms of identity and belonging and in obtaining a comprehensive perspective.

In the following section, I go on to discuss the stages involved in the fieldwork and how I built relationships with the informants.

3.4 Fieldwork Phases and Building Rapport

Long-term fieldwork not only enables researchers to develop rapport and strong relationships with informants, but allows to learn more about the social worlds they find themselves studying (Hoolachan, 2016: 36). This further provides an opportunity “to observe changes that occur over time, thus adding an additional, longitudinal dimension to the analysis” (Herbert, 2000 cited in Hoolachan, 2016: 36). The fieldwork consisted of three stages. **The first stage** took place in two parts. The first took place before I officially started my doctoral study. This was the stage during which I conducted the first stage of my preliminary fieldwork, which allowed me to develop general ideas that underpinned and guided the thesis. After finishing my pre-session course at the University of Birmingham in September 2012, I needed to extend my visa, which was due to expire, in order to start doctoral study at the same university. Therefore, I returned to Turkey to do so. Formalities meant that I was unable to start my study in January 2013 and I carried out (informal) fieldwork from September 2012 to January 2013. I visited many associations and contacted several people from several different associations. The first stage enabled me to meet and establish relationships with one of my informants, who was one of the most active board members of the IGA. He helped me throughout the whole duration of the study. He also made it possible to contact all Georgian Turkish associations in Turkey and two associations established by Muslim Georgians in Georgia. He became an important point of contact.

He was doing a PhD at the same university at which I was doing my Masters. This encouraged me to get in touch with him at the beginning of the fieldwork. He had published a few books on Georgian Turks and carried out long-term fieldwork in the Georgian villages in both Turkey

and Georgia. I thought it might be easier to access Georgian Turkish associations and their members using this contact. I then learnt that he had a close relationship with almost all other Georgian Turkish associations in Turkey, as well as strong connections to Georgia. He knew in person (or was known by) the chair and at least a few members of every single Georgian Turkish association. Both board and ordinary members of the Georgian Turkish associations became more accessible through my good relationship with him. Furthermore, my relationship with him introduced me to the community as a researcher, and as a ‘trusted’ person. In this sense, he became one of the key informants.

At this point, it is worth noting that although key informants play an important role for researchers, working with them carry risks. For one, researchers may start to see the social reality through their eyes rather than “through the eyes of [other] members of the social setting” (Bryman, 2016: 432). Therefore, researchers should ensure that the key informants’ impact on the direction of research remains restrained (Bryman, 2016: 432-462). I engaged in relationships with key informants with this thought in mind.

After officially started my PhD, I conducted another two months preliminary fieldwork between Augusts and September 2013. In ethnography, the first period of fieldwork is conducted in order to learn the basics (Fetterman, 2010). The first stage of the fieldwork was useful in teaching me the basics of the associations. It also helped me decide whether the topic was researchable or not. Moreover, I was able to access some relevant materials published by the associations and I became more familiar with the research context.

The second stage of the fieldwork lasted from May to August 2014. This was the formal start of my fieldwork. The choice of the two associations as settings for fieldwork was determined during this stage. During the fieldwork, I regularly visited the associations and spent around 3-5 hours at each association centre. I carried out 8 qualitative interviews with the board and

ordinary members and had numerous casual conversations with both members and visitors to the associations. During these discussions, I attempted to develop close relationships with the informants; indeed, I was able to establish intimate relations with them over time.

During this period, one of the well-known members of the IGA passed away. The death was announced on the association's website. I was also respectfully invited to attend the funeral via email. It wasn't just members of the associations and the Georgian Turks who attended, but also more than 300 people from different backgrounds. Although the association did not arrange the funeral, it was involved in the organisation process. To coincide with this, too, the BGCA organised a Ramadan dinner at the association's garden. More than 100 people attended the dinner. The executive board members from the other Georgian Turkish associations also took part. After the dinner, we went to a café and spent more than 4 hours with the three executive board members of the IGA. This not only helped me to enhance my relations with the informants but also to see the relations between the two associations. I also attended numerous other activities organised by the association, both inside and outside the associations' centre. As a result, attending these kinds of activities and spending time with members allowed me to establish close relationships with them.

The third stage of my fieldwork took place between December 2014 and May 2016. I conducted 18 in-depth interviews with members and had numerous informal conversations with both members and visitors to the associations. I started, for example, attending a Georgian language course that took place every Sunday. There were 12 participants who were over 25, all but two of whom were from a Georgian background. The majority of the participants wanted to learn Georgian because they had business ties with Georgia. I observed that those attendees who had no business relations with Georgia had a desire to learn language and then visited Georgia to practise what they have learned. At that time, there were also two other Georgian Turkish associations providing language courses. Although I was able to speak a little

Georgian, this helped me to establish closer relations with the informants. As a result, the members became more open and helpful.

There were several occasions during this stage that gave me additional insight into the Georgian Turkish associations. For example, the president of the Adjara Autonomous Region (Batumi is the capital city of this region) visited Turkey. A large meeting was held in Istanbul and a large number of members from different Georgian Turkish associations located in the different cities of Turkey attended the meeting. The Chair of the BGCA attended the meeting, but the IGA was not officially invited to the event. Considering the strong relationships of the IGA with Georgia, at first glance this seemed surprising to me. After, however, I learned that the new Georgian administration coming to power after Saakashvili were not happy with the religious activities of Georgian Turkish associations in Georgia. This could be why the IGA was not invited.

Additionally, the 14th April has been celebrated as Language Day (*Deda Ena*) since 1978 by Georgians in Georgia. The IGA, as mentioned earlier, was the first Georgian Turkish association to celebrate Deda Ena in Turkey in 2012. This subsequently led other Georgian Turkish associations to also celebrate it. However, the IGA did not celebrate the day in 2015 and 2016, although some board members attended activities organised by other Georgian Turkish associations relevant to the Day. The IGA organised a big event to coincide with the day in 2014. A group of people from Georgia also attended the event.

The IGA gave a number of different justifications for why Deda Ena was not celebrated in 2015 and 2016. Firstly, the board members said that they were not in favour of organising the same event every year. Secondly, they said that they knew that several other Georgian Turkish associations had begun to arrange their own celebration. They therefore did not want to do the same as other associations at the same time. Thirdly, the association made a documentary about

the migration of their ancestors fleeing from Georgia to Turkey after the Ottoman- Russian war of 1877-1878. It was made in 2013 and it is in Turkish. At that time, they were translating it into Georgian, a process they said took considerable time and which diverted resources away from any attempt to organise Deda Ena celebrations.

There were two other occasions during the fieldwork that provided insight into the Georgian Turkish associations. Firstly, Turkey's 24th general election was held in June 2015. Two members from the IGA applied to the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to run as candidates, but they were not selected. For the election, they created social media accounts and web pages, onto which they published their biographies. However, their biography did not include any information related to either their positions in the association or their Georgian ethnic backgrounds. This is important if we are to understand how they present themselves to the 'outside' world. This shows that the association is deliberately kept at arms-length from political activities. Furthermore, in the Turkish context, politicians are not keen on highlighting their ethnic backgrounds during the election campaigns (see Chapter 4).

Finally, Georgia has celebrated Independence Day annually on the 26th May since 1991. However, neither associations organised activities to coincide with it. The BGCA did not share anything on their website or social media accounts, but the IGA did publish a piece on their providing historical information about the day. Over the course of the fieldwork, the IGA shared the same information on their website each year. After talking with a few members from the associations and looking at media coverage about Independence Day, I found that associations' members think celebrating the Day might lead to the community at large misunderstanding the association's activities and purposes (see the following chapter).

At this point, it is worth providing perspective from Batumi. I first visited Tbilisi, the capital city of Georgia, in October 2013, during which time I spent 5 days in the city. I met with many

people: taxi drivers, university students, academics, shopkeepers and Turkish people doing business there. I engaged in and had long conversations with them. After that, I visited Batumi and stayed there for one week. It was here that a local Georgian, who told me that he got his religious education in Turkey and who was fluent in Turkish language, invited me to attend a dinner at his house. We also went shopping together for ingredients. Traditional Georgian food was served. He introduced his family to me. He shared with me several stories about the life of Muslim Georgians in Adjara. What I observed during my first trip to Georgia and casual observations such as this was that neither the Georgian people nor Turkish people knew much about each other. People I met in Georgia told me that they got their information about Turkey by watching Turkish TV series and visiting Turkish metropolitan cities, particularly Istanbul. From the Turkish perspective, Turkish people thought they knew a lot about Georgia. However, I gradually noticed that they had very limited information about Georgia. What the majority knew was the name of some Georgian food and that Batumi was a city famous for gambling and nightlife.

3.5 Data Collection Methods and Techniques

In this section, I discuss the methods and techniques I adopted in the field during data collection, as well as my ‘positionality’ in the field.

3.5.1 Participant Observation

The principal method for collecting data in ethnographic research is participant observation (Brewer, 2000: 18). Participant observation requires the researcher to get actively involved “in the lives of the people under study with maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data” (Fetterman, 2010: 37). “The purpose of participant observation is to gain a deep understanding of a particular topic or situation through the meanings ascribed to it by the individuals who live and experience it” (McKechnie, 2008: 598).

Participant observation therefore allows a researcher to gather more detailed and accurate information. Furthermore, “participant observation can supply detailed, authentic information unattainable by any other research method” (Li, 2008: 101).

In contrast with in-depth interviews, participant observation is “the only field method that allows researchers to observe what people do in *real life* contexts” (Li, 2008: 101). This may be different from what they say they do. The discrepancies between what they say and what they do may provide important insights. A researcher can identify these discrepancies by spending a long time in the field (McKechnie, 2008: 599). In my study, participant observation offered me the opportunity to get close to the research setting and participants in order to obtain first-hand information from the associations by being there to witness daily situations and developing relations of trust. This is important, given the instability in the country and ethnicity differences between me and my informants. As a result, I was able to obtain a more accurate picture of the associations by observing what they actually did, rather than relying solely on what they said they did (Ferraro and Andreatta, 2017:105). As noted before, I carried out five months preliminary fieldwork both in Turkey and Georgia and I tried to contact all the active Georgian Turkish associations founded in the different sites of Turkey. After that, I narrowed my study down to two associations. Therefore, in my study, participant observation was predominantly restricted to the context of two Georgian Turkish associations, their meetings and associational activities.

Although employing participant observation offers methodological advantages for improving the quality of the collected data, there are several problems associated with the method. Firstly, it is challenging to obtain permission to collect data, to establish relationships, and to earn the trust of those being studied. Secondly, personal characteristics of researchers, such as gender, age, and ethnicity (I will touch upon these later) can influence access. Finally, it is well known that the presence of a researcher changes – at least some extent – the context being studied,

which may threaten the trustworthiness of the data collected (McKechnie, 2008: 599). Researchers develop various strategies to overcome such limitations, such as choosing a setting to which one already has some relationship, whether through occupational or personal affiliation, and staying in the field long enough for habituation to take place (McKechnie, 2008: 599). In this sense, conducting long-term fieldwork and having previous relationships helped me to a large extent to deal with above mentioned methodological constraints.

There are in general two positions that the researcher can adopt during fieldwork: participant observer (insider) and non-participant observer (outsider) (Kusow, 2003: 597). However, the boundary between each in reality is blurred. After gaining acceptance from the community and building several friendships, I was, to a certain extent, able to adopt the role of participant observer.

Overwhelmingly, my insight about my field of inquiry was limited to the few available discussions in the literature about the group under study (Fetterman, 2010). Thus, I had restricted exposure to academic knowledge and everyday information with respect to the community. Being a Turkish citizen and speaking the Turkish language, however, brought me closer to most members of the research setting. Nevertheless, I had no idea how my informants would interpret this partial identity. In the course of the fieldwork, however, I found myself being considered more of an insider than outsider. Considering myself to a large extent to be an insider increased the level of in-depth knowledge offered by the informants in this study and served to strengthen my understanding of the data (DeLuca and Maddox, 2016: 288).

Georgian Turks have been living in Turkey for more than 100 years, are Turkish citizens, and the Turkish language has, in effect, become their native language. Therefore, language was not a barrier and I did not experience any major challenges in terms of cultural adaptation. Nevertheless, language still to a certain extent made me an outsider and I was not entirely aware

of the meaning ascribed to 'non-Georgianness' and representations of Turkish and other ethnic identities among Georgian Turks, which were central in facilitating my becoming an 'insider' (Ergun and Erdemir, 2010). Although a Turkish citizen, I come from a different ethnic background, that is, Kurdish. In the early stages of the fieldwork, I realised that they are very sensitive about the Kurdish issue. I also observed that some of my informants did not trust me and that they were suspicious and nervous of me. I grew up in Istanbul and was fluent in Istanbul Turkish, which is the base for standard Turkish. Because I had the same nationality and spoke the same language as my informants and because I was familiar with the culture of the country, were able to find common space for trust and acceptance to develop.

While conducting fieldwork, adopting an emic perspective, but preserving distance allows researchers to understand how people perceive the world around them (Fetterman, 2010: 37). Initially, researchers are willing to go the field in order to grasp the insider's point of view. However, a certain level of distance should be maintained in order to preserve their outsider perspective (Ergun and Erdemir, 2010: 25). Secondly, having distance is one of the most important aspects in ensuring ongoing access to different factions and building a trusting relationship with research participants (Ergun and Erdemir, 2010: 25-26). These two issues help researchers preserve their neutrality. For me, the preservation of neutrality had to do with intra-Georgian matters rather than national affairs (Ergun and Erdemir, 2010: 25-26). Though the Georgian Turkish associations had originally been mobilised to support Georgia's cultural heritage and language amongst the Georgian community in Turkey, they also engaged in a low-level struggle against each other. Even though the associations I visited made a number of accusations against each other on a number of occasions, I did not offer any comment and always expressed my appreciation for the hospitality and welcome that I had received from all of the participants and associations I visited (Ergun and Erdemir, 2010: 25-26).

Attending activities during the fieldwork helped me gain an insider's perspective. My continued presence at the associations and their activities helped me to gain informants' trust (for a similar experience, see Anderson, 2005). For example, several of my informants expressed their gratitude for conducting the research:

As somebody who is not ethnically Georgian, the fact that you are undertaking a doctoral thesis that concerns our culture and identity is very precious for us. You are leaving a mark on history - our history (Fieldnotes).

As the fieldwork progressed, I felt more included in the activities of the associations. I felt this inclusion particularly during times when my informants referred to me as *kardeşim* (my brother) or introduced me as *kardeşimiz* (our brother), which implied that I was 'one of them'.

3.5.2 Interviewing

In ethnographic study, combining qualitative interviews with long-term participant observation provides a more holistic picture of the phenomenon under investigation (Hoolachan, 2016: 32). Besides participant observation, interviewing is another important data collection method in my study, which illustrates and puts into a wider context what the researcher notices and experiences (Fetterman, 2010: 40). For the purpose of this study, semi-structured and unstructured interviews – the two main types of the qualitative or in-depth interviewing – have been used (Bryman, 2016: 466). In both types of qualitative interviewing (Wilhoit and Kisselburgh, 2016), I asked open-ended questions so as to provide informants “with the best opportunity to express” themselves (Bryman, 2016: 468). This also encouraged participants “to open up and express themselves in their own terms and at their own pace” (Bernard, 2006: 211).

Although I prepared a guideline for the interview process, I often departed significantly from this and tried not to lead informants in any particular direction during the interview (Bryman,

2016: 467). While conducting the interviews, I attempted to follow the criteria proposed by Kvale (1996), Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) and Bryman (2016). Using interviews allowed me to understand my informants better because it allowed for understanding of the ‘stories’ behind their associational life. Qualitative interviewing, in other words, not only allowed me to understand the participants’ own perspectives, but also to obtain the data I wanted without pigeon-holing the responses of the informants (Bryman, 2016: 467). As a result, interviewing became another important method of data collection. It enabled me to obtain ‘in-depth information’, for example, about the informants’ attitudes or perceptions and background, which cannot be gathered solely through participant observation.

I conducted 26 interviews in total. These were with members of the executive board and ordinary members from both associations, all of differing ages. I also carried out several interviews with association board members who organised joint events within the associations. Moreover, I conducted three interviews and had numerous informal conversations with local Muslim Georgians living in Batumi who were in contact with both associations and who made numerous visits both to Turkey and the associations. In Batumi, I interviewed the author of the first Georgian translation of the Holy Quran (I discuss this in detail in Chapter 6), the head of the Georgian Muslim Union and one of the advisors to the former Chairman of the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara.

I discussed with my informants their involvement in associational activities and how their involvement is shaped by these activities. I prepared an interview guide to guide the discussion. This included a focus on a number of different matters and laid out topics upon which questions would be asked. I conducted my interviews at different locations, including: the homes of informants, the association centres, members’ workplaces and public spaces, such as cafes and restaurants. The interviews lasted between thirty minutes and two hours. I carried out some in

the presence of other people, particularly when interviews were carried out at the association centres.

During the pilot study I realised that it was difficult to access ordinary members. There were ordinary members who did not even visit the associations after registering. The associations were run by the board members. They regularly visited the associations and attended the activities. All the associational activities were being organised by them in collaboration with a few active ordinary members. With their encouragement, their family members, relatives and friends were also interested in associational activities. Therefore, the majority of interviews were carried out with board members, rather than ordinary members.

As the fieldwork progressed, I became more familiar with people from the group. Therefore, I started conducting the interviews with informants only after I had spent lots of time with them and established a close relationship with them. However, before the interviews, I once again introduced myself (my name, affiliation, how I knew the person and through whom I approached them) and the purpose of my study. I clearly explained why I was interested in doing research about Georgian Turkish associations and how the data obtained would be used. I also pointed out that the names of the interviewees would not be available to anybody except myself. I then asked the interviewees if they would be comfortable with me recording the discussion. All of the interviews were recorded on a digital audio recorder, except for 7 interviews in which the interviewees did not wish to be recorded. Therefore, with the informants' permission, I recorded 19 interviews. The use of audio-recording has a number of practicalities. However, it does not provide a perfect record, as, for example, non-verbal behaviours of the participants are not captured (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 147-148).

After receiving the interviewees' verbal consent, I began the interviews. Although I asked my informants to give written consent, none of them were willing to do so. One of the main reasons

is that in the Turkish context, people are afraid of signing any documents as they have experienced numerous cases of fraud.

Although the ancestral language of my informants is Georgian, they are all fluent in Turkish. One cannot distinguish them from the Turkish majority when it comes to their use of the Turkish language. The spoken language at the centres is Turkish, but Georgian is sometimes spoken, especially amongst older members. It is very rare to see young people at the centres, but when they are present they speak Turkish, both amongst themselves and with those who are older than them. Turkish is not their intimate language, but the language of the public space. When my informants are with their most intimate connections, they speak Georgian. Thus, as my informants told me, they mainly use their ancestral language at home while speaking with family members aged over forty. As I am fluent in Turkish, I conducted all the interviews in Turkish. With regard to those who I interviewed in Batumi, as they had obtained their university education in Turkey and were fluent in Turkish, I carried out these interviews in Turkish too. Speaking the same language as the research participants allowed me to gather more information, because they would be better able to express themselves and more comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings. However, the fact that I am not fluent in Georgian prevented me from becoming an insider. They have their own ethnic insider language and I was not able to access them in the same way as an insider would. I was not able to be as open as I could have been; if I could speak their ancestral language, they would feel even closer to me.

3.5.3 Additional Data from the Field

The data I collected also came from a combination of useful documents and visual recordings. “Visual materials and representations of material culture” are key aspects of social science research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 148). Visual materials such as photographs, video-

recordings and screenshots can also be useful when trying to make sense of the data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 148-149; Hine, 2015). These types of data were also used in my study. In addition to using videos available on the associations' social media accounts or websites, I took pictures, recorded some events with my camera and took screenshots of both associations' websites and social media accounts (Bryman, 2016: 447-451; Hine, 2015). Moreover, I continued to take screenshots relevant to the study after the fieldwork was complete. Analysing the data and visual materials – most notably the video-recordings – allowed me to also take into account non-verbal aspects of social interaction and situations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 150).

It is worth emphasising that documents such as official statistics and records, diaries, autobiographies, letters, photographs and media productions are valuable resources for ethnographic research (Walsh, 2006: 234). Official statistics and records belonging to the government and the associations also helped me to generate a general perspective on numbers, immigration time and so on. In the case of my research, the documents produced by associations were valuable in acquiring detailed knowledge of Georgian Turks, for example about their activities, traditions, and views on life. Moreover, each association has its own statutes, which state its underpinning principles, duties, and purposes. Analysing these statutes helped me understand the structure and objectives of these associations. Such official information is also important in allowing me to understand how the associations represent themselves to the 'outside' world.

In the following section, I move on to explain how my personal characteristics affected the data collection process.

3.6 'Me' in the Research Setting

The position of the researcher in ethnography has an impact on the analysis of the data (Murchison, 2010). In other words, the interpretation of data is to some extent affected by the researcher's social/cultural or educational background and research motivation. This is the case for most methods. Therefore, it is important for the researcher to introduce his or her position relative to the study. The researcher should do this by introducing his/her background and experiences and discuss how these may affect their interpretation and perception of the research field and participants (Mligo, 2013: 46).

Age, gender and ethnic identification play an important role in shaping the relationship between researchers and informants (McKechnie, 2008: 599; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 73-75; Hoolachan, 2016). In my case, these factors affected my informants' attitudes towards me, especially in the early period of the fieldwork. However, it is also worth emphasising that not only can the age, gender and ethnic background of the researcher affect the relationships established in the field, but also that the personal characteristics of the informants, which can vary significantly from one to another, may be crucial in the process. Bearing this in mind, this section illustrates how the personal characteristics of the researcher affect the relationship with the informants. This is important, because reflexivity enhances the rigour and validity of the research process, which helps readers to understand the context within which findings were produced (Hoolachan, 2016: 37).

3.6.1 Age

Age is an important aspect of the researcher's persona and it can affect the kinds of relations that form and the data collected (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 76). Indeed, being of a different generation or age can pose problems, because it can affect the way that informants react to the researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 77). In my case, almost all of the

informants were over fifty. Over the course of the fieldwork, I met with only a handful of informants who were under 30.

As a young researcher, I was generally called ‘our young brother’ (*genç kardeşimiz* in Turkish) by my informants. I overheard conversations to this effect “*There is this young brother who came all the way from England to write his thesis or ask a few questions. We should help him.*”; “*A young brother wants to learn about us,*” or; “*A young brother who is even not Georgian wants to study us*” (Fieldnotes). From these, I would say that at some points they regarded me as their own son. For example, during activities, one of the members would always call out ‘*Hey, son!*’ and sometimes, they felt obliged to help me. Therefore, I would say that being young affected the data collection process in a positive way. In other words, the relative youth of the researcher was a positive, as elder informants could emphasise my need or desire ‘to learn’.

3.6.2 Gender

Most researchers doing fieldwork in highly gendered Muslim societies anticipate having greater access to informants of the same sex (Saktanber, 2002). It is not likely that male researchers will have much access to female respondents (Ergun and Erdemir, 2010: 29). Associations in Turkey are male-dominated settings. According to the country’s Department of Associations (2018), there are more than 100 thousand active associations⁴¹, with a total membership of slightly over ten million, more than 8 million of whom are male and only 2 million of whom are female. Therefore, associations seem to be more accessible to men than women. Indeed, women are typically members of different types of associations, such as those focused on aid. Although women make up roughly 50% of the entire Georgian community in

⁴¹ This figure includes all types of associations in Turkey.

Turkey, less than ten percent of all board members of both associations were women.⁴² For example, the IGA had 11 original board members, none of whom were women. The BGCA had 15 original board members, only two of whom were women.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that Georgian Turkish women play important background roles in associational activities, most notably during large events, although they do not tend to serve in an official capacity, such as on boards. For example, almost half of the participants attending BGCA's public activities and events were women. Nevertheless, the number of women in board positions does not reflect this level of informal participation.

However, this situation meant that, as a male, I was able to gain access to a greater number of informants. However, I was also able to access two female members. However, my unmarried status and age were important factors in limiting the nature of my interaction with female informants. The reason was that, for a woman in a highly gendered Muslim community, it is not acceptable to spend a long time together with an unrelated young man. Overall, considering the importance of women in associational activities, I can say that this is a methodological limitation that restricted my access to Georgian Turkish women, many of whom might have provided valuable insight.

3.6.3 Ethnic Background

Belonging to a different ethnic group than those people under investigation could sometimes bring distinct advantages (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 76). My ethnic background influenced the nature of my fieldwork, most notably at the first stage. I personally did not have any experience of the plight of Georgian Turks. However, during the course of the research, I

⁴² This is not specific to the Georgian Turkish case. For example, studies have shown that the percentage of Turkish immigrant associations' female board members in the Netherlands and Berlin/Germany is also extremely low (see Vermeulen, 2006: 27).

gradually became aware of what it meant to be a Georgian Turk in Turkey, which only became possible thanks to the engagement that I had with association members.

During the data collection process, I visited the most active Georgian Turkish associations located in the different cities of Turkey, talked to many people, attended events and observed associational activities. Thus, since “researchers are very much part of the discourse they create” (Joseph, 2009: 21), I was also a part of this study. As previously mentioned, being a member of a different ethnic group in Turkey and having experience as a migrant meant I could empathise with my informants. Furthermore, I shared some of my personal experiences with my informants. This helped to a certain extent to establish a close relationship with my informants. With that in mind, I shall briefly touch upon my personal story.

I was born in a remote village in the south-eastern part of Turkey home only to Kurdish people. I knew only a little Turkish when I started out at the village primary school at the age of six. I was speaking my mother-tongue, Kurdish, at home. I went to primary school for two years in the village. At the end of my second year in primary school, the village was evacuated by the government and its inhabitants were forced to leave. My father took us to Istanbul, where I was able to continue my education.

One snapshot from my time in the village stands out in my memory. It was my first month at the school. There was only one teacher in the village school at that time. He was Turkish and did not know Kurdish. It was forbidden to speak Kurdish at school and I remember I felt uncomfortable being forced to speak Turkish. I even run away from school once. One day, I was sitting with my classmate, who was also my relative, in the schoolyard under a big walnut tree located in the middle of the schoolyard. As both of us did not know Turkish, our conversation was in Kurdish. Then, much to my surprise, I noticed that our teacher was

standing just behind us and listening to us. He slapped us in the face because we were not speaking Turkish. This is an unforgettable, painful memory.

Similarly, I remember my first year in Istanbul. We were living in a neighbourhood that was home to only a few Kurdish families. The majority of the neighbourhood's residents were from the Black Sea Region of Turkey. Moreover, I was the only Kurdish student in my class. Although my aim was to go to university and become the first university student in my family, I did not want to go to school at that time. This was because I could not comfortably speak to anyone and did not understand the lessons because I did not speak Turkish. I was comfortable speaking in my native language and talking with my parents in Kurdish; in fact, this made me pretty happy. As a result, over the course of the fieldwork, reflecting on my personal experience with language and migration to some extent helped me to see the social world from the informants' perspectives (Brewer, 2000: 11) and shared with them experiences that helped create a bond and gain their trust. I also shared my own story of having been displaced. In this sense, this helped me to better understand them. Nevertheless, my Kurdish ethnic background made me an outsider, especially during the first phase of fieldwork. It also raised doubt about my positionality in the eyes of a few informants, due to the Kurdish issue and its bearing on the self-perception of Georgian Turks (see Chapter 4). The following section illustrates how the data collected in the field was analysed.

3.7 Data Analysis

I collected a considerable amount of data after more than thirteen months in the field. On top of typical data, such as interview transcripts, and observational fieldnotes, the data also included: local and national newspaper cuttings; documents from research provided by the associations themselves; quantitative data from various external organisations, such as the Turkish Statistical Institute and the Department of Associations; visual materials I produced

during events and activities, and notes from my personal notebooks. Moreover, right after each observational activity – while my memories were still fresh – I scrutinised my fieldnotes and wrote personal reflections that detailed my own feelings about events and participants (Bryman, 2016). These various data sources became a means through which I was able to understand what was happening at the associations and evaluate the research question from different perspectives.

Taking fieldnotes is an important technique and central to ethnographic research (Bryman, 2016: 440). Even though fieldnotes do not “provide a comprehensive record of the research setting” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 147), field-notes are an important source of information in this study. In fieldnotes, in-depth descriptive details of informants, places, things, activities and events, as well as reflections on data, patterns, and the research process were recorded (Brodsky, 2008: 341). However, it is not possible to capture everything that takes place (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 142).

It is essential to write field-notes straight after each field activity (Bryman, 2016: 441). I generally respected this guidance. Besides that, if it is at all possible, making notes during actual participant observation would be ideal. Nevertheless, in many circumstances, such behaviour (which would necessitate the carrying of notebooks and taking down notes) would generate “distraction and distrust” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 142). Accordingly, in some contexts, I used my smartphone to take notes via a note-taking application. As many people were using their phones in these settings, using my smartphone as a tool for note-taking helped me to avoid appearing disruptive and worthy of distrust. Transcribing fieldnotes into Word documents takes time. Therefore, using my smartphone as a note-taking tool also helped me to save time.

It is important to note that there is no single formula accepted by all researchers for the analysis of ethnographic data. The data analysis is, to a large extent, a custom-built process designed for the needs of the project. Besides that, analysis of data is not a distinct phase of the research, but rather a part of it. In many ways, it is during the preliminary fieldwork phase that it begins (Bryman, 2016; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 158; Flick, 2007: 69). Thus, the study uses thematic analysis, which is one of the most widely employed approaches to qualitative data analysis, in order to gain insights into the community under study (Bryman, 2016: 584). In this study, the steps of the thematic analysis are as follows:

Firstly: In this thesis, the first phase of data analysis involved transcribing and editing the data. Firstly, I transcribed the field-notes from handwritten notes to into Word documents. Then the all recorded interviews were transcribed into separate Word files, which were then stored and labelled according to the date of recording and the name of the interviewee and association. This was an incredibly time-consuming task. However, while transcribing the data, I was able to listen to the recordings several times over, which helped me to become more familiar with the material. Transcribing the data into Word format enabled me to turn my field-notes into accessible and searchable text. It also allowed me to attach additional data, such as associations' bulletins or photos related to the research. Afterwards, all types of available data, including interview transcripts, edited field-notes and media coverage related to the activities of the associations were printed out. I then brought together all the data into one Word document. Before starting to code the data, I also listened once again to all the audio recordings.

Secondly: During this stage, I started coding the data according to the requirements of the research question. Coding, which is described as a form of indexing by some scholars, is an important step in most qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2016: 581). While coding and analysing the data, I attempted to follow the guidance offered in Alan Bryman's (2016, 581-589) book *Social Research Methods*. Firstly, in order to familiarise myself once again with the

data, I carefully read all collected data line by line a few times without taking any notes. I then read them again, but this time took care to note the most important remarks, patterns, key events and people, local expressions and phrases, keywords and interesting points. At this point, over a hundred codes were generated. After that, I reviewed the codes and tried to relate them to the concepts and categories in the existing literature and to see whether there were any relations between the codes.

Thirdly: The accumulated data over time began to show patterns, which helped me to arrange my data into themes. To aid this, I first reduced the number of codes in order to combine them into higher-order codes. I then took into account their interconnections. With that in mind, I categorised the relevant codes into four themes and several sub-themes based on the research question and literature. Keeping an open mind throughout the whole research process is advised (Fetterman, 2010). At this stage, the research aims shaped my understanding of the data and I reformulated my research question after I began to search for patterns. As a result, four broad analytical themes were developed. Chapters four, five, six and seven discuss the ensuing data analysis.

Following that, using electronic copies of my data, I located the most relevant pieces of data under each relevant theme for further exploration and investigation. While extracting the data, it is important to avoid losing the context and the narrative flow of what is said. Therefore, I attempted to keep the extracts/quotations adequately long. Moreover, when it came to the data analysis, it was important to locate speeches and actions of the participants in relation to who was present, where, at what time, and under what circumstances. Doing this would be useful in outlining the broader context (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 146-147). Instead of translating all of the collected data, I only translated the extracts used in the study. The excerpts from the collected data used in the analysis was translated into English by the author in

collaboration with a professional translator in order to ensure that the translated data conveyed the correct meaning.

3.8 Ethical Concerns

The present research was granted full ethical approval from the Humanities & Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee at the University of Birmingham. In this study, high standards of ethical practice have been maintained by using the following procedures: gaining ethical approval from the University and getting verbal consent from the two associations and from all participants. As noted earlier, none of the participants agreed to sign a written consent form, but instead gave verbal consent.

In the present study, I use pseudonyms for the names of the Georgian Turkish associations and participants involved in order to protect them and to limit any potential negative consequences for them that may arise from my research. I also attempted to present them in ways that I hope are close to how they would present themselves, or at least to how they would have me present them.

The number of the Georgian Turkish associations is very limited, and the members of these associations know each other. Therefore, I did not provide any details about the associations and informants that might lead to their identification. I have also either omitted or changed the names of some places and people mentioned during the interviews or informal conversations. Furthermore, for the purpose of confidentiality, I did not provide the full URLs of web pages which include information regarding the associations and several of their board members. I have also made changes to some photos presented in the thesis in order to protect the identity of my informants. This typically involved blurring faces.

3.9 Conclusion

Conducting long-term fieldwork and in-depth interviews helped me to understand the story behind the interviewees' experiences and to understand the informants' point of view about their associational life and current developments, both in their homeland and ancestral homeland. I spent a considerable amount of time at the centre of both associations during my fieldwork and participated in numerous activities organised by the associations. I took part in meetings, festivals, concerts, seminars and picnics, which gave me the opportunity to observe my informants in their natural social settings. It is important to note that being a citizen of the same country and living in this country for a number of years helped my understanding of the meanings and connotations of almost everything I heard during the fieldwork.

After the fieldwork, the IGA organised an international symposium in Istanbul in May 2016. More than 40 academics from different countries attended. In addition, several of my informants and some other Georgian Turks who I met in the field participated in the event. I was also invited by the association to give a presentation on my research. Presenting my research in front of these people strengthened my relationship with them and allowed me to be perceived as a 'real' academic researcher in the eyes of the community. This also helped to enhance my post-fieldwork relationship with the community.

The use of participant observation and qualitative interviews fit the research design well; as will become apparent, valuable data were gathered using these methods. Nonetheless, these methods also created some problems. Long-term participant observation generated a vast amount of data, whether in the form of field-notes, personal notebooks, hours of recording or the numerous documents, websites and social media accounts relating to the associations. In this respect, it was expected that this would present the researcher with difficulties when it came to filtering out useful information.

Furthermore, unavoidably, during the fieldwork I faced certain limitations. For example, the lack of fluency in my participants' ancestral language stopped me being an insider and

prevented me engaging with them as an ‘insider’. When we talked about social, cultural and political life in Turkey, I felt like an insider. However, while we talked about their situation as “Georgian Turks” in Turkey and connections with the country of origin, these were the moments that I felt like an outsider. Therefore, these public-private and insider-outsider power relations influenced the nature of my fieldwork. This study therefore remains, as all studies do, a snapshot and not a complete picture.

The following chapter, the first empirical chapter of the thesis, focuses on the historical and thematic account of ethnic associations in the Turkish context in light of the certain key events and developments over the last century. It also focuses on how the state and the developments taking place at national and transnational level have influenced the appearance and development of Georgian Turkish associations.

CHAPTER 4: CONTEXTUALISING THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ASSOCIATIONS

4.1 Introduction

Georgian Turkish associations developed relatively late compared to other Caucasian associations, such as Circassian associations (Toumarkine, 2000: 405)⁴³ and also relative to when the original migration took place. The main aim of this chapter is to address how the state and the developments taking place at the national and transnational level shape and influence the association-building process. A thorough understanding of the main factors that affect the emergence and development of ethnic associations provides a means for understanding and analysing their roles among their respective communities (Vermeulen, 2006: 13-14). In other words, a careful consideration of the origins of ethnic organisations provides an essential background for studying a particular ethnic organisation.

Discussion of the late emergence and development of the Georgian Turkish associations provides a basis for a better understanding of their aims, objectives, and activities and how they position themselves in relation to the current associational context in Turkey.⁴⁴ The current chapter aims to question the prevailing view in the literature of immigrant organisations being

⁴³ Although Georgians settled permanently in Turkey with no intention of going back to their ancestral homeland, Circassians in Turkey have considered returning. The first generation has always kept alive their will to go back to the Circassian homeland. “The same discourse is still alive, and there are Circassians who have already returned home” (see more Kaya, 2005: 133-134). Around 200 families repatriated, mainly from Syria and Turkey (Shami, 1998: 627). This is to say that the intention to return might be an important factor differentiating ethnic groups’ attitudes towards associational activities (Toumarkine, 2001: 426). It is important to add that since 1989 many Circassians from different countries have visited the Caucasus “to find long-lost relatives and home villages” (Shami, 1998: 627). Nevertheless, they faced challenges “in finding commonalities with one another” (Shami, 1998: 629).

⁴⁴ One can argue that the late emergence of Georgian Turkish associations should be mentioned with respect to the closed border with and Cold War era of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, this is merely one factor affecting the association building process of Georgian Turks which I discuss in detail in Section 4.6.

developed and well-structured entities (see Boccagni and Pilati, 2015). A few existing studies focus on the factors prompting the appearance, evolution and development potential of immigrant associations (Moya, 2005; Levitt, 2004; Lampert 2013). These studies often highlight the importance of the country of origin's efforts in promoting the emergence and development of these organisations and to a great extent dismiss the important role of the host country in these processes (Lamba-Nieves, 2017: 1). What differentiates the present study from previous studies is that it focuses on the effect of the receiving state's policies on this process and, specifically, their role in delaying, rather than stimulating the formation of Georgian Turkish associations.

Long-term ethnographic fieldwork and available literature on ethnic associations (Toumarkine, 2000; Kaya, 2005; Taymaz, 2001) suggest several themes that play a critical role in the late emergence of Georgian ethnic associations in Turkey. In this chapter, the study partly borrows Schrover and Vermeulen's (2005), Vermeulen's (2006), and Boccagni and Pilati's (2015) approach to the issue by adopting and modifying the different factors they identify as affecting the immigrant organising process. These are: factors related to the country of origin (transnational, national and local contexts); factors related to the group itself (e.g. the immigration process and the ethnic group's character); and the sending country's influence.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: the first section addresses the association-building process and the importance of the village and rural-urban (internal) migration. The following sections focus on five main factors affecting the late appearance and development of the Georgian Turkish associations in the light of the state's influence. These factors are: 1) the Turkish state's discourse on ethnic groups, 2) the Kurdish issue and its bearing on the self-perception of Georgian Turks in Turkey, 3) Ahmet Özkan and activities of the very first Georgian Turkish association, 4) the seventy years of closed borders with the USSR, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Georgian independence, and 5) Turkey's democratisation

and EU accession process.

4.2 Association Building Processes

Vermeulen (2006: 157) claims that group-related factors (e.g. the “immigration process and the character of the immigrant group”) are influential “and almost completely determine the emergence of an immigrant organising process”, especially in the first phases of the process. He further argues that, “the influence of the group-related factors on the immigrant organising process is expected to weaken and to change” over time as the settlement process evolves (2006: 157). Thus, he continues, “the connection with the country of origin becomes weaker” and “the second generation constitutes a different, less ethnically based organisational demand” (2006: 157). Put differently, “the demand for separate immigrant organisations is expected to decrease over time” (2006: 157). He finally claims, with regard to types of organisations, that the expectation is “to see more and more immigrant organisations directly engaged in matters concerning the host society and a declining number of immigrant organisations involved in matters in the country of origin” (Vermeulen, 2006: 157). In the present case, however, the immigrant organising process has evolved according to a different pattern. This is because Georgian Turks could not engage with their ancestral homeland, as the border was closed.⁴⁵ The demand for founding a separate association has increased over time, wherein later generations established a greater number of associations. Furthermore, the number of associations engaged in matters related to the country of origin also increased.

4.2.1 The Village as a Shelter

During the Ottoman era and in the first forty years of the Republic⁴⁶ there was no political and

⁴⁵ The border was open between Turkey and Georgia from 1921 until 1937. It was under military control and people from both sides were able to cross it only with military permission. The border was then closed until 1988 (Akyüz, 2014: 88-90).

⁴⁶ The modern Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923 on the remnants of the former Ottoman Empire.

cultural association or activity amongst Georgian Turks (Toumarkine, 2001: 430; Çiloglu, 1993: 87). The emergence of such associations and activities was exceedingly slow and in Istanbul, the largest city in Turkey and where the majority of Georgian Turks live, the first Georgian Turkish association in Istanbul was formed only at the end of 1980s (Toumarkine, 2001: 430).

Although, the number of Georgian Turkish ethnic organisations is currently much higher in the cities, the association-building process initially started in the small village of Hayriye (Magnarella, 1979). Magnarella's study (1979) on Hayriye⁴⁷ (a Georgian Turkish village in North-Western Anatolia) was the first to deal with Georgian Turkish associations. The village was established by approximately 250 Georgian immigrants who left their village near Artvin, which today is on the Turkish side of the Turkish-Georgian border. While Magnarella's study provides many rich insights into the history of Georgian Turks, it lacks context, because Georgia was a republic within the USSR (Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, 1921-1991), and the Cold War was going on at that time, which prevented Georgian Turks to get in contact with their ancestral homeland. However, the present study focuses on the associational activities of the Georgian Turks who emigrated from Batum and its region. The difference between those from Batum and those from Artvin is due to the fact that the former's collective identity has been strongly affected by their exile⁴⁸ from their native land, whereas the people from Artvin have not experienced such traumatic displacement (Tourmarkine, 2001: 430).

It is inevitable that immigrants face particular difficulties. In the initial phases of the

⁴⁷ Paul Magnarella's manuscript (1979) *The Peasant Venture: Tradition, Migration and Change among Georgian Peasants in Turkey*, is about the village where the very first Georgian Turkish association was founded. Magnarella described the culture and society of Hayriye.

⁴⁸ "After their land of origin was ceded to Russia, Muslim Georgians of the Batum region were encouraged by the Ottoman authorities to migrate to Anatolia. As the new Russian administration of the region also exerted pressure on the Muslim inhabitants of the region, most of the Muslim families decided to leave their land to settle in Anatolia under Ottoman rule" (Özel, 2010: 478).

immigration process, these difficulties had the potential to be greater in scale. When I asked the question, “These Georgian Turkish associations were founded after 1980, despite the fact that the Georgian Turks had come around 1877-78. What would be the reason for this delay?” One of the board members of the IGA answered in the following way. He attributes it to economic hardship, which was a priority over maintaining (cultural) identity at that time.

The reason could be this: people left their houses behind. Maybe their parents, children, uncles were left behind. Some people flee but a part of them stayed. When they moved here, they didn't have anything. What will they be occupied with? Who am I? Where did I come from? Would they be concerned with these things, or would they deal with life struggles? They gave a life struggle here. It is not an easy thing to start from scratch. For me, these are the reasons behind [the delay].

The immigrants mainly from the Batumi region of Georgia who arrived in Anatolia were firstly transferred by Ottoman authorities to “temporary destinations in a relatively orderly manner, where they were expected to be hosted by native Muslim families on their lands and in their houses until eventually being allocated land of their own to settle permanently” (Özel, 2010:477). Hence, over time, newly-established ‘pure’ Georgian Turkish villages (where only Georgian Turks lived) emerged in the rural areas. One of my informants, who was born in such a village and then moved to the centre of the city of Bursa, stated that:

Georgian Turks generally lived in the countryside. For this reason, they were a bit late in founding associations. Since their family ties were very strong they didn't feel the need to found associations. The migrants from Batum lived together more than other migrant groups and therefore didn't feel the need to found associations.

Although this type of settlement decreased the need for associational activities, it became an opportunity for Georgian Turks keen to protect their language and culture over time, who could

live in places that resembled those that they left behind. For example, during a panel on ‘Deda Ena’ (Georgian Language Day) in 2015, a Georgian Turk author explained the Georgian immigrants’ primary aim in the settlement process:

Georgian Turks who found a new home in Anatolia preferred to settle in the countryside. These people settled in places resembling where they came from, and their main aim was to protect their culture, identity and languages. Without any doubt, they knew the opportunities of city life but they also knew that there was a bigger danger of losing their languages and cultures in the city. For this reason, for seventy years, they never gave their daughters’ hand to outsiders for marriage, nor did they allow their children to marry girls from outside. They preferred a closed society life. Particularly in Inegöl where there is a large population of Georgian Turks, they were even stricter. In those days, Georgian girls could only marry Georgian men (Fieldnotes).

As the above passage suggests, living together with their fellow peasants in villages that resembled those from which they came and endogamous marriage⁴⁹ helped them to maintain their cultural boundaries. The passage also reflects Georgian Turks’ strong sense of belonging at the time when it came to their culture and language. While the village served as a shelter to protect cultural practices, city life was considered a threat to their cultural existence. However, it is worth adding that these are the reflections of third (or later) generations and do not necessarily reflect the ‘real’ motivations and concerns of people at that time.

The organisational process among Georgian Turks started with the creation of a village association (the Hayriye Education and Development Association) in Inegöl (in Western

⁴⁹ Although there was no marriage between Georgian Turks and Turks or other ethnic groups during the early years of the settlement, the frequency of intermarriages has increased over time. Many Georgian Turks moved to various cities through marriages to non-Georgians. Therefore, the population of Georgian Turkish-majority villages decreased over time (Magnarella, 1976, 39-42).

Turkey) in 1961. At that time, villages provided more opportunities for Georgian immigrants to form their very first association (Toumarkine, 2000: 405). The founders of the association were aware of the national and local contexts where ethnic association-building was considered to be a threat to national unity (Toumarkine, 2000: 405). Therefore, at that time villages appeared to be safer than cities for associational activities and were less visible to officials. This may reflect not only the Georgian Turks' perceptions of themselves but may also represent an astute reading of the political context. This course of action could also be explained by the challenges faced by 'culturalist' Georgian Turks (those who wanted to preserve and maintain their Georgian Turkish culture) (Toumarkine, 2001: 427; Taymaz, 2001: 460). The types of associational practices discussed in the following pages, 'were seen as challenging' to the state's official discourse on ethnic groups. Moreover, the founders knew they would come under fire from both government and nationalist groups if they established an association that prioritised issues related to Georgian Turkish identity in the city (Toumarkine, 2001).

Nevertheless, in Turkey, the growth of the urban population began to increase substantially in the 1950s as result of a massive internal migration from villages to cities. This trend continued and substantially accelerated after the 1980s (HUGO, 2006; Kirişci, 2008: 189-190). As part of this trend, Georgian Turks began to move to urban areas (Magnarella, 1979). The majority of my informants told me that they left their villages and moved to city centres after the 1980s.⁵⁰ Thus, since a limited number of Georgian Turks were living in the urban areas at that time, Georgian Turkish-majority villages were seen as more suitable places to start associational activities.⁵¹ This was an inevitable result of their settlement pattern. Therefore, it seems understandable that the first association was formed in a village rather than a city, as it was

⁵⁰ This is when the second phase of rapid urbanisation started in Turkey (Delibas, 2015: 103).

⁵¹ The total population of Turkey in 1960 was 27,754,820, 31.9% (8,859,731) of whom lived in urban areas and 68.1% (18,895,089) of whom lived in rural areas. (www.turkstat.gov.tr). As can be seen from the statistics, more than two-thirds of the population at the time lived in rural areas.

most likely that the founders could not find a base to establish such an association in urban areas.

Yet, despite the late founding of the association, there has always been a quest for belonging and identity construction. Although it still remains unclear why this particular village was chosen, an important factor is the fact that the association was established by two young Georgian Turks residing in cities at that time.⁵² This partly shows how city life reinforces a sense of belonging to the group, as cultural differences and boundaries become more visible (Barth, 1998). It is also well established in the literature that immigrant associations generally appear where immigrants live together (see Chapter 2).

4.2.2 City Life and Little Steps

Immigrants mobilise themselves through associations in order to adapt to city life (Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2009). Thus, the associational phenomenon can be described as a phenomenon associated with urbanisation (Kumaran, 1992). Although the first Georgian Turkish association was established in a village in 1961, associational activities didn't begin amongst those Georgian Turks living in metropolitan cities until after the 1980s. In other words, the first association was founded over 100 years after immigration started, which makes the Georgian Turkish case noteworthy.⁵³ This indicates that in the present case, unlike many others, associations are not triggered by international migration (Yurdakul, 2009; Vermeulen and Keskiner, 2017), but by rural-urban (internal) migration.

⁵² This phenomenon is not only related to the Georgian Turks. For example, at the same time that the Georgian organisation was created, a Circassian association was established in Uzuntarla (a village located in Kocaeli province) by Circassians from the village who were living in Istanbul (Toumarkine, 2001: 434).

⁵³ Although no studies focusing on informal associational activities amongst Georgian Turks are available, 'informal' activities might have existed during the 100 years. For example, one of my informants told me that her father had told her that a group of ethnic Georgians were gathering at houses to sing Georgian songs and talk about ancestral culture, language and literature.

According to my participants, living in big urban areas increased the need for an association to be formed. Put differently, the associations took the role of a shelter – replacing the cultural and linguistic support previously offered in the village. Therefore, in order to preserve their culture and traditions, Georgian Turks started to engage in associational activities. The excerpts below highlight this:

...when they [Georgian Turks] were in the villages they didn't have much need for associations. They could speak their language in the village and could preserve their culture. But, in the 30 to 40 years after migration to the big cities started, people looked around and realised that their culture was disappearing. Even the EU started offering funding to support a revival of this disappearing culture. Also, the [Turkish] state provides support from time to time to maintain the culture.

There was no estrangement in the villages. Later on, the villagers moved to 'estrangement', that is, the cities. They started to gather 'abroad' [in the cities]. Thus, the associations came to being. Among Georgian Turks, there is the tradition of families visiting each other in the evenings. They missed this [tradition] in the cities. We still try to sustain this culture of house visits as an association [still going on]. As an association, we pay visits to homes.

The above comments suggest that the urbanisation phenomenon is one of the most influential factors affecting the association-building process amongst Georgian Turks. This is consistent with the existing literature (Rex et al., 1987; Vermeulen, 2005; Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005), which suggests that associations appeared in order to preserve ancestral cultural identity.

I was told that the second Georgian Turkish association – the Hayriye Education and Development Association – was founded in the city of Bursa approximately two months after the first. The Bursa association organised several activities, such as Georgian nights and picnics

and they introduced Georgian music to participants in the association's activities. The association has remained active for more than ten years and remains open to the present day, despite offering no activities.

The history of Georgian Turkish associations tells us that urban resettlement has influenced and stimulated associational activities. Although there has been no need to formulate collective identity in villages, a process of building and rebuilding collective identities has taken place in urban places. (Toumarkine, 2001: 434). In line with this argument, during the pilot study, I observed that all 'active' Georgian Turkish associations were founded after the 2000s, except for those established in 1997 in Istanbul.⁵⁴ However, this is not to say that urbanisation is the only factor in this process.

4.3 Turkish State's Discourse on Ethnic Groups

One of the board members of the IGA, a former politician, stated that:

There can be two reasons for founding an association at a later date. One is the attitude of the state. Secondly, not feeling any need for it. Georgian Turks, when they identify themselves as Georgian, have no desire to make themselves dominant in society.

One of the crucial factors in the association-building process of Georgian Turks is the Turkish state's policies towards ethnic groups. The Turkish government's official position, "especially during the early years of the Republic when the establishment of a Turkish national homeland

⁵⁴ It is also worth mentioning the Georgian Catholics Church, which was established in 1861 in Istanbul. The Church played an important role in the formation and maintenance of a Georgian Catholic identity (Natsvlshvili, 2015). During fieldwork, I was able to visit the Church, although it was undergoing restoration at the time. Three people (one man and two women) were sitting in the garden and I had a conversation with them. None of them were Georgian. According to them, there were only a few Georgians among the members and visitors of the Church. The majority had emigrated from Turkey to different countries. For a detailed discussion about the emigration of non-Muslim people from Turkey and its relation with the nation-building process in the country, see İçduygu et al. (2008).

and spirit was of critical importance” (Magnarella, 1976: 42), has influenced the associational activities of all ethnic groups.⁵⁵ Giving brief information about Turkey’s recent political history might be helpful for our understanding of the context and the homogenising effects of the nation-building process in Turkey (Karpat, 1959; Aslan, 2015).

With that in mind, this section will discuss how political processes have affected the organisational activities of Turkey’s Georgians. The modern Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as a modern nation-state. The nation-building process required the creation of a new set of national symbols so that the different peoples of Turkey could shift their loyalties and identities away from the various components of the multinational, Islamic-Ottoman Empire of the past to the one-nation, secular Republic of the future (Çelikpala, 2006; Karpat, 1959). State-initiated “educational practices play a central role in producing citizens who take pride in their national identity” (Bellér-Hann and Hann, 2001: 31). To facilitate the creation of this Turkish national homeland, the country’s Muslim minorities, such as Georgian Turks and the Circassians, were ‘defined’ as Turks (Magnarella, 1976: 42). Such citizens had to be pressured into learning ‘true’ Turkish, and all publications in their own languages were prohibited (Magnarella, 1976: 42). Inevitably, the overall political climate in Turkey influenced Georgian Turks and their associational activities, as it did other Caucasian groups, despite their well-known loyalty to the state since Ottoman times (Çelikpala, 2006: 427).

Kaya (2004: 228) argues that:

Ethnic groups in Turkey have been subject to homogenising [and Turkification] state policies, some of which originate from the nationalist Turkish history thesis of 1932, placing the Turks at the centre of world civilisation; Sun Language Theory [Güneş Dil

⁵⁵ For a fruitful discussion on the role that ‘past’ plays in contemporary local-state relations, see Kaneff, 2004.

Teorisi] (1936), presenting the Turkish language as the mother of all languages in the world;⁵⁶ unitarian nationalist education policies (Tevhid-i Tedrisat [Q]anunu, 1924); bans on the use of the mother tongue and of ethnic minority names; discriminatory settlement policies (Iskan [Q]anunu, 1934) vis-à-vis exchange populations and new migrants; implementation of the wealth tax in 1942, particularly against non-Muslims; and the enforced migration of Kurds in the east and south-east of Turkey.

However, it is questionable whether these theories, which have been extensively deployed in discussions on Kurdish ethnicity, automatically apply to all Caucasian groups, especially to the Georgian Turks. Kaya (2004: 228) further claims that:

These kinds of assimilationist and/or exclusionist state policies have eventually shaped the ways in which ethnic groups developed their identities. In order to survive in Anatolia, former generations of ethnic groups preferred to [incorporate or] assimilate [themselves into] the [Turkish] mainstream political culture.

Consequently, groups “abstained from declaring their ethnic identities in public and considered themselves as one of the constituents of the Turkish Republic” (Kaya, 2005: 136). Most likely, “the underestimation of ethnic diversity among the Muslim population of the republic occurred because of the preceding Ottoman *Millet* system borrowed by the republican political elite” (Kaya, 2004: 229). It is important to note that “the *Millet* system of the Ottoman Empire ignored ethnic differences among Muslims. All Muslims, regardless of their other differences, belonged to one and the same ‘Muslim nation’” (Kaya, 2004: 229). Thus, Georgian Turks, like Circassians, were not defined as a distinctive group. Hence, Georgian Turks, akin to “Circassians and Kurds, as well as Greeks, Armenians and Jews, were [...] subject to such

⁵⁶ “The work of the Turkish Linguistic Society (Türk Dil Kurumu, founded 1932) was matched by the work of the Turkish Historical Society (Türk Tarih Kurumu founded in 1935) which promoted a version of Turkish national history that emphasised glorious origins of Central Asia and downplayed the centuries of Islamic influence” (Bellér-Hann and Hann, 2001).

assimilationist policies in the nation-building process” (Kaya, 2004: 229). It is important to note however that this doesn’t imply that we can equate the assimilation of Georgian Turks to that of all other ethnic groups (as we will see in the following chapters).

Thus, all associations founded by ethnic groups were dismissed “after the Lausanne Treaty in 1923 because the Circassians, and Abkhazian, like other Muslims in Turkey, were not accepted as minorities in the document signed [...] in Lausanne” (Özgür, 2008: 81-82).⁵⁷ The Lausanne Treaty only gave minority rights to non-Muslims and this “allowed them to open schools using their languages and to establish organisations or foundations” (Özgür, 2008: 82).⁵⁸ That might be why there was no association founded by Georgian Turks or Circassians during the years of single party rule (1923-1946). Another reason may be a lack of demand for the Georgian or Circassian language to be taught in schools. “After this regime, the first Circassian organisation, whose name does not contain any word related to their ethnic identity, “Hand of Friendship Assistance Association” (*Dosteli Yardımlaşma Cemiyeti*) was founded in Istanbul in 1946.⁵⁹ The name changed to “The Caucasus Culture Association” (*Kafkas Kültür Derneği*) in 1952, just after the multiparty regime came into power. The members of the Association were mainly composed of Adyghes, Abkhazians, Chechens, and Ossetians etc.” (Özgür, 2008: 82).

“The [...] situation in Turkey was suitable for the opening [of] new associations after the acceptance of the 1961 Constitution, which was [more] democratic [...] in

⁵⁷ There may have been no demand from the Caucasian groups for such recognition at that time.

⁵⁸ In Turkey, the legal status of minorities was established by the Lausanne Treaty (1923), which defined minorities on the basis of religion rather than ethnicity (Özgür, 2008: 81-82). “Only Armenians, Greeks and Jews were recognized as non-Muslim minorities by the Turkish state, which deprived minority status of other non-Muslim communities such as the Assyrians (Suryani), Chaldeans (Keldani), Protestants and Catholics. In addition, no minority status was recognized for the Kurds and the Alevis” (Grigoriadis, 2016: 132-133).

⁵⁹ Circassians in Turkey formed a platform called “the Circassian Mutual Assistance Society” (CMAS) in Istanbul in 1908 to preserve their ethno-cultural identity (Chochiev, 2007: 218).

comparison to that of 1924 (Özğur, 2008: 82).

Several Caucasian associations appeared after this new Constitution was accepted in Turkey; including the first Georgian Turkish association, which was created in 1961 in a Georgian Turkish village. The Caucasus Abkhazia Culture Association was founded in 1967. Although the political climate in the 1960s and 1970s was more amenable to the creation of new associations, the military coup in 1980 silenced ethnic groups' associations, as well as numerous other civil society organisations, and interrupted their publications. Furthermore,

“...such phenomena as radio and television broadcasts throughout the country, compulsory primary education in Turkish, military service, etc. created a situation where the preservation of the ethnic characteristics of minority groups became almost impossible” (Chochiev, 2007: 223).

As a result, “Turkish had already started to replace native languages not only in social, but also in everyday life, thus becoming the only way of communication even in” settings where minority populations were settled (Chochiev, 2007: 223). This in all likelihood was not just the result of the military coup, but also (and maybe more importantly) a result of the process of urbanisation and upward mobility (driven by education and modernisation) that was taking place in the country. This continued until the mid-1980s, when the democratic situation in Turkey became more amenable for the emergence of new associations. In the late 1980s, Özal's (the 8th President of Turkey, 1989-1993) Kurdish policy for the recognition of Kurdish identity in Turkey and Gorbachev's administration, which enabled Caucasians in Turkey to establish relations with those living in the Soviet Union, offered opportunities for Caucasians, including Georgian Turks and their associations (Toumarkine, 2001: 427-428). Ethnic associations have mushroomed in Turkey since the late 1980s. Within this context, at least seven Georgian Turkish associations appeared (Toumarkine, 2000, 408). However, the effect of the political

climate on the establishment of these associations could be clearly seen. For example, several of my informants told me that:

A group of Georgian Turks decided to establish an association called 'Association of Those from Batum and Surrounding Areas' in Beşiktaş/İstanbul. The association was founded in 1986 but only in 1987 did it start its official activities. The founders were wary of the police, therefore they made someone from the Milli Selamet Party⁶⁰ the director of the association. Moreover, the statute of the association described Georgian Turks as Batumi Turks. The majority of my informants have accepted this association as the first Georgian [Turkish] association in Turkey. A few members of this association are now either directors or board members of the current active Georgian Turkish associations (Fieldnotes).⁶¹

The political elites and professional intellectuals in Turkey have presented the Georgian Turks, in the same way as other Caucasian peoples, “as part of Turkish heritage, or as some related Turkish tribes” (Kaya, 2004: 234). Therefore, “their state of being different has [to some extent] been denied” (Kaya, 2004: 234). Official histories tend to describe Muslims living in Turkey, even those who are from different ethnic backgrounds, as Turks when it comes to race and ethnicity (Magnarella, 1976: 42). Furthermore, Georgian spoken by Georgian Turks is said to be only a dialect of Turkish, and its “use in public places is not condoned” (Magnarella, 1976: 42). “This official ideology was inculcated in the public schools and appeared to be generally accepted by” many Georgian Turks (Magnarella, 1976: 43). For example, while Magnarella

⁶⁰ Milli Selamet Party, MSP (National Salvation Party) was an Islamist party founded in Turkey in 1972.

⁶¹ One of the founders of this association told me that the initial association founded by Georgians in Turkey is the Caucasian Culture Association (*Kafkas Kultur Derneği*) founded in 1977 at Inegöl, Bursa. However, the members of this association were predominantly composed of Circassians although a few board members of the association were Georgian Turks. Ahmet Özkan made a contribution to the preparation of the statute of the association.

was conducting his fieldwork among Georgian Turks near the town of Susurluk (in the Province of Balıkesir), a primary school teacher (a Georgian Turk) told him that Georgian Turks “are really Caspian Turks who speak a Turkish dialect which they should now replace with standard Turkish” (Magnarella, 1976: 43). Interestingly, it seems that this discourse still exists amongst members of the associations. For example, one of the board members of the BGCA told me:

*Normally, we are Ottoman Turks who went to Georgia with the Ottomans. When we came here our name changed. We came as Georgians. Otherwise we were Ottoman Turks when the Ottomans had taken us there. We are the portion of Anatolian Turks who had gone to Georgia. We were the Muslim segment. There it was Ottoman soil for a while. We were Ottoman Turks who lived there for 400 years.*⁶²

However, the majority of my participants did not share this view. Although they accepted the position of the state, they insisted there should be freedom for different thoughts and movements to exist. One of the members of the IGA expressed his opinions as follows:

...the state is a power, this is clear. Of course, in this land people can have different thoughts and movements. Now to balance these out and to establish justice there have been civil associations. Of course, in our country [Turkey] this happened later than in Europe. I mean there have been incidents like decrying one's culture and not accepting one's culture.

As the above passage indicates, associations' members are aware of European countries' approach towards ethnic groups and their associational activities. In the context of civil society, they are well aware that there was a delay in terms of association-building processes, not only amongst Georgian Turks but also amongst other ethnic groups in Turkey. To them, the state

⁶² For an alternative interpretation about their roots, see chapter 7.

discourse on ethnic groups is one of the most influential factors affecting this process (Portes, 2015; Guarnizo, 2017).

Furthermore, they draw our attention to the way in which Georgians in Turkey were culturally assimilated into Turkish society. They believe their ancestor sacrificed their life for Turkey. Therefore, this is not what they expected to happen to them and to their culture. A former board member of the BGCA, who was also the elder brother of the Chair, remarked on this, saying that:

My grandfather fought enemies for more than three years [for this country]. We come from such ancestors. There has to be a division like Georgian-Christians, naturally. Of course, Georgians in Adjara have all been assimilated [perhaps that they have been assimilated into Christianity]. There was an assimilation there, just as here [in Turkey]. Here, there was a different kind of assimilation. 'You have to be like me'. There is no such thing. We will be one, but we also want to know our culture, and recognise it as well. This is what is important.

The above extract is important in understanding the imagined 'we' of the research participants. 'We' refers to all Georgian Turks who accepted being part of the Turkish society, but without accepting assimilation to it. Therefore, they would like to remind the members and wider community of their Georgian Turkish identity to also create a sense of belonging to the ancestral homeland. Although they have a sense of belonging to the place from which their ancestors came, at the same time they would like to revive their traditions and live out their traditions in unity in Turkey. One of the board members of the IGA, who collected a huge amount of material from different Georgian villages in Turkey, said that:

After a long period, after 400 years, we left that place, but when we came here it was not recounted to us much. Why, I don't know either. Was it because when we came

here we found comfortable conditions and we totally forgot that place? Or in terms of social reality, with respect to the local politics of the country, there was no such consciousness? I saw that we don't have a sense of belonging towards Georgia, but we have a belonging only to one place, Turkey.

He complains both about the group he belongs to, especially former generations, and Turkey's policy towards them. They considered the first- and second-generation Georgian Turks to be responsible for that. Moreover, they thought they followed a different pattern from former generations because of changing notions of time and space. This view was echoed by one of my other informants, who was taught by his parents about the Turkish history, particularly the War of Independence, but was not told about his ancestors' migration history. The informant added that:

...of course it was very late that those who migrated became organised here and came together. This is caused by a serious lack of belonging in this society. During my childhood, for instance, our parents told us about the War of Independence [Kurtuluş Savaşı]. Okay. This is very important for us, but, equally, we had a Georgian civilisation that we lost there. They didn't use to tell us about this civilisation much. But now, there are new associations being founded to tell us about this.

This is important, because it shows that Georgian Turks are increasingly aware they have a 'different history' from other Turks. Shared history is often a very common feature of belonging and identity. In this sense, shared history is part of what distinguishes members of the associations from other Turks (Seol, 2008; Hall, 1990). This is also important, because it suggests that the rise of associations helped create a consciousness of belonging. Although there have been positive developments with regards to the state's approach towards ethnic

groups, they do not consider these developments enough. However, their ‘contested’ loyalty to the state makes it difficult for them to explicitly express this inadequacy.

4.3.1 Loyalty: ‘Homeland’ and ‘Ancestral Homeland’

We are some of the most loyal individuals in the Turkish Republic’s borders.

The importance board members of both associations attach to the Turkish homeland can also be seen as an affirmation of their identity and an important factor for the delayed formation of the associations themselves. They have used their loyalty to the homeland as a reflection of this since Ottoman times. For instance, the Chair of the IGA commented on their loyalty in the following manner:

Sultan Abdulhamid, whom I always remember with mercy and respect, called the [Muslim] Georgian people Kavm-i Necib [the honourable people or the noble race]. From this perspective, we are a people who received the praise of this man as well. In reality, Georgian [Turks] are a people who lived under Ottoman rule as an essential component of the society, who have had integrated into Ottoman and Islamic culture, and had integrated these into their societal body. In this respect, we certainly have a beautiful societal harmony and cohesion. I never think we have faced issues just because we are ethnic Georgians.

During numerous informal conversations and over the course of in-depth interviews, most of my informants repeatedly highlighted their loyalty to the homeland, dating back to the last century of the former Ottoman Empire. From this point of view, my research participants have long considered⁶³ themselves to be the *Kavm-i Necib*⁶³ because of their loyalty to the former

⁶³ During the Ottoman time, the term ‘Kavm-i Necib’ was mainly used to identify Arabs because Islam was revealed to Prophet Muhammed who was an Arab in origin. Furthermore, the term was also used for those nations and ethnic groups who served Islam.

Ottoman Empire, as well as to Turkey. One of the board members of the IGA, who was a former politician and who had a good relationship with politicians from Georgia, narrated Georgian Turks' loyalty from the perspective of the former president of Georgia.

I mean; Georgian Turks have a strong sense of belonging. When talking with Shevardnadze [the former president of Georgia] at night, when he received responses regarding how high the sense of belonging was amongst the Georgians in Turkey, he said, 'this is how a Georgian should be. A Georgian should be someone who is loyal to the country he lives in, embracing the values of the country, and serving the country'. He used such beautiful words.

The above passage represents the view of *Shevardnadze* in how 'an ideal Georgian' should act when it comes to displays of loyalty.⁶⁴ In this sense, most of my informants believed that Georgian Turks are a good example of how an 'ideal Georgian' should be. According to them, the high position of many Georgian Turks proved that. After providing *Shevardnadze's* perspective on the subject, the board member stated that:

There's also the fact that Georgian Turks are loyal citizens of the Turkish Republic and they occupy influential places. I mean, in the economy, in social life, in bureaucracy, in the parliament and in the ministries. These names had a profound effect on the development of the perception of Georgian Turks regarding loyalty. At its core the idea of being a loyal citizen of this country is embedded in us.

It is obvious that "an immigrant group needs to perceive itself as different from the host population [...] in order to organise separately" (Moya 2005: 840-841). As it is shown, while associations' members describe Turkey as their home country, they see Georgia as their

⁶⁴ Shevardnadze's statement at the same time represents a self-reflection on his own country's problems of fragmentations and fears of secessionism. The fear was about Abkhazia's secession.

ancestral homeland, and they make a distinction between the two. The difference is made in terms of religion and language, which are perceived as the common factors that unite them with Turkish society. Several of my informants told me that:

The Ottoman Empire and then Turkey welcomed us. We were born and raised here. All our memories are here. We share the same religion and speak the same language as the Turks. Therefore, we consider Turkey to be our homeland. But, of course, the place from which we came is part of our identity. It is the place where our ancestral tongue is spoken. We cannot deny that. (Fieldnotes)

At first glance, it appears that those to whom I spoke do not have a strong sense of belonging to the ancestral homeland, mainly due to religious differences and more than a century of living outside Georgia. However, the data points us towards several conclusions: Georgian Turks have a two-dimensional identity based on ‘home’ and ‘ancestral home’. The former, their Turkishness, is based on the religion and language they share with the Turks; the latter is based on ancestral tongue, place of origin and ethnicity (Hall, 1990). These are the two dimensions of the Georgian Turkish identity (see Chapter 7). For example, one of the board members of the IGA, who has been to many Georgian villages in Turkey and who has visited Batumi several times, explained that:

We live under the hat of the Turkish Republic. But our second hat is Georgianness.

Despite that, my informants see Turkey as their home country. One of my informants, who was in his sixties and worked in a government department, said that:

Other migrants [Circassians] founded associations to gain certain rights. Because Georgian Turks see Turkey as their own home country, they do not feel the need to found an association. They do not see themselves as foreigners.

This again shows that there has been a sense of loyalty among the Georgian Turks. They are proud of their loyalty to both the former Ottoman Empire and the Turkish state. Furthermore, this is not specific to Georgian Turks but also applies to other Georgians living in different countries. One of the board members of the IGA, who was member of a pro-Islamist party, pointed out that:

Georgians are a loyal nation. Those in America obey America, those in Russia are obedient to Russia. In the US the head of the army is Georgian, and in Turkey the Prime Minister says he is Georgian. I mean no traitors come out of Georgians in general. For instance, there was a Head of the Court of Constitution, Yekta Güngör Özden, he was Georgian. I am saying this to express the fact that the Georgians are an obedient people.

Similarly, Magnarella (1976), based on his fieldwork in Susurluk (a district of Balıkesir Province in north-western Turkey), stated that “there was no evidence of Turkish discrimination against Georgian Turks. Georgian Turks were not barred from entry into social clubs or occupational groups. They participated in local politics, and at least one Georgian Turk held a high position in the local branch of one of the major political parties. The typical Georgians in this area were proud to be Turkish citizens” (Magnarella, 1976, 43). Talking about this issue, one of the board members of the IGA, who was a former politician, said that:

Georgians in Turkey generally lived harmoniously in society, and because they didn't feel discriminated against, they may not have felt the need to found associations.

A few other informants, those who were in high position in the current government, offered similar comments. Nevertheless, several of my informants told me that when they were founding their associations some groups warned them against becoming separatists. Therefore, it seems difficult to agree with what Magnarella (1976) observed. Furthermore, my

participants' expressions of loyalty to the Turkish state suggest that they are acutely aware and concerned of possible recriminations. I particularly observed such a situation when the Chairs and some board members of both associations made public speeches. Throughout their speeches, they strongly emphasised their Turkish identity and their sense of belonging to Turkey (this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7). In other words, the associations were always explicitly emphasising their loyalty to the state, which suggests feelings of vulnerability and of being under threat. The following sections look at other primary factors in light of the state's interference.

4.4 The Kurdish Issue and Its Bearing on the Self-perception of Georgian Turks

The threat of an emergent Kurdish state separating from the Turkish Republic is one of the main concerns in Turkey. Its presence in other parts of the world (most notably in neighbouring Iraq and Syria) has been also perceived as a threat to national unity. Accordingly, Turkey's "official policy, conscious of the analogy with its own Kurdish population, has always been in line with the territorial integrity of Georgia" (Çelikpala, 2006: 432) as well as neighbouring Iran, Iraq and Syria, where large Kurdish communities live. This undeniably influences Turkey's foreign policy towards the Caucasus.

Kurdish nationalism in Turkey has influenced the self-perception of other ethnic groups (Toprak, 1996: 112). Caucasian and Balkan immigrant associations do not have a common front or common platform that could constitute a threat to the national unity.⁶⁵ On the contrary, they are careful to distance themselves from Kurdish and Alevi activists, claiming to represent

⁶⁵ The case of Laz is also interesting in helping us to understand the situation. They live along the Black Sea coast. Many of them speak Lazuri, a South Caucasian language not related to Turkish but which is related to Georgian. Religion appears to be more important than ethnicity amongst this group. For an extensive ethnographic research on the Laz case, see Bellér-Hann and Hann, 2001.

the loyalist communities, without threatening the territorial integrity of the nation (Toumarkine, 2000: 424). It appears that this negative and, in some cases, threatening perception of Kurdish nationalism when it comes to national unity and integrity has had a profound effect on the self-perception of Turkish citizens of Georgian origin. They have - by and large - been concerned with being associated with the ideals and activities of Kurdish nationalism.

As my informants told me, former generations feared that associational activities might be seen as a threat to nation-state unity. They were concerned about being misunderstood. Additionally, they did not want to be associated with those who were seen as separatists. Several of my interviewees argued that the reason for the late founding of their associations was the fear of having their intentions misunderstood. In line with this argument, the majority of my respondents frequently mentioned the loyalty of Georgian Turks to the Republic of Turkey. Furthermore, this strong sense of loyalty amongst Georgian Turks is still alive. For example, one IGA board member, who was in his forties, argued that:

Georgians lived under socialism for a long time, therefore had a very state-centred understanding. So that's why they were very loyal to both the Ottomans and the Turkish state.⁶⁶ This becomes more observable during the era of the Turkish Republic. Because of their state-centred understanding, the Georgian Turks shied away from any association activities, for fear of it being perceived as a threat to state unity. They feared that these activities could be misunderstood.

Therefore, the Kurdish issue has influenced the position of my informants towards the state. According to my participants, it has been extremely important not to be perceived as separatists. Although they are allowed to use the words Georgia, Georgian, or any other word referring to their ethnic identity in the associations' titles, they prefer to use geographical names. This is

⁶⁶ It is important to note that this is obviously an anachronistic statement. Georgian Turks came to the Ottoman Empire and could not have any experience of socialism.

echoed by the comments of the director of the GIA:

For instance, even now, we suggest the name of Association of Migrants from Batum and Surrounding Areas' for new associations being founded around Turkey. Why? Because of Turkey's sensitivities around the Kurdish issue. When we founded an association somewhere under a different name, we faced questions like 'What's happening? Have you become separatists as well?' When I became the director of this association, many friends of mine working as lawyers and journalists in Istanbul, said, 'what's happening? How can you be with the same mind-set as these separatists? This doesn't suit you at all!' When they said this, I responded saying, 'If we know each other fully, if we know each other in the best possible manner, we will look at each other with more trust, respect, love and compassion. Dividing this country would not even cross our minds; it seems that we have become captives of our own fears. In the past, as a result of these fears there were delays [in providing equal rights etc.]. It didn't happen like that in the West.

Similarly, one day I was sitting with the Chair of the BGCA at the association centre. We were talking about a forthcoming activity of the association. At that moment the director of a newly opened Georgian Turkish association in the district of Ordu (a port city on the Black Sea coast of Turkey) telephoned. The Chair had a long conversation with him and during the call the Chair was at times smiling and at other times expressing his sadness about what he heard from the director. After the phone call finished, I continued my conversation with the Chair. He told me that:

We had an exchange of ideas regarding associations. Regarding the Kurdish issue in particular, certain associations are in fear of being misunderstood. This was one of them. They are being asked questions, such as whether they would have the same demands as the Kurds. I advised them that there would be such problems in the

beginning, but in time with your activities and showing your position such concerns can be alleviated.

Although my participants repeatedly stated that they had absolutely no intention of dividing the country or being involved in any kind of separatist activities, their associational activities were considered to be indicative of separatist or nationalist tendencies by different groups in Turkey. However, they preferred not to say by whom exactly. Even today, they often face these types of challenges. As one of the board members of the IGA stated:

Now there's this thing as well. One of the factors [affecting the emergence of Georgian Turkish associations] is the issue in Southeast [Turkey]. Even when we were founding the association, some segments warned us and protested against us, saying, 'are you going to start becoming separatists as well?' But we had no such aspirations.

The Kurdish issue also affected the associations' members' participation in the established associations. The comment below demonstrates this point. Several other interviewees also made similar comments when this issue was raised.

My acquaintance with the IGA was a bit late. I was cold towards such an idea. What was the reason for this? This was as a result of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. I went to the Georgian International Association after their third invitation. After that, I asked myself, why hadn't I joined before?

My informants told me that the Georgians in Turkey attempted to establish an umbrella organisation that would incorporate all the associations founded by Georgian Turks and help coordinate their actions at the national and international levels. Nevertheless, this attempt failed. Instead of founding an umbrella organisation directly, they decided to form a platform to which the IGA also belonged. That platform later tried to turn into a federation. It took them

two years to do so, but the outcome was inconclusive.⁶⁷ One of the main reasons for that is the worry of being misunderstood. This was echoed by one of the board members of the BGCA, who said:

Becoming a federation, I don't know, this can lead to a little bit of misunderstanding. It can be misunderstood by the public. I normally think that it would be good to have unity among the associations; such as Union of Georgian [Turkish] Associations, across Turkey, or across the Marmara region. However, to build a federation, to become bigger, to be under one roof, can be understood as 'Georgian Turks also seeking separation' and can cause a stir. For this reason, it can be said that it is better this way.

As this passage suggests, although members of the association want to unite with other associations, they think establishing an umbrella organisation or coming together under one roof might be considered a threat to national unity. They want to distance themselves from these types of actions. Their contested loyalty to the state and the worry of being misunderstood, which emerged mostly due to the Kurdish issue, appear to be crucial factors deterring them from any form of federal unification or federal association. This has also influenced both associations' understanding of culture and the types of activities they carry out (which will be discussed in the following chapter).

4.5 Ahmet Özkan and the Activities of the First Georgian Turkish Association

Prior to the 1980s, Georgian Turks from left wing backgrounds emphasised their ethnic identity. This shows, also, that there have been left wing groups involving Georgian Turks.

⁶⁷ For a different experience, see Massicard (2012), who focuses on the Alevis in Turkey and Europe and how they formed huge platforms, first in Europe but latterly in Turkey.

Ahmet Özkan (1922-1980) was a pioneer of those highlighting their Georgian identity. Ahmet Özkan was working in Hayriye and in addition to devising plans to improve the village's economic situation, he was interested in studying and preserving its remaining Georgian culture. He contributed significantly to the ethnographic aspects of Magnarella's book. He was also an author in his own right, having published a general work on Georgian culture in Turkish in 1968 called "*Georgia: Culture, Literature, Art, History, and Folklore.*"

Ahmet Özkan (*Melashvili* is his Georgian surname) and his activities seem to be a significant factor in the emergence and the development of the Georgian Turkish associations. I asked my informants to talk about the reason(s) behind this. For example, one of the board members of the IGA, a teacher, emphasised his religious identity, saying that:

Someone [Ahmet Özkan] founds an association in Inegöl whose name I cannot recall. This was seen as racism. As a result of such an incident they [Georgian Turks] shied away from this and therefore they have delayed in [founding an association].

Ahmet Özkan and Faik Ertan, a young man from the village of Hayriye (while Ahmet's wife was from Hayriye, Ahmet himself was from another Georgian Turkish village) who had become a teacher in Istanbul, decided to organise a 'development' association to deal with the village's needs and issues, especially those of an economic and educational nature. They successfully established the Hayriye Education and Development Association in 1961. In the following years the association engaged in a number of cultural projects. Magnarella described the association and its activities as follow:

The association organised different activities. The following were among the most noteworthy: 1) They organised a folk dance group. At numerous Hayriye weddings I observed native dances and listened to folk music that villagers had brought with them from Georgia about a century [earlier]. In order to continue these folk traditions in an

organised way, the association agreed to sponsor a Hayriye folk dance group. [The association] outfitted a dozen village men with Georgian costumes, provided them with instruments, and scheduled their practice sessions. In 1963, the group entered the Bursa Folklore Festival and received high praise for its performance. [The group later disbanded when most of its members immigrated to Germany]⁶⁸. 2) They created a village folk music project. I also taped village folk songs and sent them to America where Peter Gold, a student in Indiana University's Folklore Institute, heard them and liked them. He wrote to me requesting information about Georgian music. I not only answered his questions and secured pertinent books for him, but the association and I arranged his visit to Hayriye so that he could tape village songs himself. I translated the taped songs from Georgian into French and provided him with village photographs. The final result of all this work was a beautiful record: 'Georgian Folk Music from Turkey' [Distributed by Anthology Record and Tape Corp., USA]. 3) They created a village reading room. During the early 1960s, the association constructed a village reading room, providing Hayriye with a much-needed educational and cultural opportunity. Elderly men preferred books [in Turkish] on religion and agriculture, while young men usually chose novels, and children borrowed school-related books. Although women and girls did not go to the reading room, some did send their brothers, sons, or husbands to borrow books for them (Magnarella, 1979: 122).

This illustrates that the aim of Ahmet Özkan was to help Georgian Turks to protect and maintain their Georgian Turkishness. He was actively involved in the identity-seeking process of Georgian Turks. When I began fieldwork, many Georgian Turks (who were members of neither association) told me that:

⁶⁸ See more about Georgian Turks in Germany in Okrostsvardze (2014).

We see Ahmet Özkan as the key figure in the identity formation process of Georgian Turks. The association-building process was started for the very first time by him. The lack of internet and TV, the limited resources and the politically restricted media environment made it difficult for those involved in this process. It was especially difficult for those who emigrated from Georgia to engage in these kinds of activities because of issues surrounding freedom of religion. But, despite all the difficulties, he did not give up his struggle (Fieldnotes).

While Ahmet Özkan was a central figure in establishing the association, and many felt that he represented their interests, when it came to matters of religious identity, he was not seen as being representative of Georgian Turks. The board members of both associations tended not to talk about him. Moreover, I did not observe any activity organised by both associations related to him and his legacy. Although members of some other associations (mostly those who focus on ethnicity-based activities) saw Ahmet Özkan as a key figure in the formation of Georgian Turkish ethnic identity, members of other associations (particularly those who place greater emphasis on their loyalty to the state and religious identity, including the two associations that form the basis of this study) thought that Ahmet Özkan did not represent Georgian Turks in Turkey. This is also because of his left wing views, which saw him place more emphasis on the importance of ethnic background. Associating with him and his associational activities seems too contentious and risky, largely because of feared reprisals from the state. Therefore, the latter group of associations refrained from doing so.

For example, Chveneburi, the very first cultural magazine for Georgian Turks, was published by Ahmet Özkan and Salva Tevzadze in Stockholm in 1977 and Ahmet Özkan was responsible for distributing it to Georgians in Turkey. The last issue of the magazine was published in 1979 in Turkey and the magazine closed after Ahmet Özkan was murdered on the 5th July, 1980 (his

murder is still a mystery⁶⁹; it is alleged that he was murdered by the members of the ‘deep state’ - *derin devlet* in Turkish – or fascist gangs)⁷⁰ because of his involvement in the Georgian Turkish identity struggle. The magazine was published again in 1993 and continued to appear until 2010. The magazine, however, has not been published since that time.⁷¹

Chveneburi not only gave information about who Georgians were, it also helped a considerable number of people, mainly ethnic Georgians, learn the Georgian alphabet (Magnarella, 1979). Moreover, the magazine provided detailed information about the villages formed by Georgian immigrants. During the fieldwork, while no members of the BGCA mentioned this magazine, one of the board members of the IGA, who was a historian, briefly offered information about it. He was aware of the magazine because he was a historian and had written several books about the immigration history of Georgian Turks. However, I did not see any issues of the magazine at either of the associations’ centres. When I asked about why they were missing, several informants from both associations told me the magazine did not focus on matters related to Georgian Turks. With regard to its content, it mainly covered issues related to ethnicity and Georgians living in Georgia. In this regard, the magazine was not read by associations representing Georgian Turks, who define themselves as a loyal community. In other words, it

⁶⁹ I could not access any sources available that focused on how Özkan was murdered.

⁷⁰ In the Turkish context, the term “generally refers to a kind of shadow or parallel system of government in which unofficial or publicly unacknowledged individuals play important roles in defining and implementing state policy” (Gingeras, 2010: 152). Turkish ‘deep state’ is “assumed to be composed of an ultra-nationalistic, arch-Kemalist and authoritarian network of bureaucrats, lawyers, soldiers, policemen, criminals and the like. They are often drawn from - but acting in parallel to - the state, immune to prosecution, acting against those judged to be in opposition to the official secularist, nationalist and authoritarian ideology of the Turkish Republic. The activities of the ‘deep state’ are often believed to spill over into criminal activity of various kinds” (Park, 2008: 54).

⁷¹ There is also a website under the name www.cvheneburi.net. The first website in Turkey related to the Turkey’s Georgians. The website included almost all issues of the magazine. However, the website was not updated after 2010. During the writing of the first draft of this chapter, the website has been updated with new content by a Georgian Turkish association located in Istanbul. Since then, the website has been updated on a regular basis in order to provide information both about Georgian Turks and the ancestral homeland.

seems there is a differentiation between political views and religiosity amongst members of the community.

Religion is an important factor shaping the activities of both associations (see Chapter 6). As the above passage suggests, there is a split in the associations between those who are religious and those are aren't. Religious members of both associations are especially influential in shaping these religious-oriented activities; these religious members do not want to be perceived as separatist. This is a way for many members of Caucasian associations, including Georgian Turkish associations, to get involved in political activism. This can be described as a strategic way of encouraging ethnic nationalism through Islam.⁷² Being Georgian, rather than Muslim, is at the core of this activism (Toumarkine, 2001: 447).

After Ahmet Özkan, Georgian Turks hardly ever expressed their ethnic identity “as an opposition that would directly challenge the hegemonic Turkish majority nationalism” (Kaya, 2004: 232 -234). Georgian Turks did not establish any associations, either in villages or in big cities, until 1987. Several of my informants told me that Georgian Turks probably abstained from involving themselves in the ethnic organising process in the aftermath of Ahmet Özkan's death. Not only was Ahmet Özkan perceived as an ‘anti-nationalist’, but also his associational activities were considered a threat to national unity. Therefore, those who wanted to become involved in associational activities thought the same thing might happen to them. The ethnic organising process of Georgian Turks was to some extent interrupted by the killing of Ahmet Özkan. Those in associations were worried about accusation of separatism and thus dissociated themselves from Ahmet. This again indicates that there are splits within the community in terms of positioning themselves in relation to Turkish majority nationalism.

⁷² For an extensive discussion about the relationship between ethnicity, religion and nationalism, see Brubaker, 2015.

4.6 The Dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Independence of Georgia

Due to the Iron Curtain, Georgian Turks grew up with little or no direct contact with the ancestral homeland. However, although they had no intention of returning to Georgia, their emotional connection with their ancestral homeland remained strong. The memories concerning the place of origin have been transmitted through generations of Georgian Turkish. I was told several emotional stories of Georgian Turks who yearned to see their country of origin once again after their immigration. One of my informants, who had visited Batumi numerous times, said:

When my grandma immigrated to Anatolia, she was about 5-6 years old. Several members of her family stayed on the other side of the border [Georgia]. The border was closed between the two countries until the beginning of the 1990s. My grandma was crying almost every day. Even if she had lived only 5-6 years in Batum, she often told us about her beautiful days there. My grandma always wanted me to take her to Batum. I promised to take her there. But she died and I could not make it happen [the informant was close to tears while telling the story]. (Fieldnotes)

Georgian Turks who fled to Turkey left behind relatives. Several of my informants told me that they have distant relatives living there today. This kinship-based connection to the native place is considered the main source of identity and sense of belonging. It further kept them connected on an emotional level to the place of origin during their long years of isolation. Their religiously-driven migration led them also to worry about those who remained and whether they were able to practice their faith under the Soviet regime. Therefore, the Independence of Georgia and the opening of the border with Turkey were crucial developments that enabled opportunities for the both sides to contact one another.

The following comment by one of the founders of the IGA discusses the opening of the borders between Georgia and Turkey. The comment also points out that the construction of ethnic identity is a learning process rather than knowing the past.

The radios [broadcasting from Adjara] were not working [on the border] in Turkey; our communication channels were very weak. When Turkey and Georgia opened their borders, then we saw an unopened chest, as they say. I mean, we saw there was jewellery in the chest, we learned there were Muslims there as well, that people live there who speak the same language as us. We were late in getting in touch with them. And the main reason for our being late was this: the other side [Georgia] was an Iron Curtain country that had cut ties completely. We believe this was the reason for our being late [in knowing and communicating with each other].

With the collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s and the independence of Georgia in 1991, important changes occurred to the social, political and economic life in the Caucasus (Toumarkine, 2000: 409; Yalçın-Heckmann, 2016: 134). It was also crucial in stimulating the creation of Georgian Turkish associations. Alongside other developments taking place in the region, this situation also affected other Caucasian groups in Turkey. Furthermore, the foundation of the new countries in the former Soviet Union and the wars that appeared during that time, such as the Abkhazian war (between 1992 and 1994), the Chechnyan war (between 1994 and 1996) and the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia, supported by Russia (in 2008), had an impact on the Caucasians in Turkey (Toumarkine, 2001: 428). These developments encouraged them to get in touch with their homelands and attempt to influence Turkey's foreign policy towards the region (Kaya, 2014). Furthermore, with these developments, "communal concern arose, ethnic resurgence came into play and national press and media coverage of the [Caucasian ethnic groups], cultures and histories proliferated" (Kaya, 2004: 232). Thus, the opening of the border between the two countries constitutes an

important source of ethnic consciousness and mobilisation amongst Georgian Turks.

Put differently, the changing relationships between Turkey and Georgia has contributed to a rise in ethnic identities among community members. This then affected the establishment of the new associations. However, this became more visible after the 2000s. For example, one of the board members of the BGCA, who has been involved in associational activities from an early age, explained that:

The Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991. It was only after Georgia gained its independence that these kind of things [founding associations] took place among Georgian Turks. Before that, because they were under Russian dominance, they couldn't go anywhere, nor there was much dialogue between Russia and other countries. There was no direct contact with Georgians in Georgia. The main contact with Georgians started in 2000s. Although we already had activities in 90s, we were rather passive. We were only 3-5 people and some relatives.

The BGCA was founded in 1997 and became more active from the 2000s onwards. The IGA appeared in 2004. Despite a strong emotional attachment, the question of why it took Georgian Turks almost another decade to start actively engaging with the ancestral homeland arises. Much of this delay might be attributed to the democratisation process in Turkey (see the following section) and the Kurdish issue. During the 1990s, the Kurdish issue has increasingly become politicised.⁷³ This resulted in lower levels of engagement with associational activities (see the previous section). However, with the democratisation process of Turkey forming part

⁷³ Three pro-Kurdish parties established during the 1990s were closed down by the order of the Constitutional Court and many MPs and party members were arrested. Meanwhile, the conflict between the Turkish security forces and the Kurdish armed group, known as the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) intensified and thousands of people have died over the years as a result of the conflict (Yeğen, 2007).

of the EU accession talks, after 2000 a better atmosphere emerged in Turkey for ethnic groups' associational activities (see the following section).

Almost all current active Georgian Turkish associations have appeared in this new period. Thus, the opening of the borders stimulated the emergence and development of the Georgian Turkish associations.

A female member of the IGA explained this new situation as follows:

...being able to communicate more easily, the much higher level of international relations, earning of some freedoms, all of these brought us to this phase. The opening of borders, the good relations of Turkey and Georgia as two states, all of these slowly and gradually affect everything, from the top to the bottom.

As she stated, all of these new developments affected the associations. This new situation not only allowed the associations to establish close links with Georgia, but also to become more engaged in the political sphere, influenced by the Turkish foreign policy towards the region. For example, through the creation of a Georgian Turkish association, a large number of Georgian Turkish groups came together in front of the Russian embassy in Istanbul in 2011 to protest Russia's 'invasion' of Georgia. The picture below was taken during the protest and then posted on the Internet. Although a few board members of the IGA also attended this protest, no one from the BGCA took part.



Figure 5: A group of Georgian Turks with other Caucasian groups protest Russia's intervention in Georgia (2011) (<http://www.chveneburi.net/rusya-yi-protesto-ettik-p15-aid,41.html#galeri>, accessed 5 August 2016).

The actualisation of Turkish geopolitical interests in the Caucasus was also directly connected with the above-mentioned changes. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, any development taking place in the Caucasus was mostly “being accepted as an internal affair of the Soviet Union and was left to Moscow” (Çelikpala, 2006: 429). After the break-up of the USSR, “it became necessary to establish relations with newly emerging political formations and to develop policies oriented towards them” (Çelikpala, 2006: 429). Nonetheless, in the context of these developments, a lack of knowledge about the Caucasus soon after emerged among policymakers tasked with deciding Turkey's internal and foreign policies. (Çelikpala, 2006: 429; Kaya, 2004).

Meanwhile, the importance and role of Caucasian organisations, “which had continued to exist in the cultural and social arenas” of the Turkish society, were emphasised (Çelikpala, 2006: 429). The associations “turned into important sources of foreign policy input given their accumulated knowledge [gained from their ancestors] and existing or potential ties with their [country of origins]” (Çelikpala, 2006: 429, Kaya, 2014). Moreover, new Georgian Turkish

organisations have emerged to address the lack of knowledge both on the governmental and the community level, which speaks to the strategic and ongoing use of immigrant associations by the state (Portes, 2015; Guarnizo, 2017). In line with the developments taking place in the country of origin, over time, these organisations began “lobbying to increase Turkey’s involvement” in the region (Çelikpala, 2006: 429).

Nowadays, it is obvious that these entities, which emerged and developed over the last few decades, create an important “information and relations network between Turkey and the Caucasus” (Çelikpala, 2006: 429). Both associations, rather than acting as mediators, try to reach their Muslim co-ethnic peers in the region. In so doing, they are careful to maintain a good relationship with both countries. However, the demands and expectations of these associations are to a certain extent in line with Turkish religious-based interests in the region.

The traditional Kemalist approach to *Outside Turks*⁷⁴, which were mostly defined by religious identity, manifested itself in the form of state engagement to build an ethnic-based sense of Turkishness (Tabak, 2015: 10). The traditional approach achieved a great deal of success until the 1980s. For instance, the Turkish-speaking communities in Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, and Cyprus all became proud bearers of ethnic Turkish identity. Nonetheless, after the 1990s Turkey began to be ruled by governments emphasising more religious and cultural aspects of nationalism something that affected the ways in which ‘Outside Turks’ were approached by the state. In this sense, ‘Outside Turks’ were slowly being viewed more in a cultural and religious sense, rather than in purely ethnic terms (Tabak, 2015: 10-11).⁷⁵ For example, the

⁷⁴ This expression has been commonly used since the end of the 1980s. It refers to the ethnic Turks or Turkish speaking communities living outside Turkey. However, the term does not cover Turkish emigrants in Western Europe. Instead, it covers merely those groups settled in Northern Cyprus, Iraq, the Balkans and the former Soviet Union territories including Georgia (see more Toumarkine, 2000: 417).

⁷⁵ For an extensive discussion about religion as a soft power tool in Turkey’s foreign policy in Europe, Balkans, Caucasia, Central Asia, and Middle East, see Gözaydın, 2010.

IGA's transnational religious activities (see Chapter 6), which are financially supported by government departments, are in line with this new state perspective.

In a similar vein, one of the board members of the IGA, who was a former politician, commented that:

There are new associations being founded. They started to take action in order to support and help their brethren in Georgia and do so with a sense of gratitude.⁷⁶ The structure that had emerged with Georgian nationalism in the 80s is in flux at the moment. Right now the associations are hand in hand with the state. The association is now being led by people who are more conservative, more religious and who have greater levels of state perception. For these reasons, compared to Circassian and Caucasian groups, Georgian Turkish associations are more centralised and more pro-state.

As explained in the literature review chapter, Georgian Turks described their migration to Anatolia as being motivated by a search for freedom of religion in their new environment. Therefore, religion appears to be a central factor shaping their character and affecting their associational activities. The idea that associations should be created and run by conservative Muslim Georgian Turks was shared by many participants. This partly explains why the

⁷⁶ It seems some Muslim Georgians in Georgia are not happy with Turkey's approach to them. This is because they feel that "Turkey shows tolerance towards the North Caucasians, perhaps even to an extent greater than the other ethnic groups" (Chochiev, 2007: 225). For example, it is believed that Circassians are more privileged than other ethnic groups because of being Sunni Muslim (Kaya, 2014: 52). One of my informants in Georgia told me that: "I think the Turkish government shows more tolerance towards the North Caucasians, most notably Circassians, than to Muslim Georgians in Georgia. This is because the Turkish authorities categorise the Caucasians as 'our people' (those coming from the same kin or ethnic group) and 'other people' (those from other ethnic groups). In other words, they like the North Caucasians because they are both Muslim and Turk. But, they like Georgians just because of being co-religionists with the Turks". As the passage suggests, ethnicity and religion are two important factors influencing Turkey's policy towards the region. However, it is interesting that the informant defines the North Caucasians as Turks. Neither current Turkish foreign policy nor the North Caucasians themselves, except Karachays and Balkars, accept this identification. As the Circassians are the largest and the most active Caucasian group in Turkey (Kaya, 2014), they get more attention from the Turkish authorities and have a strong capacity to influence Turkey's policy towards them. This might be why the informant in Georgia thought this way.

majority members of both associations think that Ahmet Özkan and his associational activities do not represent Georgian Turks.

4.7 Turkey's Democratisation and EU Accession Talks

Minority rights are globally recognised as an essential part of human rights. Minority rights are an indicator of democratic development in some EU countries (Öniş, 2003). The EU accession process provides a unique opportunity to push new EU member states to improve minority rights protection (Öniş, 2003: 9; Rechel, 2009: 231). Furthermore, the process of joining the EU has an impact on domestic political actors and policy change in applicant countries, especially during the accession negotiations (Haughton, 2007: 234-235). A more democratic climate was felt in Turkey, most notably during the European Union integration process (Arıkan, 2017). Turkey was officially recognised as a candidate for full membership in 1999 and formal talks begun in October 2005.

Chochiev suggests that:

Turkey's vital interest in its integration into European economic and political organisations serves to guarantee further progress in various spheres. In order to meet the European Union's requirements, authorities were compelled to liberalise legislation considerably and to vouch for the observance of human rights. Some steps towards the recognition of ethnic minorities- an unprecedented phenomenon in the history of the Republic of Turkey - seemed to be the consequence of the pressure from the European Union as well (2007: 225).

In the 2000s, “the European Union [...] declined the use of the minority discourse due to the escalation of the minority problem in Europe. As could be clearly seen in the Accession Partnership text, which maps out the requirements of Turkey in the integration process into the EU, the term ‘minority’ has been replaced with the term ‘cultural diversity’ in order to celebrate

unity in diversity” (Kaya, 2004: 236). Associations’ members appear to have benefitted from this relatively more democratic situation. For example, during their public events they often stressed that “*with our cultural diversity, we constitute the cultural richness of Turkey and we are the most loyal citizens of the country.*”

Furthermore, the IGA is the first Georgian Turkish association whose name contained the word ‘Georgian’. Additionally, the BGCA changed its name in an assembly meeting in 2015 by adding the word ‘Georgian’ to its title (the following chapter gives detailed information about these two associations). This situation was not unique to Georgian Turkish associations. As mentioned earlier, other Caucasian ethnic groups also preferred names for their associations that did not contain any words related to their ethnic identity (Toumarkine, 2000: 406-407; Taymaz, 2001). This was not a choice; in earlier times it was a must. The director of the IGA explained:

This [the emergence and development of the associations] is completely related to the democratisation process of Turkey. I mean, if you look, associations founded after the 80s and 90s have been founded as ‘Association of Migrants from Batum and Surrounding Areas’. In those eras, there is not a single association founded using the names ‘Georgian Association’, ‘Abkhaz Association’, ‘Chechen Association’, or ‘Circassian Association’.

They were associations in essence, but not explicitly ethnic ones. Due to the legal restrictions related to the naming of associations, one could not know which association belonged to which ethnic group merely by referring to their names. These legal restrictions not only forced founders of the associations to use geographical rather than ethnic names, but also delayed the creation of the associations. It is worth mentioning, however, that several Georgian Turkish associations, founded under different names, were not officially registered. This is a very

important point: there were informal networks of Georgian Turks that operated without adopting the formal structure typically found in associations. This suggests the presence of ‘informal’ activities and showcases the level of fear from state persecution during earlier times.

Vermeulen claims that “informal immigrant networks (especially those based upon regional descent) can be very important in the lives of immigrant groups. [They] ...represent a common form of immigrant sociability outside the family, primarily in the first phase of the settlement process (Moya, 2005; cited in Vermeulen, 2006: 27). However, “informal organisations pose a problem to some extent. By their very nature they are difficult to track down and leave few traces in archives. As a result, most studies focus on formal organisations” (Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005: 825). As it is also difficult to trace the informal associational activities of Georgian Turks, the thesis does not engage with these types of activities in detail.

One of the most commonly-stated reasons for the lack of official registration was the financial difficulties that associations were faced with. For example, I visited a Georgian Turkish association in Bursa. Entering the association centre, I could not see any sign or indication that that the building was being used as the association’s main office. One of the members of the association explained that:

If we officially registered the association and put a sign, taxes and extra financial obligations would be imposed upon us by local authorities. As it was expensive to run an organisation, because of legal requirements, we cannot afford that.

The 5253 Law on Associations (numbered 25649) was published in the Official Gazette in Turkey on the 23rd November 2004. Additionally, the Associations Regulation (numbered 25772) was published in the Official Gazette on March 31st, 2005. Law 5253 on Associations (2004, article 2) defines an association (*Dernek*, in Turkish) as “a non-profit organisation which is a legal entity formed by at least seven real or legal persons in order to fulfil a certain common

goal, one that is not illegal, and enables constant exchange of knowledge and studies”.⁷⁷ These legal changes were made a part of the EU accession process, and played an important role in expanding the freedoms that associations enjoyed by reducing the state’s scope for possible intervention. It has also lifted some of the restrictions on civil society. For example, associations are no longer required to be in contact with the General Directorate of Security (*Emniyet Genel Müdürlüğü* in Turkish). Additionally, associations are no longer required to invite a delegate from the government to their general assembly meetings and the premises of associations may not be entered into by security forces without a court order.

In Turkey, all associations are registered with the Department of Associations, operating under the Ministry of Interior. The Department of Associations is primarily responsible for making the procedures for creating, monitoring, recording and archiving establishment procedures, works and operations of associations, as per the Law on Establishment of International Associations and Organisations, No. 3335. With that in mind, in 2013 the Associations’ Information System (*Dernekler Bilgi Sistemi-DERBIS*), was introduced by the Department of Associations. Since then, the directors of associations are able to submit necessary papers without having to physically visit the Department of Associations’ provincial branches. Nowadays, all associations can implement all formal/regulatory procedures using an e-signature using DERBIS.⁷⁸

The Department of Associations provides details about the distribution of all associations according to the scope of their activities. While the IGA is categorised under the heading of “International Entities and Cooperative Associations”, the BGCA is categorised under the

⁷⁷ (https://www.dernekler.gov.tr/en/Statute/Compiled-statute-Laws/5253_Associations-Law.aspx, accessed 2 August 2016).

⁷⁸ DERBIS is the advanced version of E-signature Corporate Software Programme that was launched in 2005.

heading of “Solidarity Associations with Outside Turks”. They are classified differently by the government, because they preferred to be registered using these different categories. This is because they consider that such a categorisation may provide them with the necessary flexibility to carry out their diverse activities. At first glance, this different categorisation hints at the different activities offered by the associations (chapter 5 explores the differences between the two).

Despite all the difficulties mentioned above, Georgian Turks continued to come together and organise associational activities in order to retain their ancestral culture. The following account by one IGA member explained that:

In Turkey, the reason for the delay in founding associations is the law on political associations. In the past [during our city life], we couldn't say we were Georgians. Programmes, meals and folkloric events were conducted under the name of [let's say] the Caucasian Sport Association. Georgian [Turkish] associations were founded as a result of democratisation in Turkey. We can do all kinds of cultural activities in Turkey. Furthermore, we haven't had any problems with the state.

The legal changes, as mentioned above, most notably the 5253 Law on Associations (2004), made as part of the EU accession process, have expanded the freedoms of associations by limiting the state's power over associations. The fieldwork data suggests that changes to the laws concerning freedom of association and the protection of ethnic groups in Turkey not only brought new possibilities for existing Georgian Turkish associations, they also led to the creation of new ones. Almost all current active Georgian Turkish associations were founded after the new Associations Law came into force. The following account illustrates this point well:

It's a good thing that the law concerning associations was passed in 2004. This has pushed us to found an association. We have started to learn about our culture. In fact, the Turkish Republic as a state should encourage such associations. Because Turkey is not only confined to Anatolia.

To sum up, the emergence and development process of Georgian Turkish associations has been strongly influenced and determined by the state. In other words, the state was and is an important factor shaping the association-building process of Georgian Turks. Restrictive state policies towards Georgian Turks' ethnic, cultural and religious activities led to the relatively late emergence of their associations (especially when compared to those of other Caucasian associations, such as Circassian associations). The murder of Ahmet Özkan (founder of the first Georgian Turkish village association) was another major factor delaying the establishment of the associations. However, although Georgian Turkish associations appeared late, this is not to say that immigrants did not carry out any associational types of activities. On the contrary, my participants told me that informal activities were carried out outside of the formal structure of the associations. For example, the Chair of the IGA stated that the "IGA was officially structured as a result of more than ten years of efforts by our volunteers".

The data has shown that the developments mentioned above, which took place at the local, national and international levels, also had an impact on the IGA and the BGCA, as well as their members. These effects can be observed when it comes to giving an ethnic name to the associations, one that expresses a Georgian-origin identity, the content of the associational activities, attending associational activities, and establishing relations with the ancestral homeland, governmental organisations, other Caucasian associations and political parties. These themes will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

4.8 Conclusion

The chapter has discussed various factors that have influenced the way in which Georgian Turks have organised and has put forward a perspective largely ignored in studies on ethnic associations in the Turkish context. Since there was no available literature concerning the late emergence and development of Georgian Turkish associations, participant observation and in-depth interviews with participants provided data that shed light on the subject. It has been shown that although there are different factors affecting the association building process, the state seems to be the most influential actor in this process.

The chapter has shown that, since the Ottoman times, the Georgian Turks have demonstrated a strong sense of loyalty to the Turkish state. Indeed, they are concerned with showing themselves to be loyal in order to avoid being seen as having a 'separatist' agenda or associated with left wing politics. Thus, they have been reluctant to engage in activities or practices like those of the Kurdish people and Ahmet Özman, which have been deemed 'separatist' and 'divisive' in nature. This is because involvement in these types of activities have been seen to cause misunderstanding and to damage their loyalty to the state. Therefore, the associations have tried to modify the way they present themselves, their activities and so on, so that they can avoid being seen as a threat, or as 'separatists'. This is also why they have strongly emphasised their loyalty to the state. This implies that a feeling of insecurity vis-a-vis the state has been the main source of loyalty. This situation appears to be the primary factor behind informants' 'worry of being misunderstood'. This loyalty reflects a dual type of identity and belonging that is based on the notion of a 'home' (Turkey) and 'ancestral home' (the place of origin). In Chapter 7, I discuss the multiple identities among members of the Georgian Turkish associations.

The chapter has also shown that transnational developments encouraged associations' members to get in touch with their ancestral home. In this sense, the opening of the borders between the countries and establishing direct relationships with the ancestral homeland created an ethnic consciousness amongst members of the associations. This rise of Georgian-origin consciousness stimulated the association building process. The reason behind this is that they have always considered the place of origin as one of the main sources of their Georgianness.

The formation and development of the associations has taken different forms due to changing political contexts. Untangling the relatively late occurrence and the developmental roots of Georgian Turkish associations sheds light upon the current position of the associations and the activities they engage in. Thus, I argue that the Georgian Turks' association-building process has provided an important step towards understanding their current type of activities and the role(s) they have played amongst their own community in terms of identity construction and belonging. In this sense, having knowledge about the appearance and development of the associations is essential in providing an analysis of associational activities.

Host countries' transnational, national and local policies can have a decisive influence on the ethnic groups' association-building process and their primary fields of activity (Vermeulen, 2006; Boccagni and Pilati, 2015).⁷⁹ Host countries' authorities may forbid or stimulate organisations founded by immigrant or their activities by putting into force "all kinds of policy

⁷⁹ The concept of *opportunity structure* has been used to understand this influence. It refers to the 'institutional channelling theory' formulated by Patrick R. Ireland (1994). The theory was developed "as an alternative to the class and race/ethnicity theories, in order to understand immigrant political strategies" (Kaya, 2004: 230). The theory emphasises that host-country legal and political institutions, such as political parties, religious organisations, judicial bodies, citizenship and humanitarian institutions or institutional context, have an impact upon immigrant political mobilisation. The theory also claims that "migrant groups organise themselves politically along ethnic lines primarily [...] because 'host-society' institutions have nurtured ethnicity through their policies and practices" (Kaya, 2004: 230). Although "the theory was formulated to define the rationale behind the political participation strategies of immigrants in post-war European context, it is also useful for the analysis of similar processes experienced by immigrant groups prior to the twentieth century" (Kaya, 2004: 231), for example with respect to the Circassians in Turkey (see more Kaya: 2004).

measurements” (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005: 828-829). As a response, the more seemingly ‘a-political’ cultural activities became a central concern (Boccagni and Pilati, 2015: 66). However, that does not mean that immigrants do not carry out political activities, but rather they continue to practise political activities through the prism of ‘cultural’ activities. The next chapter focuses on the different understandings of culture from the perspective of association members.

CHAPTER 5: DIFFERENT WAYS OF CULTIVATING IDENTITY AND BELONGING

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter engaged with the birth and development of Georgian Turkish associations and discussed the factors that had led to their late emergence and development in comparison to other ethnic organisations in Turkey. In this sense, the state and developments occurring both at the national and the transnational level are noted as the main obstacles facing Georgian Turks on the road to creating their associations.

This chapter builds on this premise and analyses the different ways in which both associations develop their identity and belonging using cultural activities. In this chapter, I explore the meaning of ‘cultural’ activities from the perspective of associations’ board members and how their understandings of cultural activities shape their associational activities, thus reinforcing identity and belonging differently. I argue that the board members of both associations are developing their own understanding of what a cultural activity is. The fieldwork data shows that this understanding is being shaped significantly by their socio-economic and educational backgrounds, resources available to them as well as by the local, national and international contexts in which they operate.

This chapter firstly discusses the importance of cultural activities in the formation of identity. The chapter then looks at the differences and similarities between the two associations in order to understand the factors shaping their understanding of cultural activities. The next sections focus on the specific types of cultural activities they engage in and the way they serve to construct and reinforce identity.

5.2 ‘Cultural’ Activities as a Source of Identity

‘Culture’ is a significant component in the identity formation process (Hall, 1994). It is through cultural activities that immigrant associations help to construct their groups’ collective identity (Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005: 823). Furthermore, cultural baggage brought from the ancestral homeland is a crucial element in the construction of identity for members of the associations (Kaya, 2005: 144). However, the primary rationale behind focusing on cultural types of activities is not always the reinforcement of the sense of communality, it is also an alternative way of doing politics, making use of identity, culture, ethnicity, the past and tradition (Boccagni and Pilati, 2015: 66). One of the reasons might be that the inappropriateness of the political atmosphere in the settlement country triggers ethnic groups to make their claims by “highlighting their cultural, ethnic and/or religious particularities” while also affiliating with identity politics (Kaya, 2005: 144). In the Turkish context, this is a way of coping with the conditions of the present without being critical against the state (Kaya 2005: 144).

The statutes of associations established by ethnic groups in Turkey show that the majority of these associations were established to run cultural activities. Furthermore, almost all the associations’ titles contain the word ‘cultural’ or ‘culture’ (Department of Associations, 2017) and they are keen on describing all their activities as cultural. By taking into account the local and national policies of the Turkish state towards ethnic groups (see Chapter 4), describing their associational activities in this way seems to be means of protecting themselves against the state. The reason appears to be that ‘cultural’ activities are not seen as a threat, as they are viewed as ‘a-political’. (Kaya, 2005). Therefore, it is politically safer to organise themselves along cultural lines. Nevertheless, this does not mean that their emphasis on culture is necessarily a-political.

5.3 Different Understandings of ‘Cultural’ Activities

The IGA and the BGCA are the two associations selected for this study. They were founded by Turkish citizens of Georgian origin in Istanbul.⁸⁰ While both associations aim to keep their ancestral culture alive, they differ to some extent in terms of their policies, associational activities and the profile of the board members. Therefore, a comparison between the two associations will provide a broader picture of their understanding of cultural activities and thus their different ways of nurturing identity and sense of belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). By providing a brief overview of the two associations, this section reveals the differences and similarities between the two in order to highlight the factors that shape their distinctive understanding of cultural activities. The IGA currently has 28 board members, including a Chair and Vice-Chair⁸¹ (of whom 27 male, 1 female⁸²) and they come from intellectual and professional backgrounds and have both university-level educations and political experience⁸³. Most have previous experience of associational life. Indeed, all board

⁸⁰ According to the Department of Associations, the IGA is categorised under the heading ‘International Entities and Cooperative Associations’. This category includes 192 associations in Istanbul and 679 associations in Turkey. The IGA is further categorised under the sub-heading of ‘International Cooperative Associations’. This sub-category includes 143 associations in Istanbul and 21 associations in the district. While the IGA has over 100 registered members, the BGCA only has around 360.

The BGCA is categorised under the heading ‘Solidarity Associations with Outside Turks’. This category includes 122 associations in Istanbul, 626 associations in Turkey. They are further categorised using the sub-heading ‘Caucasus and Crimea’. This category includes 21 associations in Istanbul.

⁸¹ While writing the final draft of this thesis, the association changed its administrative structure and reduced the number of board members from 28 to 22 (of whom 20 were male and 2 female).

⁸² When women participate in formal organisations, they are frequently more active in the background instead of on the boards. This means that although the role of immigrant women is often crucial for the functioning of the organisation, information on their informal role does not emerge from the archival data (Vermeulen, 2006: 28-29). For a counter argument, see Jettinger (2011). In Turkey, ethnic associations are male-dominated environments. This phenomenon is true in the case of both associations. It is a rare that a woman becomes chair of an association in Turkey (Toumarkine, 2001: 435).

⁸³ Founding members met each other through different means, such as personal connections and common interests. The association’s committee meets monthly in the association’s centre. Meeting dates and times were communicated by mobile phone, text message, email and informal meetings between members. The quorum for meetings of the association was fifteen members. If fifteen members attended a meeting, action could be approved

members I interviewed had previous experience of associational life in Turkey. This was echoed in a statement made by one of the founding members of the IGA, who had been a member of different associations:

Associations are something that we were part of since our student days. We were always participating in student associations, village associations and mosque associations. For that reason, when there was an offer here from friends we agreed to take part. I joined this association as a founding member when it was established. We still try to serve as much as is possible.

Besides that, the board consists of educated people with postgraduate degrees. The historian board member of the IGA tried to explain how the association benefited from this characteristic. He said that it would impact upon the associations' understanding of culture and the types of activities in which it engages.

The fact that our [board] members at the association are highly educated and we do 'brainstorming' exercises about our projects increases the quality of the projects.

This also has an impact on the portfolio of the association. In attempting to explain this phenomenon, the IGA's Chair, who has a position in the Ministry of Education and is involved in different associations at different positions, said the following:

The majority of those attending and benefiting from our activities are intellectual people who engage in cultural events, arts, sports and who proved themselves in every area, and who have been involved in politics. Many of our friends either support the association or participate in its activities. Therefore, the portfolio of our association is

at the meeting by eight members. Ordinary members of the association had the right to attend the board members' meetings as an observer. However, it was rare to see non-committee members at the meetings.

wide ranging. This portfolio is comprised of elite people and we see their real support in our work.

It was common to see those kinds of highly educated people during the events. However, personal connections play a crucial role in bringing these people to the events.

The BGCA was started by a group of 9 local Georgian Turks in 1997. The board consisted of eleven members, including a Chair and a Vice-Chair (of whom 9 are male and 2 female).⁸⁴ The board members generally stem from middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds, with high school degrees. They also were engaged in and had previous experience of associational life. The association's committee meets monthly in the association's centre, and sometimes in one board member's house.⁸⁵

The BGCA provides a range of different activities for members, which on some occasions are open to the wider public. The association has concentrated its activities on events that are defined as 'cultural' by the association, such as cultural nights, food festivals and joint cultural activities with local authorities. These kinds of activities became the primary concern of this association, which began over time to function as a representative of local Georgian Turks living in the district in which the association is located.

⁸⁴The BGCA had two women on the Board among its 11 members until April 2016. However, although the number of members on the Board was increased to 15, the new Board did not include any women.

⁸⁵ Meeting dates, times and places are communicated via mobile phone, email or by word of mouth. This might be why women are excluded, because they are not part of this network and it would not be appropriate for them to be included in such a network. The quorum for meetings of the association consisted of 8 members. If eight members attended a meeting, action could be approved at the meeting by five members. The association's ordinary members were not allowed to attend the General Meetings. However, the association held meetings for the ordinary members too, through breakfasts or dinners at the board members' homes.



Figure 6: Two young Georgian Turks, who are children of the board members of the BGCA, are serving traditional Georgian food (August 2013).

The main target group of the association is its members who have kinship relations with each other. The association also connected people from the Georgian Turkish community living close by the centre through its members. Furthermore, several board members of the association told me that the association also targeted all Georgian Turks across Turkey and Georgia. The association had many members living in different Turkish cities, including several non-Georgian members. The Vice-chair of the association, whose brother was also a member of the board, said that:

We are not being divisive but instead are unifiers. We have many members who are not Georgians. [Pointing towards those sitting at the cultural centre during the interview] Most of these sitting here are not Georgian Turks. Our activities are open to everyone. We have many honorary members who aren't Georgian Turks.

Moreover, the association had a few members living in Georgia, Russia and Germany, unlike the other association. However, the relationship between these members and the association is weak. They became members of the association during one of their visits to Turkey. They had limited connection with the association since that time.

All associations in Turkey could apply for funding for associational activities from the municipalities and from some of the ministries, but there was no clear structured way of supporting associations and the money available has been very limited. Therefore, the main sources of income for both associations are membership fees (five Turkish liras), various donations⁸⁶ and aid, revenues obtained from activities and other domestic and external sources. Unlike the BGCA, the IGA also obtains funding from some governmental organisations (see Chapter 6). While the IGA's estimated budget is not specified, the estimated budget of the BGCA was around 150,000 Turkish Lira (c. £40,000) in 2016.⁸⁷ This financial information was announced during the association's 10th Ordinary General Meeting.

Both associations have members sitting on their respective boards from different ethnic backgrounds, including Turkish, Laz and Circassian members. Moreover, there are people from different ethnic backgrounds among the ordinary members. I did not get the opportunity to talk

⁸⁶ For instance, the BGCA received monetary assistance from a prominent Turkish citizen and businessman of Georgian origin to organise its large events. This person is also the Honorary President of the BGCA. There are mutual benefits in such a relationship. While the BGCA obtains financial help, which is essential for the running of its activities, this financial help creates a positive image of the businessman among the association's members and followers.

⁸⁷ In 2016, Annual Household Income per Capita was around £5,750 in Turkey (TurkStat, 2017).

to these non-Georgian members. However, their number is very limited. For example, the Chair of the BGCA told me that *“Now we have a new board member who is ethnically not Georgian. We did this to set an example for other associations”*. Furthermore, emphasising the relationships between the association and the Batumi region of Georgia, one of the board members of the BGCA said that *“as the association is international, we should not distinguish people according to their ethnic backgrounds.”* Although it may seem strange that an ethnic association wants members from other ethnicities, the associations have a tendency to represent themselves in this way (see the previous chapter). Because they have the same religious background (Sunni Muslim), ‘religion’ became a convenient umbrella for attracting and maintaining members and also for staying on the right side of the Turkish state (see the following chapter).

For both associations it is important to be proactive, to actively work within the host society’s system and to lobby to obtain support for their associational activities. Although they carry out their activities under the umbrella of ‘culture’, both have a different understanding of ‘cultural’ activities and it is this varied understanding that shapes the types of lobbying activities they engage in. For instance, while the IGA engages with the governmental organisations to promote its educational activities at the national and transnational level, the BGCA focuses instead on local authorities so that it can hold its ‘bringing together’ activities at the local level.

Similarly, among the IGA's current projects, the most important include book publishing, setting up a TV channel broadcasting in the Georgian language in Georgia, making a new documentary about the Georgian Turks and turning itself into an institute of Georgian Studies. These activities are very different from those of the BGCA, which included: establishing a

football team, creating a ‘Georgian Folk Dance Group’⁸⁸, organising a cultural tour to Adjara and opening up a large cultural centre. While the IGA's projects cover both the Georgians in Turkey and Georgia, and are education-oriented, the BGCA follows a different path, one which aims at bringing together Turkish citizens of Georgian origin including, most notably, those who reside close to the association centre.

The leaders of both associations and several of their board members emphasise the cultural and language differences of Georgian Turks. They argue that “*Georgian Turks should be seen as an essential part of Turkey’s cultural diversity*” and support the recognition of their cultural differences and language as legal rights. For example, to them, Georgian should be taught in Turkish public schools. For this purpose, the IGA worked on a project in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education that focused on preparing Georgian language-teaching materials for primary school students. In the 2014-2015 academic year, legal rights, for the first time, were given to the Georgian Turks and other Caucasians to access optional language courses in public schools on the condition that at least 10 students registered.⁸⁹ The IGA and other Georgian Turkish associations based in Istanbul intensively lobbied the government to allow the teaching of Georgian in public schools. Nevertheless, the role that the BGCA played in this process was relatively small. Therefore, we can distinguish between the two in terms of their understanding of associational activities.

⁸⁸ The BGCA made several announcements on Facebook and during the events about creating a folk-dance group. Several young people aged between 10 and 25 enrolled for this group, and the Chair posted the photos of them taken during the enrolment on Facebook. Nevertheless, the project was cancelled due to low attendance.

⁸⁹ The two countries have been successfully cooperating in the field of education. On 9 September 2014, the Ministry of National Education of Turkey approved a learning program “Teaching Georgian language in Turkey’s public and private schools for 2014-2016 years”, offered by the initiative group of Georgian Diaspora in Turkey. This program provides 244-hour course of Georgian language in Turkey’s secondary schools, for the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grade students, if there are ten and more students willing to attend the course.

The profiles, educational background and personal occupation of the two Chairs also differ. While the Chair of the IGA is a university graduate and has a high position in the bureaucracy, the BGCA's Chair is a high school graduate, is self-employed, and has a temporary position in the district municipality. He is also a member of the city council and was president of the Consumer Rights Group for 2 years (which is part of the district administration). Both have been actively involved in associational activities for many years. For example, the IGA's Chair was involved in about twenty different foundations and associations, either as a chair, vice-chair or ordinary member. Another common characteristic of the Chairs is that they have personal links with the government and have good relationships with several wealthy Turkish citizens of Georgian descent. By looking at the characteristics of the Chairs, it is possible to say that the Chairs seem capable of doing this job and may strategically use the position for their own interest or advantage. They might see the position as a springboard for their future career.

Both Chairs know one another and have a strong position in the associations' administration. The Chair of the IGA for example, was elected to his third three-year term in 2014. Similarly, the Chair of the BGCA was elected to his third three-year term in 2016. In fact, the associations are identified with their Chairs and members are keen to attribute the successes of the associations to the Chairs. One of the board members of the BGCA, who joined the association at the invitation of the Chair, stated that:

Of course, if our president isn't appointed elsewhere, if he leaves, I can say now, the association will be weakened. The flag is up as it is now, and we do not consider taking it down, God willing.

The IGA had a regularly updated website., which was used to communicate information about Georgia, general information on current affairs, various YouTube clips related to forthcoming

and past activities, and detailed information about the villages in Turkey where Georgian Turks live⁹⁰. Like the IGA, the BGCA also had a website that was used for the same purposes. However, the BGCA more actively used its Facebook page. Only the Chair had authorisation to access the account. He shared news both from Turkey and Georgia, especially related to Adjara. The announcements related to the association and any kind of activity concerning Georgians both in Turkey and Georgia were made this way. The members also used the social media page to advertise their association. For example, one of the board members who actively used Facebook said that:

Sometimes I receive Georgian visitors from other cities. I mention to them that we have an international Batumis association. There is no Georgian [Turkish] association in the cities in which they live. We talk about things when they come here as guests. We then turn on the computer and open Facebook. When these friends look at it, they are bemused, and they embrace it. They want to go see the director. They come to the director. They like it even more.

The associations promote virtual encounters and networks among their members and the wider community using their online platforms. These online social platforms provide an opportunity for members and followers to share their thoughts, expectations and opinions regarding the activities of the association. Furthermore, Georgians living in other countries, such as Germany and Russia, are able to access information concerning the association and their activities using the association's online resources. In addition to this, occasionally, the BGCA broadcast live the events on national TV, the links to which were shared on the association's website. In doing so, the association aimed to reach those who were living in Turkey, Georgia, and other

⁹⁰ While writing the final draft of the thesis, the IGA launched a more comprehensive version of its website. I have not shared the link of the website, as doing so compromises the confidentiality of participants.

countries and who were not able to attend the activities.

Almost all news published about Georgia in Turkey comes from the Georgian Turkish associations located in Istanbul. Georgian-related news has been disseminated through various channels, such as their own websites, social media accounts, and local and national newspapers. Furthermore, almost all the activities and the General Meetings of the associations appeared in local media. I always saw representatives from local newspapers and sometimes from local TV channels at the events I attended. One of the board members of the IGA, who worked as a journalist for several years, proudly stated that:

I mean, half of the news published about Georgia in Turkey belongs to us. We carried out interviews with state leaders. We wrote articles. At a time when everyone named Georgia as Russia⁹¹ we used to write 'Georgia'.

The fact that the two associations are different from one another is clearly evident, especially with regard to the characteristics of the members and the organisation's educational activities. The way in which they cooperate differs too; they work with the authorities both at the local and national level, but whereas the BGCA is more in touch with the district municipality⁹² when organising morale-boosting gatherings, the IGA has a close relationship with the metropolitan municipality⁹³, high profile politicians and governmental organisations when organising its education-based activities.

⁹¹ It is important to distinguish Georgia from Russia, because Russia has negative connotations in Turkey and it is largely synonymous with the Soviet Union.

⁹²“Major functions of district municipalities are as follows: social municipal services (reducing poverty, social aid, skills training for the unemployed); promote amateur sports; education, sports and culture services. Since district municipalities are the first tier municipalities and their councils are directly elected by people, they perform a significant function for civic participation in governance”, <http://www.tbb.gov.tr/en/local-authorities/municipalities-in-turkey/>, accessed 10 September 2017).

⁹³ “Major functions of metropolitan municipalities include: supervising the compliance of land development implementation by district municipalities; producing land lots and housing to ensure orderly urbanization, the building of infrastructure as required for industry and trade; drawing up the metropolitan transport master plans,

Although contacts with political parties are quite common, both associations claim that they do not regard political parties as strategic working partners. At the local level, party relations vary depending on who is in power in each municipality. Such relations, however, are not one-sided, as political parties also lobby associations in order to gain votes, especially during local election campaigns. This is best expressed in the following statement made by one of the board members of the BGCA:

Explicitly collaborating or supporting certain political parties will get you labelled, so we never accepted any ties to political parties or politics. People from all political parties visit our association, especially during the local and national elections. We are asked to promote and campaign for their parties, but we don't support any of them because we want to be open to everyone. We also do not impose on our members support for any party.

Despite that, the IGA maintains close relations with local authorities, government organisations, members of the parliament and political parties. Although the board members of the IGA emphasised that their association has no affiliation with any political parties, both the Chair and a board member of the IGA became nominee candidates on behalf of the Ruling Party in the 24th parliamentary elections, held in June 2015. However, they were not selected. In addition, one of the founders of the association is a Member of Parliament for the Ruling Party. Furthermore, some of the IGA's projects were subsidised by government departments associated with the Prime Ministry of Turkey: *The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency* (Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı, TİKA) and the *Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities* (Yurt Dışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı,

planning and implementing public transport", (<http://www.tbb.gov.tr/en/local-authorities/municipalities-in-turkey/>), accessed 10 September 2017).

YTB). The next chapter provides detail about these two governmental organisations.

In another example in April 2016, on behalf of the IGA, four board members visited the Chief of the Justice Commission of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, a Georgian Turk. Several other Georgian Turks have high positions in the current government. This seems to be an important indicator of the nature of the relationships that association members have with high profile officials. This might also be seen as a sign of their good relationships with politicians, which allow them to acquire more funding for their educational activities. For instance, some of their books were published in collaboration with governmental organisations.

In a similar vein, the BGCA also has political connections, but at a lower political level, i.e. with local authorities and political parties' local representatives. When I attended several events organised by the BGCA, for example, I found that representatives from district branches of some political parties were invited.

To sum up, firstly, the founding members of the IGA includes politicians, academics, bureaucrats, lawyers, and teachers. Current board members of the IGA occupy high positions in state institutions, and to some extent in private enterprises. The BGCA, on the other hand, was organised by people who are strongly embedded in the local Georgian Turkish community living in the district. The BGCA was established by local Georgian Turkish residents such as shopkeepers and public servants. Accordingly, members of both associations occupy different social and economic positions within society.

Secondly, there is a key difference between the two associations in terms of the sense of kinship among board members. The sense of kinship between the members of the BGCA is relatively strong. Indeed, the Chair of the association told me that almost all their board and ordinary members are related to one another. I was able to observe this during the events I attended. Although there are no kinship relations between the board members of the IGA, they work in

close cooperation during events. While the sense of kinship is important for the BGCA (for both the board in particular and the association in general), the sense of solidarity has an impact on the way the IGA is shaped and the composition of its board. In this section I have highlighted the significant differences and similarities between the two organisations. The following sections focus on the two associations' different understandings of culture.

5.3.1 The IGA: 'Cultural' Activities as a Means of Education

Having a library within the association centre influences the IGA's understanding of cultural activities. This shows the importance of education in directing its activities. The IGA has a large library of works relating to the history, culture, religion, language of Georgia and collects newly published books, journals and magazines from Georgian universities and institutions, especially those related to Georgian Turks and Muslim communities in Georgia. Although there are materials in Turkish, English and Russian, the majority are in Georgian. The library is also open to researchers and the public, on request.

The historian board member of the IGA describes the association as follows:

To be sure, our goal was not to be a 'standard' association where Georgian fellow-townsmen came together to drink tea and to have a chat. Instead, the goal was to establish an association where cultural and educational activities took place. I guess that in a few years, our association will turn into a 'Georgian Studies Centre' or an 'Institute of Georgian Studies', as this is our main goal.

The IGA was the first association in Turkey to use the word Georgia in its name. Because of this, it played a leading role among Georgian Turkish associations in Turkey. For example, several other Georgian Turkish associations established after the IGA preferred to use the word Georgian in their titles. This is an important indicator of their willingness to explicitly express their ethnic Georgian identity.

This association has also brought about the establishment of several other Georgian Turkish associations. For the first time in Turkey, a Deda Ena Day (Georgian Language/Mother Tongue Day) celebration was organised by the IGA in 2009.⁹⁴ The first celebration was held at the association centre and saw a large number of participants. Many people on the board of other Georgian Turkish associations today were ordinary members of the IGA at that time and attended these kinds of activities. The co-chair of one of these associations told me that she attended the first Deda Ena celebration event. She said:

After that I and a few other Turkish citizens of Georgian origin decided to found a new Georgian [Turkish] association to meet Georgian Turks' expectations with respect to bringing musicians and famous people in Georgian literature from Georgia to Turkey.

This association was in close ties with the IGA and organised a few joint activities, such as the celebration of Deda Ena and an aid campaign for Tbilisi in 2015.⁹⁵

The premises also functioned as a meeting-point for many of the Georgian Turks, not only those living in Istanbul, but also those in other cities. As mentioned previously, the IGA has been actively involved in a number of different activities, including language courses. The first Georgian language course, which has been ongoing for the last nine years, is operated by the IGA. Participants learn Georgian poems, songs, and ballads during these courses and the activities provide an important space for members to engage directly with each other and also

⁹⁴ Furthermore, for the first time, a joint panel was organised in 2016 in response to Deda Ena. The issues discussed in this panel include: how the new generation of Georgian Turks will learn their ancestral tongue; why they should learn Georgian; the importance of Georgian language courses; the history of the Georgian language and literature; learning the Georgian alphabet; and Georgian poets. Additionally, at the beginning of the 2016, the Consulate General of Georgia in Istanbul came together with representatives of Georgian Turkish associations in Istanbul. In the meeting, the joint celebration of the Deda Ena in April was discussed. Both the IGA and BGCA attended the meeting. This was the first time that the Consulate was involved in such matters. Sending-country governments are developing relations with communities in the sending countries; these relationships have been documented in the existing literature (Cordero-Guzmán, 2005).

⁹⁵ These two associations and the BGCA, together with a few other Georgian Turkish associations, sent humanitarian aid after a deadly flood in Tbilisi in 2015.

with their co-ethnic peers visiting the association centre.



Figure 7: A Georgian language course at the association centre, 2013 (Source: Facebook, accessed 26 April 2016).

In line with its future aim of turning into an institute, the association held a symposium in Istanbul in 2015 titled “Islam in Georgia: Past, Present and Future”. This was the first academic event on this topic in Turkey and over 40 academics from different countries presented their research. I was invited by the association to present mine. This might be seen as an important step in turning the association into an institute of Georgian studies. From this perspective, the IGA occupies a different place relative the other ethnic associations because of its aim to evolve into an institute with a focus on Georgian studies, especially Islam-related studies. In this way, the IGA draws attention to the role of religion in the identity construction process (see the next chapter). Thus, some of the IGA members are also critical of the Georgian government and Church in relation to their policies concerning Muslim Georgians.



Figure 8: The symposium entitled 'Islam in Georgia: Past, Present and Future' organised by the IGA, May 2015.

All board members of IGA I interviewed agreed that the Georgian Turks in general lacked knowledge about their culture. To them, “*Georgian Turks say our culture is rich, the literature is rich, the history is rich, but they know nothing more.*” Being aware of that, therefore, one of the main aims of the IGA is to address this ignorance among its members and followers, as well as to create an awareness of their ancestral culture in Turkey. In this sense, the IGA differentiates itself from these kinds of associations. As the historian board member of the IGA explained above, the association thus draws attention to its educational activities, which aim at teaching ancestral culture, thus connecting to the country of origin.

The association accepts that Georgian Turks are an important component of Ottoman civilisation and one of the oldest peoples of the Caucasus. Furthermore, the association sees Georgian Turks as the most loyal individuals to their homeland (see Chapter 4). Thus, the IGA

seeks to make Georgian Turks visible and recognised as an ‘*inseparable part*’ of the Turkish community. Starting from this point of view, the IGA aims to showcase the industriousness, successes, heroism and patriotism of Ottoman Georgians in order to create a positive image of the community. It also aims to further illuminate the details of their migration to Turkey (known also as *Muhajiroba* – the process of migration). For example, during my fieldwork, the association was working on another book, entitled ‘*Muhajiroba*’.

In this way, the IGA aims to represent and indirectly build a community that is aware of its history and proud of its identity. The association uses history education as a means to achieve this. In order to revive the community spirit and safeguard cultural legacies, the IGA helps members and followers to ‘recreate’ the particular cultural practices and traditions that emanate from the practices and cultures of the ancestral homeland. In this regard, the IGA published two different books to showcase Ottoman Georgians who held positions of varying importance over many centuries of the Ottoman Empire to the modern day. In order to emphasise the loyalty of the Ottoman Georgians, the historian board member of the association, who is also the author of one of these books, put it as follows in a newspaper interview:

Ottoman Georgians lived with the idea of serving the state. They were not involved in secretive plans and they did not try to come by political power for their own gain. Even when they were involved in politics, they didn’t actually engage in active politicking. They were really more focused on service (Newspaper interview, 2011).

The board member is emphasising that their past represents them. In other words, it is claimed that Georgian Turks are not different from Ottoman Georgians in terms of serving the state and getting involved in politics. In doing so, the association aims at including those who distance themselves from political activities.

The writing and rewriting of history is an important act in the construction of community (Hobsbawm, 2012) which refers to reinvention of tradition in the case of the Georgian Turks. The IGA has published a few books on the historical roots of Georgian families living in Turkey. The IGA claims that a substantial number of people from both countries may trace their ancestors through the association's historical publications. Furthermore, the association prepared a 13-episode Migration Documentary. The documentary showcases the Ottoman Georgians' industriousness, successes, heroism, patriotism, and contribution to the spread of Islam. The documentary also tells the story of the Ottoman Georgians' surviving grandchildren. Moreover, the documentary reveals the tragic history of the migration, not only based on historical written sources, but also from the eyes of the last remaining victims, who are an important source of knowledge and information about ancestral cultural traditions.

The association not only promotes ancestral history, but also carries out activities to increase awareness about modern Georgia and its history. These forms of activities include: bringing a Georgian folk dance group to Turkey; organising events showcasing Georgia; staging an exhibition of Georgian painters; and showing films by Georgian directors. These types of educational activities allow the association to have a good image in the eyes of the Georgian state. This is important for its ability to run its religious-based associational activities in Georgia (see Chapter 6). Almost all the informants I interviewed and had informal conversations with expressed how these forms of associational activities surprised them and also taught them a lot. In other words, these types of activities are important in terms of learning about their past. One board member of the IGA who was in his fifties and planning to write a book on the history of Georgian Turks, commented:

Until now I was away from such things and lacked knowledge, and those coming were more or less the same. When they came and saw it, 'they started to go 'ah' with surprise.

Surprised, they said, 'Good God! Is this what we were? Why did we stray so far away from this?' People need to be awakened. The association is doing this right now.

Similarly, another member of the executive board who was in his forties and who joined in with almost all association activities, said that:

We arrange events of arts and music as Georgian [Turkish] associations. Georgian visitors coming are very surprised. They say they learn a lot and learn things they didn't know about before.

Another board member who was in his fifties and who learned Georgian in his forties through the association's language courses, explained how collective consciousness has been developed through the association's educational activities:

We used to think that Georgian culture was a mountainous culture. We never used to think it had its own alphabet or that it was modern. We also did not associate Georgia with these things. They used to call it Russia back then. As such, a Georgian consciousness has been rising in Turkey with the founding of the associations, the opening of borders and the various comings and goings.

The IGA's educational activities connect members to their ancestral origins, thus cultivating a sense of belonging towards the ancestral homeland. The female ordinary member who was once a board member of the IGA and who generally visited the association centre with her son, pointed out how her generation was deprived of this opportunity, due to the absence of associations:

Our activities were received with great pleasure, because up until now this didn't exist. The new generation maybe doesn't notice this much, but middle-aged people and people above middle age express their appreciation a lot. Because of their bitterness,

for years, up until now, there were no serious steps taken in the name of Georgians and they had always lived their Georgianness inside themselves.

As the passage shows, there was a lack of knowledge concerning the ancestral background and the country itself. One of the board members of the IGA, a former politician and journalist, stated that:

You came from Georgia, there's a country called Georgia, but you know nothing about it. I started with this curiosity. So, after 15-20 years we came to this point. Yes, it's good to be Georgian.

By giving an example from her own life, a female member of the IGA, who was in her early forties, stressed how the association has increased her level of knowledge:

I think the association has a very crucial role. I can say this taking my life story into consideration. Thanks to this association I have learnt a great deal about being Georgian and about Georgian history. My awareness about my Georgian identity increased. I learnt about my past and history from this association. Therefore, I can find everything that I need to pass on to my children and the new generation thanks to this association. Therefore, the association makes an enormous contribution to our lives. There's more to it of course, this is only one aspect.

Despite all the activities of the association, there were also a few board members and ordinary members who thought that the role of the association in teaching cultural traditions was exaggerated. To them, this is not specific to the IGA, but is also true of other associations in Turkey. One of them told me that:

There are currently about 20 associations in Turkey. Yes, there are also new language courses being opened. These courses continue at different associations and new ones are being opened at others. However, these associations aren't very effective in

practice. I mean, these associations generally start with an emotional urge like, 'Turns out we are Georgians, let's get together', but they do not last. I am not of the opinion that these associations have much of an impact on reviving cultural activities. This still remains at a theoretical level. Do they have any effect at all? They do, of course, especially when it comes to the teaching of the language. I think they can be beneficial in increasing the number of language courses.

The association centre is a place for people to meet and gather and where they can establish and strengthen ties with each other (Cordero-Guzman 2005). Attending associational activities creates feelings of belonging. By exposing members to shared language, familiar music, and traditional foods, the IGA creates a familiar space, thus providing participants with a feeling of belonging vis à vis their ancestral culture. Those coming to the association are generally people who know each other, but there are also people who get to know each other at the association itself. For example, those coming to visit have a conversation over tea, during which they talk about their ethnic roots. Apart from this, they talk about migration stories and about the old days and the tragedies caused by migration and the separation of families that resulted. They also talk about contemporary problems. In order to increase the bonds between members, the association also organises dinner and Iftar (fast-breaking) parties that are open only to members. In this way, the association creates a hub for people to provide and receive emotional and practical support. Nevertheless, the number of people who attend the activities or visit the association is very small. In this sense, the association appears to be for a relatively small number of people (generally the association's board or ordinary members and their relatives and friends) who want to use the association and its activities as a meeting point and educational base.

5.3.2 The BGCA: ‘Cultural’ Activities as a Means of Social Togetherness

The association had a beautiful garden along the banks of the Bosphorus. It was generally in the garden under the grapevine where I talked to informants and I counted at least fifty people sitting in the garden every time I visited. However, I could not see anyone under thirty years of age. Almost half came to the association every day, especially after 5 pm, to sit in its beautiful garden. Looking from their perspective, I might say I could sympathise with their attraction to this beautiful place. Each of them made friends with someone coming to the association, and beverages were relatively cheap there.

Symbolism can be used as a means to represent belonging to a group. In turn, symbols are meaningful for those who can recognise what they mean (Guibernau, 2013: 116). At the centre of this beautiful garden was an old grapevine, said to have been brought from Batumi. This grapevine is a symbol for understanding the association’s approach towards cultural activities. The grapevine symbolises the BGCA’s non-political cultural activities, which are aimed at bringing members together (for example, by drinking tea, eating certain foods, and so on) and to connect to the ancestral homeland using kinship and solidarity. Furthermore, only few of them were Georgian Turks. From this point of view, the association was proud that it had non-Georgian members, visitors and members from different countries. This aspect of the association was seen as an important indicator in their struggle to avoid being perceived as ‘separatist’ (see the previous chapter). However, the inclusion of non-Georgians could be considered a new normal, and not necessarily a means to prove that they are not ‘separatists’.

The association officially changed its name on 24th April 2016 during the 10th ordinary General Meeting; the word ‘Georgian’ was added. This change was officially approved by the Department of Association on 9th May 2016. After the word ‘Georgian’ was added to the title, several board members told me "*this is a more suitable title for our association’s status and*

role". The association not only changed its title, it has also changed its logo. The board members collected suggestions through associational meetings and the association's social media account. Both members and non-members contributed to the process. After a fruitful exchange of ideas and suggestions, the association has changed its logo to include a bunch of grapes and a dancing figure. These symbols represent their belonging to the group and their origin (Guibernau, 2013). The youngest board member explained that:

We looked for something that really represents us. There were many alternatives. We received feedback from Georgia. As a result, the current logo came to being. Of course, this is a novelty. Renewal is always a good thing. We received positive feedback for our new logo. There should always be renewal of course. There should be new things done that reflect our culture. It is not nice to do things that would distance us from our culture. Our aim is to represent our culture and therefore we designed a logo that does just that.

However, the association did not use its new title when local authorities visited the association. For example, after the name change, the District Mayor made a visit to the association with his vice-chairs. During his visit, there were a few flags on the desks and walls displaying the new logo and the full name of the association. Nevertheless, the name on these flags did not include the word Georgian.

In a similar way to the IGA, the BGCA sees language as a key element in cultural protection and its transmission to the next generation. Therefore, the association opened a Georgian language course for the first time in 2011. However, the course was run only once and largely attended by the association's board members. Nevertheless, given that a few other Georgian Turkish associations ran these types of courses, the BGCA also wanted to be part of the trend, or at least give it a try. Nevertheless, the association was not able to run the course again due

to poor attendance, financial difficulties and difficulties finding qualified teachers.

The BGCA places strong emphasis on organising cultural activities. This was also emphasised by the emphasis on the word ‘cultural’ in their title. Furthermore, according to its statutes of the association, one of its main aims is to cultivate solidarity between members. This was echoed in a statement made by the director of the BGCA:

One of our established goals is to prioritise or to give importance to cultural activities.

During the course of several conversations with the Chair, he repeatedly made this statement. He added that *“almost every association like us describes their association as cultural. However, when we look at these associations, they either do not organise any activity or describe their coming-together as cultural activity”*. Like the IGA, the BGCA also differentiates itself from other associations. However, what the association does is not that much different to what other Caucasian associations do (Kaya, 2014; Besleney, 2014; Özgür, 2009).

Generally, all board members of the BGCA joined the activities run by the association (these include cultural nights, picnics, *Iftar* dinners, summer festivals, *Eid* celebration, and so on.) It was always the case that more than 50 ordinary members attended these types of activities. As their numbers and generational participation change, it is obvious that the everyday activities serve different people than the ritual activities. They generally came with their family members; indeed, it was particularly important for them to bring their children to such events. I was able to talk to many participants during such events, many of whom stated different reasons for taking part. One of the more common reasons was to seek out their Georgian roots and to meet people from their ancestral homeland. This was echoed in the words of one of the board members of the BGCA, who could speak a little Georgian and who was in his fifties:

I want to come [to the association]. I mean, when you say Georgian, you want to seek your roots, I want to seek my roots. Now that we have this Georgian [Turkish] association, it is very emotional for me. To have a chat with Georgians, to talk with Georgians [in the Georgian language] is very peaceful and makes me happy.

A recurrent element in several interviews was the role the associations played in providing a space for a ‘coming together’ of sorts, defined by Waldinger (2015: 170) as “nostalgic get-togethers”. In this sense, the association centre and its activities constitute an important place in which people meet, gather and establish and strengthen ties. For members, attending associational activities strengthens their sense of belonging. Through ancestral language, familiar music and traditional foods, the association creates a familiar space, thus providing the participants with a sense of closeness with the group as a whole. In this sense, the BGCA provides a platform in which members and followers can gather. Therefore, almost all informants I interviewed considered that this is what the main aim of the association should be. In this regard, members of the board and the ordinary members come together at the association centre, especially during events such as Eid and Iftar dinners.

One of the members of the BGCA who has run the association’s tea house for the past few years told me about the role of the association as a place for people to meet and share their feelings. He had felt very lonely upon arriving in the city after having been used to being surrounded by many Georgian Turks. He found emotional support in his associational network. He then referred to the disadvantages of being busy, which left little time for coming together. After talking about the way of life in Georgian Turkish villages, he expressed how associations in cities fulfil the same role:

There are few people in the city with whom I can talk to and share my emotions. In this sense, we come across such people here, thanks to the association. However, everyone is busy because of their jobs. So our gatherings here do not happen very often.



Figure 9: Iftar dinner at the garden of the BGCA, July 2015.

In a similar vein, one board member, who was in his 40s and who had a relative on the board, told me that:

I have been the co-director of the association for two periods. The associations have become a centre of gathering; we do not go to coffee houses [Kahvehane in Turkish] because at the coffee house, there are games, but no talking. The associations are focused on culture, mixing, integration and support.

Furthermore, another member of the board explained how the association is a place to come together with non-Georgians too. In this way, the association connects them to the wider local

community. He sees the association as a family for all Georgian Turks. He also emphasised the role the association plays as a place through which people can find one another.

I accept that the association is a family for all Georgians. Plus, this family means something to all people. Turks, Laz, as we mentioned. They come here. We sit down, drink our tea. There is mutual help between us. And our President is in dialogue with other associations. Especially when the Georgians come together, it's hard to separate them. In addition to this, when I need to find the address of a friend, I come to the association and find it. For instance, you can easily find me by coming to the association. Having an association is a good thing, I love it.

His reflections are representative of those of many members I spoke with, who saw the association as their family. Another board member expressed similar views.

Georgians have started to find each other after 2010. This happened thanks to the associations and social media.

Unlike the IGA, bringing together young people was one of the main goals of the association. In this way, the association aimed at maintaining their remaining ancestral culture and transmitting it to the younger generations. One of the former board members, then an ordinary member of the BGCA, who was in his late sixties, a high-school graduate and elderly brother of the Chair, told me that:

We would like to have an association to bring together the younger generations. In this way, they could maintain our culture using our pioneering role. We hereby founded this association.

Nevertheless, although I spent a considerable amount of time with the association, I could not see many young people visiting the association's centre. This shows that the BGCA has not

achieved this aim, yet. It is clear that the association is for elderly men. The youngest board member of the BGCA, who was in his thirties, told me that

Generally older people visit the association. The activities of the association for young people are limited, and the activities offered are not attractive for us. We go to shopping centres and cinemas instead of attending associational activities. However, we value the culture that our elderly people mentioned. It should be protected and maintained.

In line with these developments, during a long conversation with the Chair of the BGCA, he mentioned his dream concerning the future of the association, which demonstrates the association's understanding of culture. He stated that:

As the director of the association I have a dream of opening up a Batum Cultural Centre. Here, especially geared towards our youth, I am planning to open departments on regional [Batum and its surroundings] dresses, regional cuisines, language and culture. This way I would like to protect our youth from bad habits and to teach them our culture. In short, I want everything related to Georgians to be in that centre.

The above comment illustrates that it is important to keep ancestral culture alive and to teach culture to young people. It also shows that the region -rather than country - is still important. In doing so, the association not only aims at teaching ancestral culture to the young generations, but also hopes to protect them from bad habits by bringing them together. This is typical for associations dominated by older people. Similarly, during a conversation with the Vice-chair of the BGCA, I was told about a different, future plan of the association, which reflects what the association means by culture. He pointed out that:

We want to establish a football team that will represent our association in the professional leagues. We know that managers of a few football teams in Turkey are

Georgian. There are also several Georgian footballers playing in Turkish leagues. We would like to get in touch with them as well. We are thinking of giving the name 'Batumspor' to the team. Thanks to this team, we will bring together the youngsters.

Given its financial difficulties, the association is unable to form such a team. However, in other places, this is not only viable, but achievable. For example, in Germany, there are many Turkish associations which have their own football team (Yurdakul, 2009). Having similar aims to the BGCA, these associations want to bring together younger generations through football to keep them away from bad habits. Playing in these associations' football teams gives the Turkish youngsters the opportunity to speak their mother-tongue, meet with new people from their home country and to maintain their Turkish cultural traditions (Blecking, 2008).⁹⁶ In this sense, establishing a football team is a part of the identity construction process for ethnic associations. It is possible to make a similar point for the BGCA too. In considering calling the team "Batumspor", the association wishes to make reference to Georgian identity.

My participants claimed that local Georgian Turks living in the district get to know each other thanks to the association's activities. In doing so, the association introduced Georgian Turks to Turkish society and made this group 'visible'. This helped them to express themselves and their Georgian identity more comfortably. Almost all those I interviewed thought that. For example, one of the members of the executive board, a man in his fifties, put it as follows:

The association told people about the existence of Georgians; that Georgians live in Turkey as well. At least it shows people that there are Georgians in the district and that they are numerous. It tries to say, the district does not only consist of Kurds, Laz and Turks, there are also Georgians.

⁹⁶ However, in Germany, Turkish associations with football teams are completely in decline these days, and they certainly do not have much of a function of keeping the native language.

In a similar vein, the Chair explained how the association made people aware of Georgian Turks living in the district:

In the district where our association is situated, there is great potential for Georgians in terms of their population. In the past, people used to exclaim in surprise, 'Are there Georgians living here?' But today everyone is aware of Georgians living in this region. As an association, we have been appreciated and accepted by the district population. As an association 'we brought what was dead back to life'.

Furthermore, at the rhetorical level, people from Central Asia and the Caucasus would also be aware of the activities of the association through the media. The Chair stated that:

After this association was founded, we managed to identify the number of Georgians living here. Secondly, they [residents in the district] got to know us, in cultural terms, more generally. We also had a number of activities. There were also people from outside the district who got to know us. God willing, thanks to a programme on the TRT channel, perhaps people in Central Asia and the Caucasus will watch us and get to know us.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to say “*everyone is aware of Georgian Turks living in the region*”; this statement may only hold true for those who visited the association on a daily basis. I spent lots of time in the garden of the BGCA with my participants. The garden was particularly full in summer time. Some of those who regularly came to the associations had no idea about the association and its activities. A few of them did not even know what the name of the association meant. These people even thought Batumi was in Turkey. For example, I had a chance to talk to a 90-year-old Thracian (ethnic Turks who migrated from Western Thrace to Turkey) at the association. In 1945, he moved to the district, alongside other migrants, because of the need for workers in the factories. When asked about where they came from, he counted

one or two cities in the Black Sea and Central Anatolia. But he did not mention Georgian Turks and Muhajirs. He said he did not have any idea about Batumi or Georgian Turks. Therefore, it seems that the association has a limited impact on its non-Georgian visitors in terms of familiarising them with their ancestral culture.

One of the aims of the association is to present a positive image of the community locally. I attended several events organised by the BGCA. There were more than a hundred attendees at each event and there were many non-Georgians among the participants. Those invited either had friends who were members of the association or lived as neighbours alongside Georgian Turks in the district. They were expressing their joy at attending the events. In this sense, the associational activities create a positive awareness among the non-Georgian local residents.

Most of those coming to the association are not Georgians. They say how beautiful and clean the Georgians are. People, for instance, don't say 'let's go become a member of another association', but they say, 'let's go become a member of the BGCA'.

As a result, members of the association started feeling more comfortable about expressing their Georgian identity, which reaffirmed the belonging to the group. This also contributed to them being perceived as a threat to the state (see previous chapter). One of the former board members said that:

Now, what are the benefits of this association, do you know? Before I couldn't say 'I am Georgian' at my workplace, no matter how much I was respected by my workmates. This is because I didn't want to be misunderstood. There is a different perception, which makes people afraid. But now we are overcoming this. How? Thanks to the association.

Similar to the IGA, one of the main aims of the BGCA is to build a community that is aware of its history and proud of its ethnic identity. To achieve that the association draws attention to the history of their ancestors and the migration to Turkey. This is also mentioned in the official

statute of the association. Although one of the stated aims of the BGCA is to analyse and observe their arrival in Anatolia in its historical context, the association did not hold any activities in pursuit of this aim, mainly due to financial difficulties. One exception is its preparation of a short video about their immigration to Turkey. This video was shown at the beginning of almost all activities.

As the kinship relation is strong amongst the board members, once or twice a month they either visit each other or ordinary members living close to the association centre. Hence, home visiting becomes a means through which the association can connect to the community. In doing so, the association aims to strengthen the ties between members, especially members of the executive board. According to my informants, house visits are very important. To them, one of the most important qualities of the house visits is that they still faithfully maintain Anatolian heritage and culture. There has been a strong ‘Anatolian culture and heritage’ in Turkey. Throughout its history, Anatolia became home to many cultures. Therefore, in the Turkish context, everyone can be a member of the Anatolian culture, a term with no ethnic connotations. By Anatolian culture, they mean the culture they were exposed to while living in villages in Turkey where only Georgian Turks lived.

Home visiting is also important in terms of offering moral support to members and followers. This is specified in the association’s official statute, which says that “*Our association aims to maintain social, economic and cultural support between the members as well as to help our members financially and spiritually during events like weddings, funerals, disasters and illnesses.*” For instance, announcements regarding visiting sick or elderly Georgian Turks or attending engagements, marriages and funerals are all made by the association. In general, a group of board members on behalf of the association attend these types of events. Furthermore, the board members visit Georgian Turkish patients, either at the hospital or at home.

5.4 Conclusion

In a sense, the Georgian Turkish associations and their activities are not unique. Indeed, some of their activities fall within the range of typical ethnic association behaviour seen in other parts of the world (Yalçın-Heckmann, 1997; Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005; Cordero-Guzmán, 2005; Çağlar, 2006; Christiansen, 2008; Sardinha, 2009; Orozco and Garcia-Zanello, 2009; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2015). Consistent with the literature, the chapter has shown that the objectives of both associations are similar to those of many other ethnic associations involved in cultural and identity maintenance, including the promotion of language. Furthermore, when carefully looking at the statutes and stated missions of the both associations, one can easily recognise the similarities with other associations discussed in the literature (Boccagni and Pilati, 2015; Cordero-Guzmán, 2005; Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005; Attah-Poku, 1996; Okamura, 1983).

The chapter has illustrated that the associations' board members are the 'guardians' of 'ancestral culture' and that the two associations emphasise and perform different types of cultural activities. This leads to different ways of being Georgian in Turkey. That is to say, there are different forms of belonging and identity. In the case of both associations, cultural practices include anything related to ancestors or the ancestral homeland, such as language, religion, music and food. Both associations, however, have a different way of understanding 'cultural' activities. The IGA has an understanding of 'cultural' activity that is educational, and which refers to 'high culture'. The IGA belittles the other association's activities as 'non-educational' and thus 'trivial' and 'insignificant'. To its board members, while other associations are aimed at drinking tea and chatting or gossiping, their association has lofty goals. The IGA's associational activities generate a non-kinship solidarity amongst members and connect them to the country of origin by raising awareness concerning their historical background. Their activities appear to be political in nature.

For the BGCA, the association is focused on exposing members to ‘culture’ so that they do not develop ‘bad habits’ and bringing them together to create a sense of collective identity. Therefore, ‘cultural’ activities are about moral upbringing and togetherness, which represents ‘low culture’. Board members feel responsible for the moral upbringing of their members, followers and family members. They wish to raise their children as ‘good people’ who avoid ‘bad habits’ and who are aware of the Georgian aspect of their identity. Kinship based on solidarity plays a crucial role amongst members and links them to their place of origin; activities seem to be non-political in nature.

Board members’ profiles play a crucial role in shaping the type of activities of the associations. The data demonstrates that this is being shaped significantly by their socio-economic and educational backgrounds, kinship and resources available to them, as well as by the local, national and international contexts in which they operate. Put differently, I argued that the nature and scope of both associations’ activities are, in large part, context-bound – implying that associations are primarily a reflection of the problems, issues, and characteristics of the board members and the community itself. Therefore, while BGCA focuses on gathering activities and moral upbringing, IGA has almost given its full attention to educational activities.

The name of both associations might suggest that the associations aim to preserve ancestral culture and identity. In fact, both Chairs of the associations argue that Georgian Turks in Turkey are not immigrants; they are an essential element of the Turkish community. In this way, they want their ancestral culture to be recognised as an integral part of the cultural diversity of Turkey. They expect to be supported, especially financially, by the relevant government departments and not to be perceived as ‘separatist’ because their activities are defined as ‘cultural’ by both the state and society. The following chapter focuses on both associations’ activities relating to the country of origin.

CHAPTER 6: TRANS-NATIONAL AND TRANS-LOCAL ENGAGEMENTS OF THE ASSOCIATIONS

6.1 Introduction

“Ethnic associations may serve local, national and transnational functions, often at the same time” (Friesen, 2008: 53). Their transnational function is important in understanding the construction of identity and belonging outside the receiving country’s borders. With the help of developments in technology and transportation, ethnic associations’ role in fostering transnational linkages is becoming more important (Friesen, 2008: 59). Studies showed that the transnational circulation or flow of images, practices, discourses, meanings and perspectives can have a profound effect on people’s identities (Vertovec, 2001; Hansing, 2001). Hence, analysing both associations’ activities with respect to the ancestral homeland will help us to understand how they contribute to the construction of identities and belonging among their members in a transnational context.

This chapter evaluates the importance of both associations’ activities relating to the country of origin in the process of identity formation and belonging. I argue that religion and kinship-based associational activities with regard to Georgia are important in shaping associations’ members identities. The chapter shows that both associations are connecting their members to the country of origin but in different ways. While the IGA has a transnational character based on religion, the BGCA “centres more on making a home from home through the ‘creation of trans-local understandings’” and kinship (Vertovec, 1999: 457; Meer, 2014: 151; Anthias, 2002). It is also argued that members of the IGA participate in the transnational activities of their associations because of an ‘assumed’ sense of responsibility towards Muslims living in Georgia. Therefore, there is a moral dimension to their identities. What makes the IGA case

noteworthy is that the association engages with transnational religious flows from the homeland to the ancestral homeland, rather than from the country of origin to the destination country.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: the first section focuses on how the IGA connects its members to the country of origin. The second section discusses the trans-local activities of the BGCA. I shall now move on to the question of what drives the IGA to get in touch with the country of origin.

6.2 Religious-based Transnational Relations

What drives the associations to engage with their co-ethnics in the country of origin? Is it only ‘the ethnic bond’ (as much of the current literature suggests, see Chapter 2) or are there other factors that should be kept in mind in order to understand the full story behind this phenomenon? Adopting a transnationalism lens (Glick-Schiller et. al., 1995; Vertovec, 2001), the section aims to answer the above questions by focusing on the IGA’s transnational relations.

6.2.1 Motivational Factors

According to my informants, a large number of Georgians in Georgia lack adequate or positive knowledge about Islam and Muslim Georgians. Much of the little they know is based upon negative perceptions constructed by the dominant power regarding Islam and Muslims over time through dominant, distorted narratives that date back to the days of former Ottoman Empire (Sanikidze and Walker, 2004; Hoch and Kopecek, 2011). Board members of the IGA are deeply concerned about such discourses and their implications for the way in which Islam and Muslim Georgians are perceived in Georgia. In response, the association channels much energy, through various joint activities with both Turkish and Georgian institutions, towards a positive reconstruction of Islam and Muslim Georgians’ image. Through their activities, they aim to inspire positive perceptions about Islam and Muslim Georgians, create opportunities for

social and cultural linkages and partnerships and transform relationships. Thus, although it is not clearly specified in its statutes, one of the main aims of the IGA is to engage in religious practices to help Muslim Georgians and try to correct the image of Islam in the region.⁹⁷

Several of those I interviewed described the immigration of their ancestors from Georgia to Turkey as “the second Hijrah (*Hicret* in Turkish) in Islam”. The Hijrah, also spelled Hijra, is the migration or journey of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in order to escape persecution, in 622. The Hijrah is also identified with the start of the Islamic calendar. ‘The second hijrah’ is a reference to the word *muhajir*, which comes from *hijrah*. It describes escaping from a hostile environment. This indicates that the IGA members ground their own migration in terms of a religious form of mobility. Therefore, amongst Georgian Turks, one would thus assume that faith could be a powerful force around which social networks and associations are built, or that the Georgian Turks would use existing associations as a resource to solve the problems Muslim Georgians experience in Georgia. For example, one of the board members of the IGA, who visited numerous Muslim villages in Georgia, stated that:

Another point was that we had asked what we could do for people, particularly those living in Georgia, whom we consider our relatives belonging to the Muslim faith, at least in terms of better learning their faith.

Considering the association’s country of origin-oriented activities, one of the most important aims of the association is to help Muslim Georgians in Georgia to learn about and practice their religion in the ‘best way’ by providing them with the necessary religious material and

⁹⁷According to Bourdieu, religious capital refers to the way religious knowledge and practice is appropriated and disseminated (Dillon, 2001). In this study, religious capital is the practical contribution to Muslim Georgians’ life made by the IGA.

supporting them financially and spiritually.⁹⁸ This could be considered missionary work, but, as they told me, they have no intention to convert them to Islam. Furthermore, the association also aims to provide non-Muslims with the ‘right’ information about Islam.⁹⁹ In this sense, the IGA appears to have an educational role in teaching Muslims in Georgia about matters of faith. This was echoed in a conversation with one of my informants, who said:

Georgian Turks in Turkey have a high level of religious motivation. They are more religious compared to other Caucasian ethnic groups, such as the Circassians and Abkhazians. A few Georgian [Turkish] associations have undertaken an important mission to reflect this religious motivation to Georgia. This approach has made a great contribution to these associations in terms of giving central importance to their ancestral homeland-oriented activities. This became very beneficial for those living there. However, there are also some associations that say we should make a distinction between religious-related matters and Georgianness-related ones. In this sense, there are associations concentrating only on Georgian culture.

The board member of IGA, who was a former politician and head of the news department at a national TV channel, was one of the members of the first Georgian Turkish associations, established in Istanbul in 1987. He was also actively involved in several civil society organisations and other Georgian Turkish associations. During my fieldwork, he was also

⁹⁸ Turkey plays a central role in the financing of Muslim organisations in Adjara. Georgian Turks provide significant amounts of financial support to these organisations in the form of private donations. For instance, “many new and renovated mosques in upper Adjara display plaques referencing private donors based in Turkey. However, as no official figure is available, it is difficult to calculate the exact amounts of financial support” (Liles, 2012: 17).

⁹⁹ “One priest and history instructor from Tbel Abuseridze State University stated that one of the goals of the university’s history program is to “teach the correct facts” about religion in Adjara, which means treating [Christian] orthodoxy as an essentially primordial aspect of Adjara’s history, portraying Islam as a historical aberration precipitated by the Ottoman conquest, and emphasising the need for the region to return to Georgia, so to speak, through conversion to Christianity. The faculty of the university is dominated by orthodox priests from other regions of Georgia” (Liles, 2012: 12-13).

working for a religious foundation that aimed at supporting Muslim Georgians living in Georgia by providing them with printed as well as visual religious materials. I had a sincere conversation with him lasting more than two hours. The above passage is from this long conversation, which suggests that getting in touch with Muslim Georgians in Georgia is essential for association members. In this sense, the IGA sees itself as responsible for taking action to help their ‘Muslim brothers’ (*din kardeşleri* in Turkish), as well as relatives in Georgia.

“Being Georgian” and “being Orthodox Christian” are inseparable in Georgia. This is formulated as “I am Georgian, therefore, I am Orthodox.”¹⁰⁰ Hence, the majority of the Georgian population does not accept the term “Georgian Muslim” (Khalvashi and Batiashvili, 2009). According to the IGA, the dominant perception among Christian Georgians is that Muslim Georgians were forced to accept Islam during the Ottoman time. Therefore, while providing education-based assistance to Muslims in Georgia, the association at the same time aims to dispel the myth that the faith was imposed forcefully.

In a newspaper interview, for example, the historian board member of the association, who wrote several books about ‘Ottoman Georgians’, tried to challenge the allegations that Islam was forced on to the Georgians by the Ottomans by blaming Soviet Russia for disseminating such a discourse.

The Russians purposefully spread the idea that ‘the Ottomans forced the Georgians [living in Batumi] to become Muslim.’ But this was not true. In fact, the Georgians living there embraced Islam easily. Of course, the resemblance between these two [the

¹⁰⁰ Zurab Kiknadze (Professor of Literature, Tbilisi State University) states this. He further continues that this formula “considerably narrows the limits of the identity of Georgians, as among the ethnic Georgians there long exist the representatives of Muslims both within Georgia and beyond its borders,” namely Turkey and Iran. Therefore, the formula blocks the way towards Georgians those who are believers of different faiths (Kiknadze, 2006: 245).

Ottomans and Georgians living in Batumi] was influential in this. In just a short time, they begun having more contact with other ethnic groups, and then they produced a commendable number of scholars and built all sorts of mosques and madrasas. There were even Georgian Sheikh-ul Islam [head of the highest religious institution during the Ottoman time] during the Ottoman time. So, the allegations that the Georgians living in Batumi were forced to become Muslim are not true. When the Georgian version of this book is finally published, it will strike a blow to Russian propaganda on this matter (Newspaper interview).

As the passage indicates, the board member blames Soviet Russia for the allegations. As it is important for the association to have a good relationship with Georgia in order to carry out its activities (I discuss this later in the chapter), it seems reasonable to blame Soviet Russia rather than Georgia. However, it is worth adding that Georgia remained under Russian control for a long period of time. Therefore, one would expect that Soviet Russia had an impact on the country's policy towards Muslim communities and the discourses created during that period of time. Nonetheless, this is not just the case during the Soviet era; this discourse predates this time. This is well-known outside of the USSR. Indeed, such stories of Ottomans forcing people into Islam exist across Eastern Europe. a

According to some of my informants, the 'demands' from those who are in need also motivated them to engage in associational activities. However, these demands were not made on the basis of financial difficulties. Instead, these demands were about the preparation of material on Islam in the Georgian language. The comment below from former board member of the IGA, who

was head of a religious foundation that provided religious material¹⁰¹ to Muslims in Georgia, alluded to this notion of ‘demand’:

Naturally, people of the same blood [same ethnic group] feel more eager to help each other. Of course, there are so many demands from those who are in need. We are motivated by these demands. For example, while walking on the street with one of my friends in Istanbul, I was talking in Georgian with him. A lady [Muslim Georgian living in Georgia] stopped me. “Are you Georgian?” she asked in Georgian. I said, “Yes.” “Are you Muslim as well?” she asked. I said, “Yes, I am Muslim.” She continued to ask, “Are you not feeling ashamed?” Her questions surprised me. Then I asked, “Did I make a mistake?” She replied, “We don’t even have a book in our own language about how to pray?”

As the above passage suggests, being both from the ‘same blood’ and sharing the same religion became a crucial motivation behind association members’ decision to address the demands coming from Muslims in Georgia. In this context, the term ‘same blood’ refers to a collective identity and belonging that does not include non-Muslim Georgians. Hence, religion serves as a form of kinship for the board members of the IGA.

I would like to tell you a story [from my military days]. There were two hafizs [those who have completely memorised the Qur’an]. While one of them was an immigrant from Batumi, the other was Turkish. Their commander wanted to choose one of them as an

¹⁰¹ Due to the lack of materials about Islam in Georgia, religious leaders from other parts of Georgia also frequently visit Turkey to obtain necessary religious educational materials for Muslims living in Georgia. The Georgian government makes life difficult at the border for those who carry religious materials while entering Georgia. These people, who are Georgian citizens, have, for example, been stopped or detained for many hours at the border (Preston, 2016: 38). For example, the association hosted a group of imams from predominantly Azeri Muslims regions in Georgia. The association accompanied them during their stay in Istanbul. In doing so, the association places emphasis on the importance of religion above ethnicity. This policy helps the association in terms of being supported by the Turkish governmental organisations. This is also in line with the Turkish policy towards ‘Outside Turks’, which has seen the focus shift from ethnicity to a more cultural and religious stance (see Chapter 4, Section 4.6)

Imam [the person who leads prayers]. The commander chose the Batumi immigrant and said to him, “Your ancestors emigrated from Georgia because of their religion therefore, you are higher in taqwa [a term in Islam which alludes to the highest levels of moral rigour].

This story was repeated by the president of another Georgian Turkish association, who was a high level government official and who was located in another city. The narrative about the migration of my informants’ ancestors emphasises how religion is an important form of mobility and identity (De Vos, 1995). This narrative is also common among my research participants. Moreover, the articulation of this narrative is central in the discussion of belongingness amongst them. This narrative is also used by both associations, most notably by the IGA, to promote a create a sense of closeness or intimacy to the ancestral homeland in order to be able to help Muslim Georgians living there. In this regard, the IGA engages with the ancestral homeland through religious activities. In the following section, I focus on the IGA’s transnational religious activities, which aim at developing the knowledge of Muslim Georgians with regards to their faith.

6.2.2 Forms of Activities

In collaboration with governmental and civil society organisations, the IGA engaged in numerous transnational religious, socio-cultural and political activities, such as distributing translated Georgian religious books, organising circumcision (*sünnet* in Turkish) ceremonies¹⁰², holding cultural activities in Georgia and hosting senior officials from Georgia.

¹⁰² “Muslims are the largest single religious group to circumcise boys. It is considered a sign of belonging to the wider Islamic community. In Islam there is no fixed age for circumcision and the age at which it is performed varies depending on family, region and country. The preferred age is often seven, although some Muslims are circumcised as early as the seventh day after birth and as late as puberty. Circumcision is not compulsory in Islam but it is an important ritual aimed at improving cleanliness. It is strongly encouraged but not enforced. The ritual dates back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad”, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/islamethics/malecircumcision.shtml>, accessed 10 December 2016).

These transnational activities have increased the knowledge Muslim Georgians in Georgia have concerning their faith, most notably in Adjara. These activities further contribute to a strengthening of the relationship between the two countries. In this section, I would like focus on such activities and how the IGA connects its members in the country of origin through these activities, which serve to create an identity and feelings of belonging towards the ancestral homeland.

6.2.2.1 Educational Role

In 2013, the first Georgian translation of the Holy Quran was published, in collaboration with “Humanitarian Relief Foundation”-IHH- (a conservative Turkish NGO which is active in more than 100 countries) and the Turkiye Diyanet Foundation.¹⁰³ Each foundation printed twenty thousand copies of the Quran. A large number of copies were distributed throughout Georgia, but mainly in Adjara. The Quran has been translated from Arabic into Georgian by a Muslim Georgian who is a citizen of Georgia and who graduated from university in Istanbul. This is the first Georgian translation of the Quran ever conducted by a Muslim.¹⁰⁴ He completed the translation in three years. The Chair of the IGA said during an interview with Anadolu Agency, the state-run news agency in Turkey, that:

There was no Georgian translation of the Quran available. Therefore, Muslim and Christian Georgians rightfully ask, we wonder what is written in the Quran. They would like to understand the Quran. For this reason, we commissioned the translation. We

¹⁰³The Foundation, in line with organisational goals of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, carries out charitable, social and cultural activities (Diyanet Foundation, 2017). More info is available at: <https://tdv.org/en-US/site/icerik/hakkimizda-1038> (accessed 8 September 2017). For a detailed discussion on how the Diyanet Foundation became an influential apparatus for state ideology under the AKP (Ruling party) rule in Turkey, see Öztürk, 2016.

¹⁰⁴ The first Georgian translation of the Quran was made from French into Georgian by Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907), a famous (non-Muslim) Georgian politician and writer.

are aiming to hand a translated Quran copy to every Georgian household, whether they are Muslim or not.

It is worth pointing out that their desire to give a copy of the translated Quran to all, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, could be considered a missionary activity in Turkey. Nevertheless, my informants strongly denied that they were engaging in such a missionary role. Bearing in mind the importance of the Quran for Muslims, the first Georgian translation of the Quran is a highly significant development for Muslims in Georgia, one which gives them the opportunity to learn more about their religion. Several board members of the IGA, including the Chair, were involved in distributing the Quran in the region. During the same interview with the Anadolu Agency, the Chair said that:

We witnessed emotional moments while distributing the translated Quran. Those who were receiving it became emotional, even sometimes tearful. We learned that a lady had read the whole translated Quran two times in three days upon receiving it. The lady then became Muslim.

Although the IGA has no explicit missionary aim to convert people to Islam, stories of Georgians becoming Muslim encourage them to continue their activities. Thus, the media and publishing are important tools for the IGA to reach Muslims in Georgia. For example, the IGA has a desire to set up a TV channel broadcasting in the Georgian language in the ancestral homeland. The main goal is to reach Muslims in their native language. In this way, Muslim Georgians in Georgia would be able to access more resources and be able to learn about Islam and their process of becoming Muslim, thus dispelling the myth of the faith being spread by force. The association adopts an 'educational role' to make materials available to people who are already Muslims. The following account by one of the members of the IGA, a former politician and journalist, explained that:

As an association, our goal to set up a new TV channel broadcasting in the Georgian language in Georgia. In doing so, we will be able reach them in a visual way to convey the materials that we have. In this way, they will learn where they came from and how they became Muslim.

In line with the IGA's educational mission, more than 50 religious books from Turkish and other languages have been translated into Georgian. For example, Martin Lings' book "Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources" was translated from English into Georgian by the IGA in collaboration with the Diyanet Foundation. A substantial number of copies of these translated books were also distributed with the help of board members throughout Georgia, mainly in Adjara, especially during organised activities. Additionally, at least 17 religious films and cartoons were dubbed by the IGA into Georgian and shown on Georgian TV. One could expect that these types of activities will encourage Muslim Georgians to learn more about Islam. For example, during the summer of 2014, I was sitting in the garden of the Orta Mosque (*Orta Camii*), located in central Batumi. This Mosque was partly restored with the help of the IGA. There were many young Muslim Georgians in the garden.¹⁰⁵ I was talking with a local resident. He pointed towards the young people in the garden and said that:

*It was very rare to see a young person in this garden several years ago. However, as you see, now there are many. Nowadays, they can find many religious materials in Georgian at the mosque. These materials help them to learn more about their faith.*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Although Georgian Muslims do not have an intellectual leading figure, the young generation appears to make an effort to revive Islamic heritage and consciousness amongst Muslims in Georgia (Gümüş and Nakaidze, 2010: 143).

¹⁰⁶ According to the annual survey conducted by Caucasus Barometer in Georgia, while 5 percent (3 percent among the 18-35 age group) identified themselves as Muslim in 2008, this figure increased to 13 percent (17 percent among the 18-35 age group) in 2017 (Caucasus Barometer, 2018).



Figure 10: A Georgian child is reading an Islamic magazine published in the Georgian language. The cover also includes a photo of a famous mosque in Istanbul (Source: IGA's website, accessed 5 September 2016).

The association also opened a religious school (madrasa) in Georgia and provided financial help to those already established. I was not provided any information about the number of madrasas opened or financially supported by the IGA in Georgia.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Currently there are 184 active Muslim buildings in Adjara: 141 mosques, 27 madrasas, and 16 prayer houses- i.e. mosques lacking key architectural/symbolic components, such as minarets (Liles, 2012: 15).



Figure 11: A prayer house in a village close to Batumi city centre.

When I visited Batumi, I went to a madrasa where the Quran is taught. All the needs of this madrasa were being met through donations from Turkey. I went there following information obtained from the association. When I went there I was very warmly received. There were children of Muslim Georgians living in the villages at the madrasa. Everyone were so helpful and kind to me. While I was there, one of the board members of the IGA also came and stayed one night. The association later organised a tour to Batumi and, as part of the tour, the participants visited this madrasa. The following statement from a board member of the IGA, who joined the tour, illustrated how transnational religious activities connect them to their country of origin:

I had also been to Georgia with a tour. The children who received us there were Georgians who were living there but they had studied in Turkey thanks to this association and they have connections with Turkey. They started working there and when they welcomed us they were very excited. We also were excited and embraced

them with excitement when we saw them. These are very important, emotional, sensitive issues, but also very precious work.

It has been over a century since Muslim Georgians came to Turkey. This is the first time that many of my informants had visiting their ancestral homeland. They were told many stories about Adjara, especially during their childhood years. Thus, they tend to be emotional and excited when visiting the region. As they have both ethnic and religious bonds to the region, they feel a responsibility to Muslim Georgians living there.

The Prophet Mohammed's birthday (Milad an-Nabi) is one of the holiest days of the year in Turkey. It is celebrated through different activities by millions of people, especially at mosques. These activities include mosque illuminations and special foods. The IGA organised Milad an-Nabi celebrations in collaboration with the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency mainly in Batumi and Tbilisi (TIKA -*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı*),¹⁰⁸ the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB - *Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı*)¹⁰⁹ and the Turkish Office of the Counsellor for Religious Services in Tbilisi.

¹⁰⁸ TIKA is a government department of the Prime Ministry of Turkey. On its official website, it is defined as an intermediary of Turkish foreign policy, particularly in the countries with whom Turkey shares a common language, a shared social memory and culture, as well as in many other areas and countries. More info available at: <http://www.tika.gov.tr/en>, accessed 15 October 2016).

¹⁰⁹ YTB is a government department of the Prime Ministry of Turkey. The organisation carries out activities strengthening the bonds and relations with Turkish citizens living abroad as well as kin and related Communities and establishes closer economic, social and cultural relationships. More info available at: <https://www.ytb.gov.tr/en/corporate/institution>, accessed 15 October 2016).



Figure 12: Milad an-Nabi celebration organised by the IGA in a village close to Tbilisi (Source: IGA's website, accessed 5 September 2016).

Several circumcision ceremonies were organised in collaboration with the Turkish branch of Doctors Worldwide (a UK based Islamic charity), TIKa and YTB. According to the IGA's bulletin, 5,000 children, including a number of children from Christian families, were circumcised in total. The association also distributed Qurbani¹¹⁰ meat to those living in poverty across Georgia, including non-Muslim families. The Chair of the IGA made a speech at the 4th Ordinary General Assembly Meeting of the association. In his speech he said:

We had circumcision ceremonies. Thousands of children from different regions of Georgia were circumcised with the support of our association. Then we had qurbani

¹¹⁰ Qurbani is the word used to describe the sacrifice of an animal to Allah during the period of Eid ul Adha. From an Islamic perspective, Qurbani tradition brings people closer to Allah and it encourages a better relationship with all of creation. It is also seen as a sign of belonging to the Islamic community. Furthermore, it is considered a way to help those in need and to establish a link with them.

sacrificed and distributed. Many institutions and people from Turkey and Germany gave their qurbanis to Georgia through us.



Figure 13: Circumcision ceremony organised by the IGA in a village close to Tbilisi (Source: IGA's website, accessed 5 September 2016).

The above passages emphasise the importance of religion as a means through which to get in touch with the ancestral homeland. To do so, members of the association not only practice their religious traditions, they also show their belonging to the ancestral homeland. Furthermore, the association connects other Muslim Georgians living outside of Turkey to the country of origin.

It is important to note that the circumcison ceremonies organised by the IGA were suspended by the new Georgian government in 2013. These forms of religious ceremonies were mainly allowed during the administration of Saakashvili (the former president).¹¹¹ My research

¹¹¹ Georgia held its parliamentary elections on the 8th October 2016, its eight since declaring independence in 1991. The ruling Georgian Dream coalition won the election for the second time. The coalition came to power in October 2012 by defeating Mikheil Saakashvili's long-ruling United National Movement party. It has reformed its policies towards Muslims in Georgia.

participants in Turkey were content with the previous president. However, they said they are not happy with the new government and that the new government had introduced some policies directed negatively towards Muslims.

This might be due to the fear of 'Turkish expansion' in the region. As the association conducts some of its activities in collaboration with governmental organisations, these types of activities are considered by some local Georgian priests as a means of 'Turkish expansion' in the region (Sanikidze and Walker, 2004: 8; Preston, 2016: 13; Popovaite, 2015).

The association already had good connections with several religious-oriented organisations and other Muslim communities in Georgia. It is worth adding that to be able to carry out associational activities in the ancestral homeland more easily as a partner association was established in the region in 2007. The Chair of the association was one of the board members of the IGA. This association was closed a few years later. As I was told, it was closed due to financial difficulties.

The association sees itself as a 'window' to encourage intercultural dialogue and friendship between Turkey and Georgia and, more broadly, between Turkey and the Caucasus. From this point of view, the IGA not only has an intellectual outlook and international connections, but also a transnational character. Furthermore, the IGA has positioned itself differently to other associations. This was echoed in the director's statement:

Let me say this: the IGA has a different mission and vision from its counterparts in terms of 'standard' associational activities.

With regards to relations with other Caucasian Muslims in Georgia, the IGA claims to have relations with them too. The relations between the IGA and the Muslim Caucasian peoples living in Georgia are religiously-oriented. The Chair commented that:

We had great relations at the time of Mikheil Saakashvili [the third President of Georgia (2004-2013)]. Our mutual relations were at a high level. Most of our activities were attended by the Diaspora Ministry and by the Vice President [of Georgia]. There is a serious number of Muslims there. Some of these are Georgians and some are Avars, Chechens or Azeris. There are also Terekemes, Karapapaks, Kabardians [Muslim peoples of the Caucasus], and so on. Many Turkish tribes have Muslim populations represented there. We were developing good relations with them. We used to do circumcision organisations.

The IGA invited imams from Turkey to Georgia to give religious talks. Those imams and scholars are from the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey. The IGA does not pay them, it only organises the talks. Thus, it is hoped that Georgians learn about Islam in the ‘best’ and ‘right’ way. The association also gives educational and cultural support and helps Muslim students of Georgian descent studying in Turkey. The association provided bursaries to poor Georgian children and helped some of them to come over to Turkey for education. The association includes such Georgian youth in its religious events in Turkey. These youth read the Qur’an and Islamic songs at the association’s events. The association aims to appeal to the religious feelings of those who attend these activities and aims to garner their support. In doing so, it also aims to create a positive image of Muslim Georgians or correct the image others have of Islam. Nonetheless, it is difficult to say whether they have been successful.

In addition to above mentioned activities, an exhibition themed “*Traces of Islam in Georgia*” was also organised in Tbilisi in 2010. This event was organised before I started my fieldwork, but I was provided with relevant materials. Through this exhibition, the association attempted to show that Islam has deep historical roots in Georgia. However, Muslim Georgians today feel as though they are under siege by Christian missionaries and need the help of their Muslim counterparts. It is worth adding that in a Christian-majority country, Muslim activists are more

likely to be described as missionaries. Similarly, to uncover the Ottoman legacy in Georgia, both in Istanbul and Tbilisi, the association held an exhibition entitled “*The Ottoman Georgians*”, which focused on the mosques, public baths, and libraries built by the former Ottoman Empire in different regions of Georgia.¹¹² An international symposium titled “*Islam in Georgia: Past, Present and Future*” was organised by the association for the first time, which offered the chance for the topic to be discussed academically.

Although these efforts strengthened the relationship between the two countries, Muslim Georgians living in Batumi tend to see themselves differently from Georgian Turks living in Turkey because they were born in Georgia, are citizens of Georgia and have different traditions and understanding of the world. Besides this, Turkish Muslims still have a bad image in Batumi. Therefore, Muslim Georgians do not want to be associated with them. As my informants told me, some teaching materials used previously in public schools contained negative images of the Ottomans, Muslims and the Turks. Additionally, most non-Muslim Georgians do not see any difference between the Ottomans, Turks and Muslims. This implies that the discourse that “a Georgian cannot be a Muslim” is still evident amongst non-Muslim Georgians in Georgia (Khalvashi and Batiashvili, 2009).

To sum up, what drives the association to engage with Muslim Georgians in the country of origin is the feeling of responsibility towards them and fulfilling their religious-based demands. However, it is important to be aware of the context in which they operate whilst doing so, which is both politicised and fragile (for more info, see Chapters three and four).

¹¹² Many Georgian Turks get in touch with the association to ask questions about their family trees. They wonder whether they can find their relatives currently living in Georgian villages from which their ancestors came. For example, with the support of the association, a rich Georgian Turkish family did an extensive research about their ancestors. A book then was published by the association related to this research.

6.2.2.2 Maintaining Activities

According to several of my informants, it is important to be careful when determining the way in which the association should help fellow Muslims, ‘ethnic kin’ (*soydaş*) or co-ethnics in the region. For them, the associations should not take an ‘ideological’ approach towards the ancestral homeland that prioritises ethnicity. To them, in the Turkish context, while involvement in ethnicity-based associational activities can be considered ‘ideological’, engagement in religious-based associational activities can be seen as ‘non-ideological’. Thus, the ‘ideology’ refers to not being ‘separatist’ or supporting separatist ideas through ethnicity. Departing from this point, one of the board members of the IGA, during a long conversation which took place in his house, suggested how establishing relations with the ancestral homeland should be approached. He did so by underlining the position of the association:

People have such a longing [to visit their ancestral homeland]. But you should tell this to people very well. You should tell them beautifully, in a sweet way. Because this has been told in ideological ways. There are Caucasian associations in Turkey like this. They have been fitted into rigid ideologies. But ours is not like that. We don't approach it like that. It is a Muslim society there. We are Muslims here. We have forefathers there, we say. We approach it like this; 'let us go and see'.

My research participants told me that, predominantly due to the historical context of the region, the Georgian government is suspicious of any religious activities carried out in the country. Hence, almost all my interviewees considered the transnational religious activities as politically fragile issues. Therefore, in order to be able to operate in the region with minimum difficulties, the IGA gives priority to strengthen the relations between the two countries.

The association represents the concerns of its members in media discussion on matters related to the representation of the ancestral homeland in Turkish media. The association published

joint press releases regarding the invasion of Georgia by Russia (in 2008), the minaret crisis (in 2013), and Russia's recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (in 2008). The last of these press releases was also published in English on the association's website. The association, in line with the foreign policy of Turkey towards the region, supports the territorial integrity of Georgia. This is important for the association to be able to maintain its relationship with the historical homeland and not to be considered by the Turkish state to be as an association that supports 'separatist' ideas (see Chapter 4). For example, the joint press release states that:

Instead of adherence to Russia, South Ossetia must try to find the solution together with the Georgian Government.

The IGA's board members claim that they continue their work based on friendship and fellowship between the two countries. At almost every activity it holds, the association emphasises the vital role it plays in building bridges between Turkey and Georgia. The association organised friendship nights and Georgian days in order to reveal the friendship between the two countries. Senior officials from both countries attended. Through these activities, the association introduced Georgian traditional folk dances and famous Georgian painters and authors to Turkish society. Furthermore, numerous books have been translated from Georgian modern literature into the Turkish language. In this sense, the association places great importance on the development of social, cultural and economic ties between the two countries.¹¹³ For instance, in collaboration with Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, "*Georgian Cultural Days*" in Istanbul and "*Istanbul Cultural Days*" in Tbilisi were organised. The association said that they are in constant dialogue with both the Turkish and Georgian governments to further strengthen their relationship. These mutual relations continue in a way

¹¹³ "Tourism and Trade Committee" from the Autonomous Republic of Adjara made a visit to the association in 2010 to strengthen economic ties between the two countries, especially between the Adjara region and Turkey.

that opens doors for the association. This is significant for the association, without which it would become much harder to reach out to people in Georgia.

The association also appears to have a transnational political function. However, the association highlights the cultural and linguistic – rather than religious- characteristics of Georgian Turks. For example, an honorary doctorate was given to the head of the association by Tbilisi State University in 2013 for the cultural and historical work the association has performed. During the honorary doctorate ceremony, the president expressed that:

We work as an association in showcasing Georgian language, history, art, literature, and culture in Turkey.

The comment from the historian board member of the IGA below explains why the honorary doctorate was awarded to their association:

Our director received an honorary doctorate from the Georgia Tbilisi State University for the two book projects, 'Georgians in the Ottoman Archives' and 'Ottoman Georgians'. This award is actually an award to our association, represented by the director. Of course, when we witness these things our motivation increases, and we keep working.

Similarly, the IGA hosted senior officials from Georgia. These officials include: The Deputy Prime Minister of Georgia; the Deputy Chair of the Georgian Parliament; The State Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues; the key advisor to the former President, Mikheil Saakashvili; the Prime Minister of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara; Georgian MPs; the Georgian ambassador to Turkey; and the Consulate General of Georgia in Istanbul. The Chair sometimes also travelled to the airport for the send-off of high-profile Georgian politicians. Furthermore, the IGA hosts officials visiting Georgian Turkish villages from Georgia and shows them to how Turkish citizens of Georgian origin have maintained their language and culture. In

addition, the association helps these senior officials to contact related institutions and associations in Turkey.

While fulfilling its transnational political function, again it is crucial to avoid engaging in activities that can be considered suspicious in the eyes of the Turkish state. The IGA, for instance, shares information on its website every year related to Georgian “*Independence Day*”¹¹⁴ (on the 21st May). Georgia has celebrated Independence Day annually since 1991. However, it was not celebrated by the association during the course of my fieldwork. Only the Embassy of Georgia in Ankara held a reception and a group of Georgian students at a Turkish University (Ankara) organised an event to celebrate the day. After having a conversation with some board members and looking at the Turkish media coverage about Independence Day, I realised that Georgian Turks are hesitant to devote much attention to the day. This is because it can be perceived as a threat to national unity; members of the associations believed that celebrating the day might lead to a misunderstanding among the Turkish society (see Chapter 4).

Thanks to the various associational activities and strong transnational relations, the IGA is, to a certain extent, a well-known Georgian Turkish association, both in Turkey and Georgia. During my visits in Tbilisi and Batumi, I saw that many of the the Muslim Georgians I had conversations with liked the fact that their relatives are engaging in associational activities. They support them. They invite them to Georgia. They also go to Turkey and help them. They feel interested, and this benefits cultural development and the strengthening of the ties between Turkey and Georgia.

¹¹⁴ This is Georgia's national day (also known as Day of the First Republic). It commemorates the adoption of the Act of Independence on May 26th, 1918.

The board members claim that the association not enhances relations between Turkey and Georgia, but also between Turkey and different ethnic groups living in Georgia (e.g. Avars, Chechens, Azeris). For example, the Chair stated that:

In fact, our association not only organises activities for Georgians who live in Turkey. Alongside this, our association contributes to the development of Turkey's bilateral relations with both Georgia and with communities living in Georgia, whether in terms of friendship, cultural or economic relationships. Accordingly, under the framework of this association we organised numerous activities, both in Turkey and Georgia.

The association has been accepted and now supported by a considerable number of people from both countries, including governments' officials. All this makes it possible for the IGA to run its education-based transnational religious activities. In attempting to explain this phenomenon, one board member who visited Georgia several times, expressed the following and it was a commonly held belief:

Several cultural activities have been done. We got in contact with several Georgian bureaucrats and MPs. They were all really happy. People from across the country and from Georgia supported our work. Students came over to receive education. Those students have now returned [to Georgia]. Some became Muftis, some became Mufti assistants. Our friend who did the Quran translation is working at the Mufti's Office now. He also studied in Turkey. We are at the moment accredited by both governments. We are the only one. For instance, the copies of the Quran we published has the seal of the Turkish Directorate of Religion on the first page, and the seal of Batumi Mufti's Office on the other. What does this mean? This means that 'Our Association' has been accredited from both sides.

Thus, the IGA has a strong relationship with officials in both countries. However, this relationship differs in both cases; in Georgia it is secular, whereas in Turkey it is religious. Nevertheless, the relationships have been affected by a change in government in Georgia. In recent years, the association has found it difficult to hold religious activities in the region. Some of its activities have been suspended by the new Georgian administration. This shows that the context is quite fragile and changeable. The minaret conflict that occurred in a village in Adjara in 2013 might shed further light on this.

6.2.2.3 Minaret Conflict

In the village of Chela, in the Samtskhe-Javaheti region of Georgia, which shares a border with Turkey, local Muslims erected a minaret at the village mosque in 2013. Chela's residents are originally from Adjara, as were my informants. The minaret, which was made of metal and which was 20m high, was constructed and brought to the village from Turkey. The local Christian community considered the construction of the minaret insulting to them and protested against its construction. The minaret was subsequently dismantled by local Georgian authorities. This development led to a tension, in the form of local protests, between local Christians and Muslims communities living in the village.¹¹⁵ It also provoked a negative reaction from both sides from other regions. For some local priests, as mentioned above, this was considered an example of 'Turkish expansion'¹¹⁶ in the region (Nikuradze, 2013; Krikorian, 2016). But later on, the minaret was reassembled by the Georgian local authorities after the involvement of several organisations, including the IGA.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ A Turkish state-run TV channel widely covered the issue (TURKTIME, 2013).

¹¹⁶ Muslims in Adjara speak Georgian, maintain their Georgian customs and think of themselves as Georgian (Sanikidze and Walker, 2004: 8). However, the Georgian Orthodox community frequently labels them as ethnically *Turkish* because they are not Christians (Bukia, 2013; Preston, 2016: 13; Popovaite, 2015). *Ajarians* and *Mohammedan Georgians* are two other terms that were used to define them by non-Muslim Georgians. These identifications come from Ottoman times. During the Soviet Union period, they were considered to be *Georgians* for the first time in the official census of 1936 (Hoch and Kopecek, 2011: 58).

¹¹⁷ See more details at: <http://agenda.ge/en/news/2013/328>, accessed 10 September 2017.



Figure 14: Chela village mosque, with its metal minaret and Orthodox Christians protesters. (Available at: <http://sknews.ge/index.php?newsid=2880>, accessed 10 September 2017).

The association supports efforts that would contribute to state policies towards the development of relations between the two countries. Furthermore, the association has started playing a role in finding solutions to issues that exist between Muslim Georgians in Georgia and the official Georgian authorities. Several of my respondents explained how the IGA played a role, alongside several other civil society organisations, in dispute resolution related to the minaret conflict¹¹⁸.

The associations had an important contribution to the development of friendly relations between Turkey and Georgia. They even contributed to the foreign relations of the two countries directly. For instance, there was a minaret being built there. There was a big quarrel in Georgia. They took down the minaret, but later on, with mutual relations

¹¹⁸ In Muslim countries, minarets are accepted as a symbol of Islam (Göle, 2010). However, minarets can also be seen as a political symbol as well as a religious one. As in the case of Switzerland, the minarets can further be considered as being a “step in the strategy of Islamification” (The Guardian, 2017). This can cause fear among non-Muslim societies. With regard to the Swiss minaret crisis, Göle (2010) notes “the debate on the minarets in particular, and the visibility of Islam in general, generates transnational dynamics and assemblages of disparate elements.”

and the initiatives of our association, we had a good outcome and the minaret was returned. Therefore, associations are needed (Fieldnotes).

After the minaret crisis, the association issued a joint press release, which was made available on its website. It states that:

Recently some negative developments taking place in Georgia deeply influenced Georgian Turks and our association. While even little things that happened to our Muslim Georgian brothers would hurt us a lot emotionally, we cannot accept any verbal attacks and insults on holy places. We declare that all should show common sense and respect towards our Muslim brothers' beliefs, places of worship, and other holy places (Press statement, 2013).

The 'negative developments' mentioned in the press release also refers to other activities carried out by the Georgian government in the region. For instance, I took the photo below during my visit to a village in Batumi. This is the entrance of the village. The local Georgian, who received his religious education in Turkey and who speaks Turkish fluently, accompanied me during the visit and told me that the majority residents of the village are Muslim. However, the government put this huge cross here and does the same to other Muslim villages in the region. To him, this is part of the Georgian Orthodox Church's expansion policy in the region.



Figure 15: A huge cross built by the government at the entrance of a majority-Muslim village in Kobuleti region.

This is part of a trend led by the Georgian Orthodox Church¹¹⁹ in Adjara, especially in upper Adjara, which is majority Muslim (Pelkmans, 2002).¹²⁰ New Churches are being constructed and the Georgian Orthodox Church has an impact on education institutions in the region. Furthermore, in public schools, “the instruction of religion’s role in Georgian history is focused almost exclusively on Christianity, largely as a result of the Georgian Orthodox Church’s consultative prerogatives in the field of public education” (Liles, 2012: 21). Besides, there has

¹¹⁹ There has been an inseparable connection between the Georgian Orthodox Church, the State and the Georgian nation (Simons, 2015). The current Constitution of Georgia “acknowledges the exclusive role of [Georgian] Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church in the history of the Nation and asserts its sovereignty from the State” (Concordat of 2002). The Church is the most respected and influential institution in Georgia that has played a significant role in the Georgian public sphere (Funke, 2014).

¹²⁰ With regard to Christianity in Georgia, the Autonomous Republic of Adjara played a special role due to its unique history (Pelkmans, 2006: 91). Although the population of Adjara is (or was) predominantly Muslim, the place is believed to be the heart of Georgian Christianity, or where Christianity first took hold. Adjara stayed under Ottoman control for centuries. During this time, most of the inhabitants adopted Islam (Coene, 2010: 162). The Ottoman period in Adjara is described by some scholars and writers in Georgia as an ‘unfortunate’ period or ‘three centuries of Turkish oppression’ by the Church (Pelkmans, 2006: 93). In this sense, due to Adjara’s historical importance, the Church attempts to Christianise Adjara and the inhabitants were (or are) increasingly converted to Orthodox Christianity (Pelkmans, 2006: 91-94). Board members of the association are well aware of the religious assimilation of the Muslim Georgians. This is an important motivation driving members to get touch with their Muslim counterparts living in Georgia.

been a “growing preponderance among Adjarians to convert to Christianity” (Liles, 2012: 21). The photo below was also taken during my visit to Batumi. According to the Georgian local who accompanied me, the building used to be a mosque during the Soviet times. It is worth reminding that many churches were also used as libraries, museums and so forth during the Soviet era.



Figure 16: Kobuleti museum, which used to serve as a mosque, was opened in 2012.

Muslim Georgians in Georgia, especially in the Batumi Region of Adjara, are not happy with the Georgian Orthodox Church’s expansionary policy, which aims to convert them to Christianity. The IGA’s board members are aware of the ‘religious transformation policy’ of the Church in the region. Because they come from the same ethnic background, the board members feel more responsibility for them in terms of improving their religious knowledge and thus helping them to protect their Muslim identity. This is also in line with the Turkish policy of ‘Outside Turks’, which has slowly shifted from a focus on ethnicity to one underpinned by a more cultural and religious stance (see Chapter 4, Section 4.6). That is why

the association also aims to form a close relationship with both Turkish and Georgian officials. These activities refer to practices which are based on sustainable contact between the homeland and ancestral homeland (Saksela-Bergholm, 2009).

Thus, the association plays a role as an important transnational link between the Turkish homeland and Georgia, the country of origin. Accordingly, firstly, the association sometimes partly sponsors visits to and from Georgia. Secondly, the association provides links between elected officials and government bureaucrats in the homeland and ancestral homeland.¹²¹ Thirdly, the association is involved in facilitating and managing the flow of news and information and in the preparation of cultural and religious activities of importance to the country of origin and vice versa. Finally, the association is engaged in activities designed to increase the level of information and public awareness related to the country of origin, thus becoming a resource for the historical homeland in Turkey.

In conclusion, through the above mentioned activities, the IGA contributes to the relationships between the two countries. In this way, the association finds ground upon which to carry out its religious-based activities. It is worth adding that the IGA has relations with institutions in the ancestral homeland, such as local, political and charity organisations. The association works with them when holding international activities in Georgia. Although the association is expanding the scope of its activities, some members of the association preferred to have privileged contacts, limited to Turkey. They believed that the issues and concerns confronting the association are best tackled at the national level, mainly because they maintain relationships with 'privileged contacts' in Turkey and have access to the country of origin through these

¹²¹ In 2010, the Republic of Turkey Ministry of EU Affairs held a civil society dialogue meeting on "Turkey's EU Accession Process" with the representatives from civil society, local administrations, business world and universities. The IGA was the only Georgian Turkish association invited to the meeting evidence of its strong relationships with the governmental organisations, the 'high' profile of its board members and their position in the government.

contacts. This is a means to diminish the chances of them being accused of having ‘suspicious’ links to ancestral homeland organisations. Both associations’ Chairs and some board members have accused a few other Georgian Turkish associations of working closely with The Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues (see Chapter 2). Nevertheless, the IGA and the BGCA have strong relations with one another. The main determinant in shaping this relationship is the religious standing of the IGA. This was echoed in a statement made by the Chair of the BGCA:

The association we are most in contact with and get on with is the IGA. Because they are conservative.

Similarly, the Chair of the BGCA claimed that “99% of our grassroots are conservative.” This shows that the two associations have a brotherhood based on religion. However, the most important factor binding them together is their common ancestry. Now I would like to move on to the following section, where I focus on the BGCA’s translocal activities, which are established via kinship.

6.3. Kinship-based Trans-local Relations

Although the BGCA aims to build transnational connections between Turkey and the region of origin, it primarily focuses on life in Turkey. More specifically, the BGCA places a particular emphasis on policies and associational activities that are generally directed towards Georgian Turks residing around the association’s premises. Hence, it is mainly local links to local Georgian Turks and Caucasian groups that are developed, despite that the BGCA’s support for transnational involvement, with an emphasis on the fact that Georgian Turks are linked to their ancestral homeland, i.e. Batumi and its surroundings, rather than the whole of Georgia. This section explores how the BGCA connects its members to their specific place of origin, thus enforcing a sense of belonging amongst members.

The BGCA defines Georgian Turks as part of the cultural mosaic and heritage of Anatolia. The BGCA activities make Georgian Turks living in the district ‘visible’ and recognised as an “essential part” (*asli unsur* in Turkish) of the local community. Therefore, the association helps members and followers to maintain their distinctive cultural practices and traditions, which emanate from the practices and cultures of both the region of origin and Turkey. In doing so, the association aims at reviving community spirit and protecting cultural artefacts. Through the activities and personal efforts of the Chair, attachment to the region is reinforced. In attempting to explain this phenomenon, the youngest executive board member of the BGCA, who was in his thirties, expressed the following:

There are activities. Thanks to this, anyone who says ‘I am Georgian’ gets to learn where he came from, who his ancestors are, and learn about his culture. What is the extra contribution of this association to this? Its contribution is to the acknowledgment of our past and our forefathers.

One of the aims of the board members is to link their respective community to the region of origin rather than the country of origin. Thus, the BGCA has a region-oriented approach in a transnational context. The BCGA does things differently to the IGA; it does not carry out regular transnational activities aimed at those who are living in the country of origin, except a few joint humanitarian aid activities with other Georgian Turkish associations.¹²² The BGCA is involved in facilitating and managing the flow of news and information to members and followers, most notably through social media. The association regularly shares news related to the region through social media and on its website. Moreover, with regard to the negative

¹²² For example, following the aftermath of the severe and deadly flood in Tbilisi (2015), the association, together with other Georgian Turkish associations, sent humanitarian aid. It is important to note that this is not specific to Georgian Turkish associations. As I observed, many ethnic associations try to play a role in humanitarian activities through governmental or non-governmental organisations. This is a way to show their loyalty to the country in which they live.

Turkish media coverage related to Batumi, a joint press statement was released. A few active board members, especially the chair, play a key role in this process. The association's limited translocal activities, most notably the Chair's personal efforts, help to create a form of attachment to the place of origin via kinship.

The association claims to be a resource offering information on the historical homeland for non-Georgian Turks. Nevertheless, some of those non-Georgian Turks who regularly spend time in the associations' tea garden are not aware of Batumi or Georgia. Some even thought that Batumi was a city in Turkey. Contrary to the IGA, the BGCA does not organise activities directed at providing religious help to Muslims in the region. There are several reasons for this; one of the main reasons is that the association is facing financial difficulties. Another is the background of the members, who have had little prior associational experience. Yet another is the lack of strong relations with politicians from the two countries. Therefore, the BGCA does not currently engage at the transnational political level, nor does it aim to do so in the future. It limits its activities to the district and its environs. However, despite that, in particular the Chair has taken every opportunity to create a link between the members and the region of origin.

As mentioned before, Turkey and Georgia lifted visa requirements for their nationals in 2009. Following that, in 2011, a passport-free regime was introduced, which meant that nationals would be able to visit each other's country using only their national ID cards. Currently, the two countries offer a visa exemption for touristic purposes to each other's citizens (for up to 90 days for Georgian nationals and of up to one year for Turkish citizens). This encouraged them to visit their ancestral lands, to explore their roots and thus become more aware of their origin. For example, one of the board members of the BGCA, who had never visited Batumi, said that:

Now, the lifting of passport requirements is a beautiful development for us. Why? Because we will be able to travel to and from our homeland, Batumi, like we go to Ankara and Erzurum. This is something to be proud of.

As I observed, there has been an increase in awareness amongst association members about seeking out their roots, most notably after the visa and passport free regime was adopted. They are understanding and remembering their roots as a reflection of their identity and would like to trace the places from which their ancestors originated. When they described the essential elements of their sense of belonging to the ancestral homeland, they predominantly emphasise visiting Batumi and its surroundings.

When you go to Georgia, I would like you to convey our heartfelt greetings to all of our fellow townsmen there.

A few weeks before my trip to Batumi I was asked to convey the above message to the people there. The use of the word ‘fellow townsmen’ (*hemşehri* in Turkish) to refer to people living in Batumi, which indicates that most members feel that they belong to the place from which their ancestors came through kinship. They do not want to forget their past because the past as a source of identity has value for them. The Vice-chair of the BGCA states this as follows:

This is our home, our country. We can talk about Georgia with the intention of not forgetting our roots.

One of the board members of the BGCA, who was in his forties, shared his reflection on visiting Batumi while sitting in the garden of the association. He highlighted the ‘sameness’ between ‘them’ and ‘Muslim Georgians’ in Batumi.

Batumi is like any place in our country [Turkey]. Entering and leaving [Batumi] is very easy and comfortable. I went to Batumi, travelled the city and the villages. I did not feel

estranged at all. I could understand most of what was being said. Our lifestyles are the same.

Another board member from the BGCA, who travelled to Batumi twice, emotionally explained how he felt a sense of closeness to people he met whilst there. Moreover, he did not see any difference between those people and his relatives in Turkey.

It was like meeting my relatives here, I sensed the warm sincerity of people there. I stayed about a week. It was beautiful. As I said, there were times when they said 'don't go, stay with us'. For this reason, it was a beautiful feeling, with a sense of pride. One wish is to go there again and again.

Although the association does not seem to have a transnational character like the IGA does, recently it has begun to practice some form of transnationalism. In the words of the Chair:

With regard to making the Sister City Project between Batumi and the District [where the association is located], we took steps in this direction. We are ready to establish close relationship between the peoples of the two cities. We cannot choose where we come from, but we have free will to choose our state, our flag, and our religion. As people coming from Batumi, we chose Islam as our religion, the Turkish flag as our flag, and the Republic of Turkey as our state (During the Regular General Assembly, 2013).

As the above passage shows that it is important for the association to create a link between the cities, rather than countries. In so doing, they also reaffirm their loyalty to Turkey once again. As I was told, there were a number of disagreements when the association was first founded. There were people asking, “*Are you going to be divisive, too? What is this Batumi, which religion do you belong to?*” People were doubtful of the association. Thus, the founders of the association have had ‘the worry of being misunderstood’ (see Chapter 4). The association thus

strategically emphasises two things to dispel such misunderstandings, namely religion and loyalty. On the one hand, “*We migrated for our religion*”, becomes emphasised. For this reason, in the activities, religious discourse plays an important role. On the other hand, they display pictures of their veteran grandfathers and photos of their nieces martyred during military operations in the southeast of Turkey. In almost all activities, messages of “*We gave our lives for this country*” and “*We are the most loyal members of this society*” are emphasised. They add, saying, “*There is an ethnic problem in the Southeast of Turkey. Conversely, we were loyal to this land both today and during Ottoman times.*” In doing so, the association wishes to overcome the problem of raising attention and being perceived as being a threat to the state, whilst also staying in touch with the region of origin.

The statutes of the associations have been changed several times. For example, in changes adopted in 2010, the BGCA allowed for a branch to be opened in a foreign country.¹²³ This change was made specifically so that they could open a branch in Batumi. The Chair told me that:

By making this alteration in our statute we could now say that our association became an international organisation. Hopefully, we would soon open a partner association in Batumi. Our association was now more institutional than ever before.

In opening a partner association in Batumi, the association followed a similar pattern to interact with the ancestral homeland. Nevertheless, there is a difference between the two associations. The BGCA pursues trans-local connections based on kinship i.e. connecting the present place with the specific place of origin. However, the IGA performs transnational relations based on religion, although religion for them is a type of transnational kinship (i.e. brotherhood). As I discussed in the previous chapter, kinship based on solidarity plays a crucial role amongst the

¹²³ However, this is not specific to the BGCA. With the new Associations Law (2004), associations are permitted to open representative offices in other countries.

executive and ordinary members of the BGCA and it is kinship that links them to the place of origin. This type of connection serves to create an identity and sense of belonging in the community.

Over the course of the fieldwork, the BGCA started to directly engage with the ancestral homeland, most notably through the personal efforts of the Chair. For the first time, he visited Batumi, the specific place of origin. He made two trips to the region. The first trip took place in the summer of 2014 and the second in the summer of 2016. After each trip, he shared many photos about life in Batumi on the association's Facebook page. After the trip, the BGCA decided to organise a cultural tour to Batumi. Later, after I finished my fieldwork, an announcement was made on the association's Facebook page about the tour. After the required number of participants, the tour can be organised (however, at the time of writing, the tour has not yet been organised). During his first trip, the chair also visited "The World Alliance of Georgian Muslims" in Batumi; I met with its president in person and the short conversation we had confirmed the organisation's good relationships with both associations. During this trip, the Chair also visited the Turkish Consul General in Batumi. This is important in terms of the representation of the association and how it would be perceived in the eyes of the state.

The BGCA's involvement in trans-local relations can be illustrated using other examples, which, of course, only reflect the engagement of the association in transnational politics to a certain extent. Firstly, a reception was held at the Sheraton Hotel in Istanbul on the occasion of the National Day of Georgia. Representatives of Diplomatic Missions, business circles and non-governmental organisations of Turkey, as well as the Minister of Education, the Minister of Culture and Tourism and the 9th President of Turkey attended the event. On behalf of the association, the Chair also attended the reception. Secondly, in 2014, the Chair attended a meeting held at a Georgian Turkish association centre located in Istanbul. The President of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, the Consul of Georgia in Istanbul and the Chairs of several

other Georgian Turkish associations also attended. Photos related to the both events were shared on the association's Facebook page. These two examples also show that the chair plays a key role in shaping the association's relations with the ancestral homeland.

It is not just board members of the BGCA who want to know about their ancestral homeland; Georgians from Georgia are also interested in getting in touch with their co-ethnic peers. For example, in 2014, a group of Georgian academics - mainly professors - from Tbilisi State University (in Georgia) came to Turkey to collect linguistic materials as part of an ongoing research project that explored Georgian Turks' cultural traditions. The group visited the association, together with a few board members from other Georgian Turkish associations. Traditional food was served and a Georgian Turk played Georgian bagpipe (*tulum* in Turkish). One of the guests said: *"We have the same blood, and have two separate lives. But these lives are very similar."* The group expressed their pleasure at the activities and invited members of the association to Georgia. They said, *"The Georgians in Turkey are very hospitable, and we will come more often"*. Similarly, in 2016, another group of academics from Batumi State University (in Batumi, Georgia) visited Turkey as part of a similar research project. The group again made a visit to the association. Secondly, a few journalists from a Georgian TV channel came to the association in order to conduct an interview with board members to obtain information about Turkish citizens of Georgian origin. Later, the association proudly shared details and photos and videos related to these visits on its website and Facebook page. It is important to note that as the IGA is a well-known association in Georgia. Both the research group and journalists visited the IGA first and, on the advice of the IGA, they also visited the BGCA.

6.4 Conclusion

The chapter has shown that both associations' activities with respect to Georgia create an attachment to the ancestral homeland and shape members' sense of belonging. However, the fieldwork data reveals an important difference between the BGCA and IGA in terms of how they connect their members to the ancestral homeland. There are two different types of relations being established by the associations: the IGA fosters transnational relations based on religion; whereas the BGCA fosters trans-local relations based on kinship. Both serve to create different forms of connections between the members of the associations and the ancestral homeland. Thus, there are two types of identities that have been constructed by the associations. While the IGA fosters a transnational Georgian Turkish identity, the BGCA creates a translocal Georgian Turkish identity.

The chapter has shown that, contrary to some studies on transnationalism and religion (Portes, 2015; Levitt, 2004; Vertovec, 2001), the IGA connects its members to the country of origin through transnational religious activities. The IGA exports a Turkish form of Islam to the country of origin, which helps to construct a sense of transnational belonging among its members. This points to the importance of religion in shaping associations' members identity (Meer, 2014: 40). The IGA's members participate in transnational associational activities with the expectation of helping their Muslim co-ethnics in Georgia and developing their knowledge about Islam. In doing so, the association's transnational religious practices play an 'educational role' in helping co-ethnics and other Caucasian Muslims in the region. Meanwhile, the association's members believe they are practising their religion by being involved in these transnational activities. The IGA seems to have similar aims to other ethnic associations in other countries (Çağlar, 2006: 1; Orozco and Garcia-Zanello, 2009; 57; Sardinha, 2009; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2015). What makes the IGA case noteworthy, however, is that the association engages with transnational religious flows from the homeland to the ancestral

homeland, rather than from the country of origin to the destination country.

Unlike the IGA, the BGCA connects its members to the region of origin rather than the country of origin. What is more, the association does not offer any 'educational' religious help to Muslim Georgians in the region. Instead, it is involved in facilitating and managing the flow of news and information from Batumi and its surroundings to its members and followers, most notably through its use of social media. In doing so, the association not only increases the amount of information to which they are exposed, but also creates awareness amongst them with regards to the place of origin. Thus, the BGCA has a region-oriented approach in the cross-border context. The association's limited trans-local activities, most notably the Chair's personal efforts, contribute to the creation – via kinship – of attachment to the specific place of origin, thus creating a translocal Georgian Turkish identity (Greiner and Sakdapolrak, 2013; Mandaville, 2002).

The following chapter focuses on how associations' members express different dimensions of their identities and belonging towards Turkey and Georgia by exploring the relationships between the constructed identities.

CHAPTER 7: UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF GEORGIAN TURKISH IDENTITY

7.1 Introduction

People have multiple identities, which are ‘activated’ at different times and in different contexts in particular situations (Burke and Stets, 2009: 1). “A range of cultural values or habits (language, folklore, music, food, religion, [...] etc.) holds different significance and centrality for individual members of [an ethnic group] in their identification as group members” (Tannenbaum, 2009: 978). These values or habits help them to reinforce their distinctiveness in “ethnic, religious or cultural communities, even when sharing an extended cultural context with the majority” (Tannenbaum, 2009: 978). Departing from this point, in this chapter I use different identity markers to explain how multiple identities are used, by whom and in which context. In other words, the chapter attempts to reveal how members of both associations express their varied identities and ways of belonging towards Turkey and the ancestral home by exploring the relationships between different dimensions of their identities. I argue that developments taking place at the national and the international level (discussed in Chapter 4), the associations’ different understandings of culture (discussed in Chapter 5) and transnational and translocal relations established by the associations (discussed in Chapter 6) are all critical to understanding different dimensions of the research participants’ identities.

As both associations are in contact with other Georgian Turkish associations located in different Turkish cities, I also use the data I collected from these associations. The chapter also looks at how associations’ members strategically use their multiple identities to cope with challenges while interacting with different contexts. In doing so, the chapter addresses the question of what it means to be a Georgian Turk. The chapter begins with a brief description

of the physical space of both associations, which reflects the multiplicity of the association members' identities. The chapter then discusses the terms used by Georgian Turks to identify themselves. The rest of the chapter focuses on how associations provide a space where members reflect upon their identity and belonging using different cultural practices. I argue that associations' members emphasise different aspects of their identities and belonging inside and outside of the associations.

7.2 Associational Space as a Reflection of Identity

A brief description of the physical space of two associations can provide a glimpse into the multiple identities of the informants. The BGCA occupies a beautiful location. The association has four rooms: The Chair's room, the room where card games can be played, the cafeteria, where they sell beverages and refreshments to guests and customers, and the garden. In the card games room, there was a large landscape photo of Batumi on the wall, which depicts the natural beauty of the city. The Turkish national flag and the logo of the association are also displayed on the top of the photo. This room was also used for board meetings as well as to host visitors from local authorities, other associations and Georgia, and social events. The cafeteria was located in the middle of the centre. There was another Turkish flag on the tea room's wall. The dimensions of this flag were larger. There was a big TV in the corner of the room. Generally, news and music channels are watched. There were also a few tables in this room. Everyday there were two or three national newspapers and the district's monthly magazine available to read. In the final stage of my fieldwork, this room was redecorated with new chairs and tables.

As the Chair mentioned, it is important to be able to represent the cultural atmosphere of the Caucasus. The Chair's room was specifically designed for this purpose and had several cultural artefacts from the region. There were maize bread cooking vessels made of clay or stone

(*Pileki*), regional clothes and some other cultural artefacts specific to the region in the room. Furthermore, the walls were decorated with posters of “Ottoman Georgians” who held positions of varying importance over many centuries of the former Ottoman Empire. Each poster contained a photo and brief biographical information (both in Turkish and Georgian languages) of the relevant person. The posters were prepared by the IGA and presented as a gift to the BGCA. There were several books written both in Turkish and the Georgian languages in the room. In addition, the photo of the Chair’s grandfather, who was martyred during the Battle of Gallipoli, was also on the wall of the room. Just next to the photo, there was also a photo of Atatürk (founder of the modern Turkish state) surrounded by Turkish flags.¹²⁴ The Chair also displayed his grandfather’s War of Independence Medal in the room. There was also a relatively small photo of a bread stall in 20th century Tbilisi hung on the wall.¹²⁵ Much of this décor was deliberately and consciously designed.

When you enter the cultural centre, it is important that you feel an atmosphere of Caucasian culture. Therefore, we designed our cultural centre to create that atmosphere. There are a lot of materials unique to the region in our cultural centre.

The above is from a conversation with the Chair of the BGCA. Similarly, several other board members of the association told me that they feel at home when they come to the centre. In this sense, the association provides a space where associations’ members feel a sense of closeness (Çağlar, 2006). However, it is important to note that the Chair uses the word ‘Caucasian’ instead of Georgian or Batumi. This is because of the meaning attributed to the word ‘Caucasus’ in Turkey. The word has no ethnic connotation and is used to express cultural

¹²⁴ Although there is no specific law that obliges the display of Atatürk’s photo and the Turkish flag at association centres, this has been accepted as a norm by almost all associations.

¹²⁵ The photo was taken by famous Georgian photographer Dimitri Ermakov (1846-1916) who took part in the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878). It is available at: <http://agenda.ge/news/21701/eng>, accessed 25 January 2018).

connotations related to the region.¹²⁶ Moreover, as different Caucasian¹²⁷ groups, such as Laz, live in the district, the association appears to be seen as an organisation open to all. However, it is difficult to say whether the association is visited often by other Caucasian groups.

Observational data suggests that members of the BGCA want to reflect upon the Georgian aspect of their identity using cultural artefacts specific to the region. It was claimed that the centre was designed in this way. However, it seems that ‘the worry of being misunderstood’ had an influence upon the design of the building (see Chapter 4). The Chair’s room was generally closed off, particularly during the daytime. Furthermore, while a small number of people (guests of the Chair, board and ordinary members) spent their time in this room, this was very small, which is important when one considers that approximately one hundred people spent their time in the other sections of the centre on a daily basis. As mentioned above, however, only a photo related to the natural beauty of their ancestral homeland and two Turkish national flags were available in these more public sections. This is to say, board members of the BGCA explicitly expressed a sense of belonging to the homeland, rather than the ancestral homeland, in order to overcome the issue of being perceived as a threat to the national unity. Thus, they seem to reduce ancestral home to a sense of pastoral nostalgia and good food and yet exalting the new home as the focus of national supra-belonging. In this sense, the association’s premises illustrate the dual identity (Turkish-Georgian) of its members.

As mentioned previously, the IGA has a relatively large library of works relating to the history, culture, religion, and language of Georgia. It collects newly published books, journals and magazines, especially those related to Muslim communities in Georgia and Georgian Turks,

¹²⁶ Recall that the name of the association founded by Georgian Turks in 1977 in Bursa was the ‘Caucasian Culture Association’.

¹²⁷ The word ‘Caucasian’ has no "racial" meaning, as in ‘white’ (the literal meaning of the word ‘Caucasian’ in Western Europe and North America). In the Turkish and the greater Caucasus context, there are no perceived ‘races’, or at least in the legal/formal structure of these societies.

from Georgian universities and institutions. Although there are materials in Turkish, English and Russian, the majority are in Georgian. The library is also open to researchers and the public, upon request. Those visiting the association who can read Georgian also spend time looking at these materials. There were also cultural artefacts specific to the ancestral homeland in the library.

The IGA shared the building with a foundation established by people who emigrated from Artvin, in central Istanbul. Although its members are not Georgian Turks, what brings them together is predominantly their historical relationship, as well as their cultural and geographical closeness. Besides the library, the association had three other rooms. The first was used to welcome guests, members and friends. There was a large table located in the middle of this room. A number of times, I saw members and guests sitting around the table talking about Georgian-related topics while drinking tea or coffee. The room was a more public space and was shared with the foundation. The second room belonged to the Chair. It was well-decorated and had high quality, locked office furniture, which housed the official documents of the association. The atmosphere here was more official than cultural. The third room was used mainly by members of the IGA with an interest in history as a study place, where they could examine documents published by the association. Two walls of the room were covered with bookshelves, with hundreds of materials related to Turkey, Georgia, and the Caucasus. The room had several cultural artefacts that reflected their cultural heritage. Unlike in the BGCA, a small Georgian flag can also be seen on the desk. The association's library stimulates association members' curiosity and provides them with the opportunity to learn about their ancestral past. From this perspective, the association's library represents the Georgian aspect of their identity.

7.3 ‘Like Us’

The word “Chveneburi (*Çvneburı* in Turkish written) has an important place amongst the Georgian Turks. It means “like us”. The term has emerged as a result of their migration and religious beliefs (Putkaradze, 1998a). Georgian Turks generally use this term to differentiate themselves from non-Muslim Georgians on the basis of religious affiliation and to differentiate themselves from the Turkish community on the basis of ethnic affiliation (Putkaradze, 1998a; Çiloğlu, 1993; Üstünyer, 2010). The term is still common among the Georgian Turks in Turkey and the participants in this study, especially those from older generations. This is a legacy from previous generations of Georgian Turks.

Ancestors of the board members fled from Georgia to Turkey in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They were, like all other Caucasian immigrants, categorised as *Muhajir* (migrant) by Ottoman officials at that time (Özel, 2010; Karpas, 1985; Çiloğlu, 1993). This term has still been widely used by Turkish society to refer to Georgian Turks and other Caucasian groups, as well as various other groups from the Balkans.¹²⁸ Alongside this term, Georgian Turks are frequently referred to by broader Turkish society as Adjarian (*Acaralı*), Batumite (*Batumlu*, those who are from Batumi) and Caucasian (*Kafkasyalı*). These terms refer to the name of their place of origin and are commonly used not just by Turkish nationalists, but by a broad a range of people (Erkan, 1996; Zeyrek, 1999; Demirel, 2009). The terms Adjarian and Batumi also became widespread among Georgian Turks and have (and continue to be) used in their associations’ title. Georgian Turks themselves, however, have usually preferred or tended to use the term *Chveneburi* (like us/one of ours) in their daily interactions with their co-ethnic peers.

¹²⁸ Balkan muhajirs, widely known as "macir" or Turks from the Balkans (*Balkan Türkleri*), comes from the same Ottoman Turkish word for migrant. It seems that Turkish society refers to Balkan groups as muhajir even more frequently than they do the Caucasian groups.

Along with the term *Chveneburi*, however, my participants have also used various other terms when referring to themselves, namely Georgian (*Gürcü*), Turk (*Türk*) Georgian Turk (*Türkiyeli Gürcü*), *Chveneburi/Çveneburi* (like us, one of ours), Muslim Georgian (*Müslüman Gürcü*), migrant (*Muhajir*), Ottoman Turk (*Osmanlı Türkü*), Ottoman Georgians (*Osmanlı Gürcüleri*), Batumite (*Batumlu*) and Batumi Turk (*Batum Türkü*). I also came across the term *Kartveli*,¹²⁹ which has Christian connotations; the research participants were careful not to use this term when identifying themselves. At this point, a number of questions arise: How do associations' members talk about themselves to other Turks? How do they talk about themselves to other Georgians? How are they defined in Turkish public space? The table below shows the insider terms research participants used to identify themselves, as opposed to the terms used by Turkish society to define association members.

TERMS	INSIDER TERMS		OUTSIDER TERMS
	when talking to non-Muslim Georgians	when talking to Turks	used by Turks
Chveneburi	✓	✓	
Muhajir		✓	✓
Georgian		✓	✓
Muslim Georgian	✓		✓
Georgian Turk	✓		
Ottoman Georgian	✓	✓	
Ottoman Turk	✓		
Batumi Turk		✓	
Batumite (those who are from Batumi)			✓

¹²⁹ In their native language, Georgians in Georgia refer to themselves as the *Kartveli*. For the Georgian Turks, it is a term used by Orthodox Georgians.

Adjarian			✓
Caucasian			✓
Turk	✓		✓
Kartveli			

Figure 17: How associations' members define themselves and how they are defined in Turkish public space.

When looking at the historical names and titles of associations established by Georgian Turks in Turkey, the effect of above mentioned factors could be observed. The majority of Georgian Turkish associations changed their names in this way. The figure below shows the names that Georgian Turks have used when founding their associations over the years in Turkey. The figure makes an important point in showing that way identity changes over time amongst Georgian Turks in Turkey.

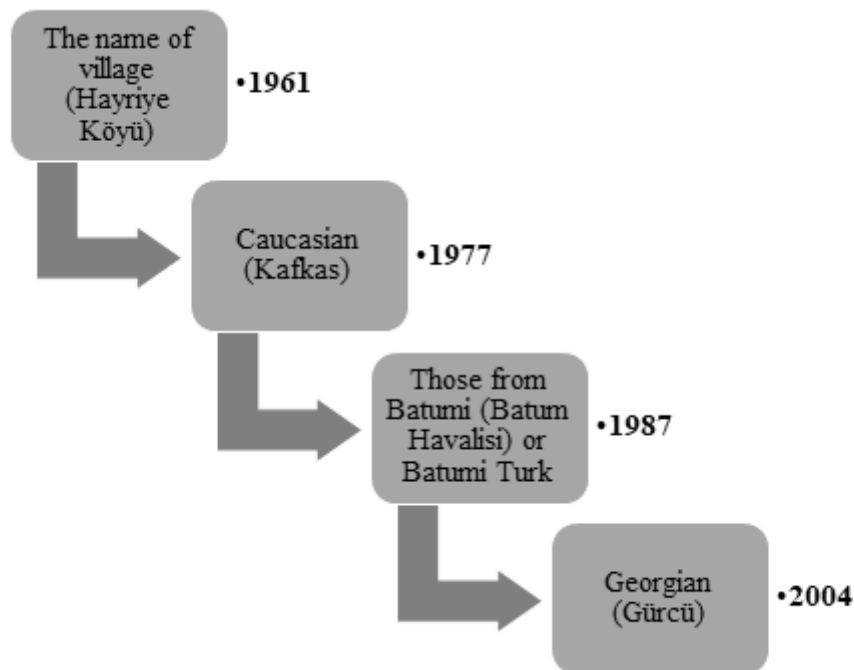


Figure 18: The names/titles of Georgian Turkish associations over time in Turkey.

In a lengthy conversation over tea in the garden of the BGCA, the Vice-chair (who was elected for the third consecutive term) spoke of his experience with the word Chveneburi. During his childhood and youth, although his family was living in Istanbul, he lived with his Georgian Turk grandfather in the village where he was born. He stayed with his grandfather in the village until he finished his primary and secondary education. The Vice-chair had a good job at an international company and visited his village every summer. The Vice-chair, when expressing his longing to visit the village, told me that:

We use phrases like Chveneburi for Georgians living in Turkey. This is what we observed in our grandparents. When our elderly come to the cultural centre, they generally use the term Chveneburi [to address each other].

During my time at both associations' centres and throughout all the events that I attended, association members and participants used different Georgian expressions, including Chveneburi, to address one another. For example, an ex-board member of the BGCA, who was serving tea at the association cafeteria at that time, explained that:

When I identify myself, I first say I am from the district [where the association is located] and then I say I am Georgian. In this sense, compared to the past, we feel more comfortable identifying ourselves as Georgian. When we see each other we commonly say: What's up Chveneburi? [Çveneburi ne haber? In Turkish] Or, how are you? [‘Ravay kh'art?’in Georgian, kh pronounced as a guttural ‘h’].

As the ex-board member states, nowadays association members are on the whole more comfortable expressing the Georgian dimension of their identity. This leads them to use some Georgian words or expressions during their encounters with other Georgian Turks. In this sense, the association, to a certain extent, serves as a space where origin-based identity can be expressed. Furthermore, as the above passage suggests, it is important to note that members of

both associations place a strong emphasis on place. They also identify themselves with the place where they live or from which they migrated. This helps them identify themselves without facing any potential difficulties. This is because, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, whilst identification with culture and religion and the place of origin is politically acceptable, identification with ethnicity always attracts suspicion in Turkey.

The excerpts below provide background to the political and cultural context in which identities are developed. The first excerpt emphasises the difficulties of expressing identity in Turkish society. This also shows the importance of the association as a place where identities can be expressed more safely.

I shy away from saying I am Georgian in my class. There is a student in our class who is a migrant from Germany, and he can say 'I am German' comfortably. Germany is a strong country; therefore, it is not a problem to say [who you are]. But it's not like that in the Georgian case. If I say 'I am Georgian', I fear that I might be asked, 'are you Turkish?' I shared these thoughts with only a few of my friends.

I met with Yusuf, a secondary school student and son of one of the IGA board members, at the beginning of my fieldwork. I had long conversations with Yusuf at different times. The above quotation is an excerpt from one of these conversations. Yusuf attended almost every event with his father. Yusuf, like his father, was also known for being able to recite Georgian poetry by heart and was renowned amongst the Georgian community both in Turkey and in Batumi. After listening to Yusuf's story, I realised that it was highly likely that those who are ethnic Georgian did not want to openly express their ethnic identity. This could have been for several reasons, one of which, as Yusuf stated, was the worry of being treated like as a foreigner or of 'being misunderstood' (see Chapter 4).

In a similar vein, one of the few female members of the IGA told me about her “lost Georgian identity”. She was in her 40s and working in one of the departments of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and was responsible for organising cultural events. She generally came to the association with her son. She was also on the board of another association. She proudly told me that her son could speak Russian and would later study the Georgian language. She added that *“I really wanted my son to learn Georgian and its culture in order for him not to lose his Georgian identity. This is why we are visiting the association together.”* She did not want her son to have the same experience as her when it came to maintaining her Georgian identity. She told me that:

Georgianness, as with Georgian culture and identity, is a very ancient civilisation. It was lost in the city, there are many people like me who live their Georgian identity here and there on their own. I can emphasise again the importance of the association regarding the exposition of these people’s sense of being lost [in terms of identity] and in maintain their identity.

The fear described by Yusuf and the consciousness of Georgian identity described by the members of the IGA underline the point that expressing Georgian identity is not an obstacle-free activity in the Turkish context. However, although there are difficulties in the way, the informants are willing to express who they are and to where they belong much more openly than in the past. To them, the associations provide a platform and the tools for them to be more aware of their origin and express the Georgian dimension of their identity more explicitly.

The Turkish Republic is a rich nation. We come from a rich and rooted culture. Let the Georgian live as Georgian, let the Albanian live as Albanian, Abkhazian live as Abkhazian, but we have only one country, one flag. That’s a different thing.

Board members of both associations differentiate themselves from Turkish society through their cultural traditions and express a willingness to maintain them. The above quotation is from a conversation with a board member of the IGA who was a Georgian language teacher. It is representative of many such conversations I had. The one element all of these conversations had in common was that they often expressed a desire to ‘live as a Georgian’ by expressing their culture. Nevertheless, an ethnicity-based recognition would not easily find a place in the Turkish context (Chapter 4). Therefore, although both associations’ members see themselves as integrated into Turkish society; they want to maintain their ‘rich and rooted’ culture and do not want to be considered as ‘separatist’ when carrying out ethnicity-related cultural activities, either by the dominant Turkish society and the state. Otherwise, they would feel insecure, anxious and would be seen as a threat to national unity.

Religion is significant in shaping the research participants’ identity and feelings of belonging. They identify with religion above all else (see Chapter 6). While their religious affiliation approximates them to the homeland (Turkey), at the same time, it estranges them from the ancestral homeland (Georgia). Because they share the same religion, members of the both associations feel a strong sense of belonging to Turkey (i.e. a religious proximity). In some sense, in Turkey, ‘being Muslim’ and ‘being Turkish’ are inseparable¹³⁰; several of my respondents emphasised that they are Turkish and Muslim, therefore matching the Turkish ethno-religious norm. In this way, the participants adopt multiple identities that incorporate and articulate three main features: Turkishness, Muslimness, and Georgianness.

In the course of a conversation with an ex-board member of the BGCA, who is also the elderly brother of the Chair and now an ordinary member, he willingly expressed his ‘multiple

¹³⁰ It is a political discourse, but not something which describes all Turks or all Muslims in Turkey.

identities'. Throughout the conversation, he several times emphasised the importance that Islam and being a citizen of Turkey had on his sense of belonging. He said that:

I am Turkish as much as I am Georgian. I am first and foremost Muslim, and a citizen of this country. However, in the past, our people did not have the courage to express the fact that they were Georgian in public spaces and in their workplaces. Why? This is because of a worry of being misunderstood.

In a similar vein, the youngest board member of the BGCA, who was in his thirties, expressed his Muslim, Turkish and Georgian identity, which is in part opposite to the nationalistic ideology of “one language, one nation, one state, and one flag”¹³¹ in Turkey (see more Coşkun et al., 2010).

As I said, our faith is one, we are under one flag. The only [difference is that] we are Georgians who came from Georgia at one time.

Georgian Turks hesitate to express the Georgian part of their identity. As I observed, what they feel *-self-* and what they say *-person-* are different. There is a distinction between ‘self’ and ‘person’ in anthropology (see for example Besnier 1991, 1995 and Street 1993); while my ‘self’ is who I feel myself to be, emotionally and ‘affectively’, ‘person’ is the identity I project to others in my socially defined roles (Joseph, 2009: 9). The youngest board member of BGCA is a good example of this. He was working for the Ruling Party election campaign when I interviewed him. I conducted the interview at his office. Several people from his own family either were on the board or were members of the association. He was also responsible for the youth branch of the association. He stated that:

¹³¹ This has increasingly become a political slogan of at least two parties but nevertheless contested.

We are Georgians, we are, praise to God, Muslims, and then Turks. This is something important that needs to be known.

However, when he was asked in public spaces about his ethnic background, he provided a different answer:

When they ask me where I am from, I generally respond saying ‘we are from Giresun’ [a city in the northeast of Turkey]. When we are asked in society where we came from to arrive at Giresun, we say we came from Georgia, and later on I say we are Ottoman Turks who used to live under Ottoman rule when Georgia was Ottoman soil. Otherwise we don’t also say ‘I am Georgian’; we don’t impose this on them. We express it by saying ‘we are Turks who come from Georgia’.

On the one hand, Pelkmans (2006) claims that a Georgian Turkish identity is perceived as existing on the margins of two major categories: Georgianness and Muslimhood. On the other hand, according to Georgia’s national narrative, two things, among others, are essential constituents of Georgian identity: the Georgian language and the Orthodox Christian religion (Khalvashi and Batiashvili, 2009: 3-4). From this point of view, dominant political discourse and public imaginaries in Georgia on what ideally constitutes ‘Georgianness’ articulates that “A Georgian cannot be Muslim” (Khalvashi and Batiashvili, 2009: 3-4). Against this narrative, numerous Georgian Turks have developed a narrative of identity that “*We are the Turks who were settled in the region by the Ottoman officials in the 16th and 17th centuries*” (Fieldnotes). The term ‘Ottoman Turks’ has likely emerged as a result of this narrative.

However, the historian board member of IGA suggested another narrative about the emergence of the term Ottoman Turk. According to him, the use of the term Ottoman Turk is particularly common among Georgian Turks in Bursa (a city in northwest Turkey). A large number of immigrants coming from the Balkans also live in this city. The majority of those coming are

Turks and they settled there during the former Ottoman Empire, many centuries ago. Therefore, it is highly possible that Georgian Turks living in this city have been affected by those immigrants when it comes to identifying themselves as being Ottoman Turks. Nevertheless, this identification to some extent also helped them to distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups and dominant discourses regarding ethnic groups in the Turkish context (see Chapter 3 and 4).¹³² As a result, it appears that associations' members project different identities because of a highly politicised context, rather than a lack of knowledge regarding their origin.

7.4 Association as a New Type of 'Village'

Ancestral language is a constituent element of ethnic identity (see for example Carli et al., 2010). Moreover, language, along with other characteristics, such as folklore, music, religion, transnational links and food is an explicit marker of ethnic and cultural identity (Butcher, 2008: 371). As I discussed in Chapter 4, the village served as a shelter to earlier generations of Georgian Turks to protect their cultural practices, including ancestral language. The associations provide a new type of 'village' for my participants, wherein they can engage with cultural practices and thus reflect upon their multiple identities through ancestral language, food and music.

7.4.1 Ancestral Language

Ancestral language is not only an expression of identity for the participants but also a means of expressing feelings of attachment to the shared past heritage of their community. Ancestral language has been used symbolically by informants to express their belonging. Furthermore, the Georgian language spoken by them, which includes many Turkish words, is the most obvious differentiating factor between themselves and Turks, with whom they otherwise share

¹³² For example, there was (and maybe still is) a belief that "Circassians were merely the most noble branch of the Turks" (Kaya, 2014: 56).

a remarkable amount in common. In this section, I focus on the use of language as a way of expressing identity and belonging, which refers to the Georgian dimension of the research participants' identity.

While almost all of my participants spoke about their ancestral language, they could not read or write it. This is a common phenomenon among ethnic groups in Turkey. This is mainly because of state policies regarding teaching ethnic languages at public and private schools (see Chapter 4). For example, language continues to be taught orally, but not in written form, which requires state endorsement. There were also a few research participants who could only speak a little, but who could understand it much more competently. However, a small number of informants, largely board members of the IGA, were competent at speaking, writing and reading the Georgian language, being able for example to give a public or academic presentation and writing academic texts.¹³³ Yet these were the exception. In contrast, none of the board members of the BGCA were competent enough to read and write the Georgian language. The difference between the IGA members and the BGCA members when it comes to their ability to learn Georgian in writing and reading indicates a class difference between the two associations.

Although some board members of the IGA were fluent in reading, writing and speaking in their ancestral language, they had difficulties understanding guests from Georgia, especially those from Tbilisi. The Georgian language teacher board member of the IGA was a good example; he had a Turkish mother and Georgian father who was from a Georgian Turkish village and who received his primary education there. He said that:

¹³³ The IGA's board members, as mentioned before, consists of highly educated people. As they told me, they have learned their ancestral language in available courses both in Turkey and Georgia, as well as through their personal efforts.

The spoken language at home was Turkish. My father only spoke Georgian with my uncles. My family and I moved to Istanbul when I was twenty-five. I could speak only a few words of Georgian at that time. In 2005, I became a student [laughing] at the IGA, our association, learning the Georgian language. With the support of my Georgian teacher, I progressed a lot and learnt much Georgian in a short time. After the course finished, I did not give up and I kept on learning this beautiful language. Over the last few years, I have been teaching the Georgian language at the association. By the way, I would like to thank my Georgian teacher once again.

He travelled to Georgia often. He was invited to speak on TV and give talks at different events concerning Georgian Turks. He was also known both in Turkey and Georgia for reciting Georgian poems. He told me that:

I have difficulties in understanding the Georgian language as it is spoken in Tbilisi. When I am in Batumi, it is easier to understand the Batumi dialect of Georgian, which includes many Turkish words. But again, I want to say that there is a considerable difference between the Georgian spoken by Georgian Turks and the Georgian spoken by Georgians in Georgia. They can hardly understand each other.

It is important to note that my informants did not express any negative opinion regarding the incorporation of Turkish words into their ancestral language. In the following interview extract, one of the founding members of the IGA highlights the importance of the ancestral tongue as an identity marker:

Some of the Georgians in Turkey have completely accepted that they are Turks. People who believe that they are citizens and they are no different. And there are others who say 'I am Georgian', they are the ones, who like, me didn't forget their language.

This implies that participants in this study tend to use their ancestral tongue as a firm and self-evident ethnic identity marker to reflect their Georgian Turkish identity. To him, the main difference between those Turkish citizens of Georgian origin who identify themselves as Turks and those who identify themselves as Georgian is their ability to speak Georgian. This means that being able to speak the ancestral tongue is a crucial factor in terms of expressing ethnic identity. One could expect that, at least amongst the board members of both associations, if you identify yourself as Georgian, you should, to a certain extent, be able to speak the language. Although those who can speak Georgian were proud of and comfortable expressing their Georgian identity when interacting with their co-ethnic peers, they emphasised the names of the cities from which they came when getting in touch with local authorities and communities. This ‘switch’ was evident in the BGCA in particular. For example, when the Chair was addressing an audience during events open to public, he emphasised the names of places in Turkey from which they came. This is a reflection of their sense of what they want to project and how they want to be perceived, spurred by ‘the worry of being misunderstood’ (see Chapter 4).

Normally it is a beautiful thing, to come from a different culture, to mention Georgian in a new environment, to speak a language. When you enter that environment, hearing even the guests say ‘Gamarjoba’, hello in Georgian, is something extraordinary. It can make people happy.

Apart from the board members, there were only a few Georgian Turks who came to the association on a daily basis. What’s more, the board members did not visit the association regularly. Thus, it was rare to hear Georgian words amongst those visiting the association. The Chair was laughing when he commented that:

Those coming to the association speak with each other in Turkish. Of course, sometimes there is Georgian spoken as well. For instance, when they come here, I make jokes, when they enter here, I say 'Gamarjoba' [hello in Georgian].

In a similar way, an ex-board member's comments portrayed the life at the association in terms of the lack of knowledge of the ancestral language. It is worth adding that the songs he was singing were mainly about their ancestors' migration and life in Georgia.

For a year I have been running the cafeteria of the association. Sometimes I sing Georgian songs at the cafeteria. But most do not understand what I sing. They ask, what is this?

However, particularly during the long summer nights, when board members were gathered at the association, nearly a quarter of their conversations were in the ancestral tongue. In this sense, the association was the place where the ancestral language could be practised. The shared language, an aspect of cultural identity, creates intimacy amongst members. This further fosters the insider connections that bind them together (Herzfeld, 1997: 3). Thus, the association provides members with a space of *cultural intimacy*¹³⁴, where they feel comfortable and where a sense of closeness is fostered. The quote below points to that:

When we get together we sometimes speak Georgian. I for instance speak Georgian when I am with our Chair [I witnessed this a few times]. We have friends who don't know/aren't Georgian on the board but they never take it as an insult. Many people come to the association and comfortably use this language here (Georgian), they can

¹³⁴ Herzfeld defines cultural intimacy as "the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality" (1997: 3). However, he later argues that "cultural intimacy is not the simple idea of acquaintance with a culture, although the term has sometimes been used in that generic sense. To the contrary, it is that part of a cultural identity that insiders do not want outsiders to get to know yet that those same insiders recognise as providing them with a comfort zone of guiltily non- normative carryings-on" (Herzfeld, 2013: 491). Nevertheless, my participants (insiders) want aspects of their cultural identity to be known by the dominant Turkish society (outsiders), although 'the worry of being misunderstood' restrains their ability to do so to a certain extent.

speak it. For instance, my spouse is Turkish and her mother is Georgian, but my wife knows no Georgian. My mother, when she comes to the association, doesn't speak Turkish with me, she always speaks Georgian [she generally speaks Turkish with him at home or in other places].

The IGA had no cafeteria. During the day, there was only one or two people at the association centre. The association held its meetings at the centre. During these meetings, several guests and ordinary members also came to the association to attend meetings. There were Georgian greetings heard from those attending. There were also people who talked in the ancestral language with each other. Although generally there was a limited number of people coming to the association, I became accustomed to hearing long conversations in the ancestral tongue. Many had a good command of the language.

One of the few female members of the IGA, who often came to the association with her son and attended language courses at the association, commented on the importance of the language in the expression of identity and belonging, as well as to the association itself.

After coming to this association, obviously the vein of Georgianness in my inner self [emotionally] rose and boiled up some more. The association opened language courses here last year. I myself also joined these courses as a student. Although, due to my workload at that time, I was unable to attend regularly and finish the course, the Georgian words I heard from my grandmother, aunts and mum during my childhood came to life in my memory again. This led me to get in touch with my past as well as learn the [Georgian] alphabet.

It is worth adding that the BGCA has run two language courses. There was sufficient interest on of the first course, which was completed to the end. However, the second was not completed,

because of poor attendance. The Chair, by highlighting the vital importance of language to being Georgian, told me that:

We want to start a course again. To be a Georgian association and not know the language, this is not how it should be.

Almost all of my informants stated that the ancestral language must be taught to the younger generations in order to preserve cultural identity. About ten Georgian Turkish associations located in different cities were running language courses. The common issue for all of them at that time was the low levels of attendance on the courses. This was also the case at the national level. The majority of my respondents, however, were not happy about that. Using the Internet and social media, they were encouraging Turkish citizens of Georgian origin to learn the ancestral language. The elderly brother of BGCA's Chair, who was in his sixties, expressed his sadness about the lack of interest among Georgian Turks to learn their ancestral tongue by emphasising the importance of the Georgian language among other world languages. He regretfully stated that:

Now it is like this my dear friend; we speak [the language]. Generally, when we are with our families, we have no problem speaking, we speak it. But the coming generation doesn't have the skills. But I want it to be known. 2000 years in history, it is a language that has been spoken since the earliest times of history. Many languages do not have an alphabet, but ours has one. It has not changed at all. It is still written as it was written at that time. Now is this a language, is this a culture to be left to its fate? Is this possible?

Although most members of both associations were willingly encouraging people to learn the ancestral language, it seems, some were not able to speak it with their own families. The Chair of the BGCA was a good example of this. He told me that:

My wife is Georgian. However, we don't talk Georgian at home. For this reason, our children don't know Georgian.

In a similar vein, one of the board members of IGA, who was also a teacher, described the situation in his own family:

My children don't speak [Georgian]; my daughter, my son, they don't know it. My daughter understands it a little bit. On this point, God willing, in the coming times I hope they learn, too.

It seems that moving from a village to a big city played an important role in the linguistic assimilation to Turkish that took place amongst the families of my informants. On the one hand, most of my informants told me that their children do not know their ancestral language. On the other hand, some of my interviewees said that they did not know Turkish when they were in the early years of primary school. As the below quotation explained, because they do not know Turkish language well, some of my informants faced difficulties growing up. One of the board members of the IGA, who spent his childhood in his village, provided an example from his own life.

For instance, when I went to primary school, I didn't know Turkish. I only knew a few words. I can even retell a memory. In Amasya, [a province of Turkey] my mum asked me to buy soap [sabun in Turkish]. But we call it saboni [in Georgian]. I went to the market and said, 'give me a saboni'. The guy gave me an empty look; he did not understand what I said. Finally, a villager said, 'he wants soap'. Then I brought it home. I have such a memory.

The Vice-chair of the BGCA, by giving an example from his trip to Batumi, explained how knowing the ancestral tongue helped him to create a sense of closeness to his ancestral homeland.

I went to Batumi, I travelled in the city and the villages. I never felt estranged. I could understand most of what they said.

However, it is possible to argue that there has been a contradiction with respect to the ancestral language: almost all of my informants accept the importance of ancestral language, but most of them cannot speak it. This is especially true among their children.¹³⁵

Most of my participants consider the ancestral language to be a source of happiness for them. Learning the ancestral language, being able to speak it and even hearing one word of it is enough to make them feel happy. It reminds them of their past lives and heritage, of their relatives, and of their roots. In this way, the Georgian language facilitates the promotion of a sense of belonging—both to the group and to the culture of their ethnic origins—among members of the both associations. This means that the ancestral tongue connects them to a shared history and place of origin (or village of origin), thus it helps to foster a common identity. In this sense, the associations become a platform through which this sense of belong can be produced and reinforced. The youngest board member of the BGCA told me about his encounter with a Georgian:

I'll give an example. I heard someone speak Georgian in Eminönü [district of Istanbul]. He tried to tell something to the other person, but he couldn't understand. When I tried to help, he was happy, he was extremely happy. He said outright Gamarjabo Chveneburi [meaning you are one of us]. This is a beautiful thing.

¹³⁵ There are four Departments of Georgian Language and Literature (henceforth DGLL) at four different universities in Turkey. However, they are not good enough at providing quality education in Georgian Language and Literature due to a lack of academic staff. However, in 2016, the total quota allocated by the ÖSYM (Measuring, Selection and Placement Centre, *Ölçme, Seçme ve Yerleştirme Merkezi* in Turkish) to the DGLL was 89 students, only 56 students were placed into the DGLL (ÖSYM, 2016). It is worth adding that interestingly, I did not come across any criticism or positive judgements from my informants about these Turkish state-led institutions. Students do not choose to read Georgian language and literature because of difficulties finding a job after they graduate. Thus, students graduating from the department generally go to Georgia to do a Masters degree or PhD in order to increase their chances of getting a job. I met with such a student in Georgia. After finishing her undergraduate degree in Turkey, she went Georgia to do a Masters degree. When I met with her, she was doing her PhD. Later, I learned that she also started working as an interpreter at the court of justice.

As the above extract demonstrates, the participants are seen as part of the group through their ancestral language. In other words, being able to speak the ancestral language creates a sense of closeness between the members. I also observed this during the events I attended. I heard the words 'Gamarjoba' (hello), 'Chveneburi' (like us) and *Ravay kh'art* (how are you) a lot. For some guests, these events were the only place where they could say and hear a few words from their ancestral language and thus feel comfortable express the Georgian dimension of their identity. The guests also expressed their contentment when attending events. Indeed, their happiness and joy could be seen in their eyes and smiles.

One of the board members of the IGA who was also teaching the Georgian language at the association centre, explained how his journey of learning the ancestral language took him to other places. He had learned much about ancestral culture on this journey, which made him feel a stronger sense of attachment to the ancestral culture. He said:

Of course, after I learned this language I loved it. I knew it very little. Because I didn't use to speak it at the village much and I only knew four or five words. It turns out that Georgian culture is a very profound culture. We didn't know it like this. For this reason, learning the language took me to other places.

Using an analogy from my own experience in the UK and an example from his own life, one of the board members of the BGCA, whose nephew was also on the board of the association, stated that:

You for instance went to a place you don't know. You went to England. You have knowledge of the language, but you don't know anyone. When there's someone you know, England becomes yours. I know this from my military service [askerlik in Turkish], and my time at the Qur'an course I attended. It was different when there was someone around you from your own ethnicity.

The above extract suggests that in order to feel a sense of belonging to ‘where’ they live they need also to have people around them from their own ethnic group. The place in which they live will then become theirs. In this sense, both associations provide a space where members can meet such people and practice their ancestral language. Furthermore, learning the ancestral tongue provides an opportunity for them to learn more about their shared cultural background, thus enforcing a sense of attachment to the place of origin and the ethnic group. In the following section, I explain how both associations provide a space for and organise activities that help members reflect on their Georgian identity.

7.4.2 Food and Music

Several of my informants described the lives they previously had in their villages and how they tried to transfer some aspects of this way of life to the city. This is important for them in terms of representing the Georgian dimension of their identity. It was summer of 2013 and I was sitting in the garden of a Georgian Turkish association located in Bursa that I had learnt about through the IGA. There was a restaurant in the garden that resembled a canteen and which was run by the son of the Chair, a man in his thirties. I introduced myself and gave information about the reason for visit. He became very happy and said “I will help you as much as I can”. He said “my father is not here and comes here a few times a week, but no worries, I will take you to his office”, he added. He ordered something to drink. Then we had a long conversation, which lasted a number of hours. He had attended both the Georgian language course and Georgian folklore group run by the association. He told me that “*I first identify myself Turkish, and then Georgian. This does not mean I deny my Georgianness*”. After that, he stated that:

As I was told by my parents, the lifestyle in the village was very similar to the one in Georgia. Generally, the houses in the village were inside the fields, just like in Georgia. The things done were also very similar. Chadi, maize bread, is still very common. Those

who didn't eat the Georgian dish 'Phallobya' were not considered Georgian. My father, because I haven't eaten this dish, tells me that I am not a Georgian.

As above passage suggests, Muslim Georgian immigrants maintained some aspects of their cultural life in these new places. Furthermore, they still retain some of their traditional forms of livelihood. They continue to cook the same foods, which is an essential part of their culture. Similarly, traditional foods from Georgian cuisine were served during almost all activities organised by both associations. In this sense, food becomes an important element of identity expression in terms of connecting to the past and to their ancestral homeland (Keeler, 2007: 166-185). For instance, the BGCA organised a cultural night in April 2014 to bring together Georgian Turks and prominent figures living in the district. Over the course of the event, dishes unique to Georgia were served as part of the meal: maize bread (*chadi*), a dish made of cabbage (*phallobya*), a dessert made of grape syrup (*siron*), yoghurt and dates from Batumi were presented to the guests. Similarly, during another event organised by the IGA, Chadi bread, Phallobya and yoghurt were served to the guests, all of which have an important place for Georgian Turks. This sometimes leads to a competition, rivalry or cooperation between ethnic groups.¹³⁶ However, I did not observe any such rivalry or competition amongst my informants vis-a-vis other groups originating from the Caucasus.

¹³⁶ For example, there has been an unending quarrel between the Turkish, Kurdish, Armenians, and Greeks over certain dishes. This concerned to which nation the food belongs. In his PhD thesis, Kavak (2017) provides some reflections of the competitive attempts by the Kurdish community in London to be recognised as Kurds and maintain their culture in a migratory context.



Figure 19: Traditional foods from Georgian cuisine served during the events.

The serving of traditional Georgian dishes during the events creates an attachment to the country of origin. The youngest board member of the BGCA smiled and explained how this excited him.

To say [and know] that there are some people out there from our culture, and to be in such a community is a very nice thing. As I said, cooking things like maize bread and

Phallobya, things that belong to our culture, is an additional excitement. This is a very beautiful thing for me.

Serving these traditional foods to guests and showing ‘Georgian Turkish hospitality’ to them is a significant component of their ancestral-origin identity. Food has played an important role in social connectedness. Thus, associational activities offer a space where this feeling of connectedness is developed within the group. My respondents repeatedly and proudly spoke about their Georgian hospitality, both in the past and present. This is also how they want to represent themselves to the outside. One of my informants, who was in his late thirties, stated that:

Migrants from Batum are hospitable and affectionate. They show respect to everyone. Most houses have a guest room. Every household offers an iftar [fast-breaking] dinner [to guests] by taking turns [during Ramadan]. Guests coming to the mosque are invited to the houses. Most coffee houses do not have board and card games. Generally, people talk about old times, daily matters and politics [in the coffee houses].

Music is another way through which identity and a sense of belonging can be expressed. Polyphonic Georgian music and Georgian folk dances are famous in Turkey. The research participants are proud of their rich and historic musical traditions. Therefore, music is inseparable part of associational activities. Nevertheless, the religious identity of association members has affected the style and content of their folk dances. The Chair of a Georgian Turkish association located in Kocaeli Province (in the north-west of Anatolia) explained the Georgian Turks’ religious understanding of folk dances. He performed Georgian folk dances at the events. He stated that:

The harmonica and the accordion are still being played at the wedding ceremonies, despite having become quite rare otherwise. We have a dance called ‘Kolsama’.

Normally a man and a woman dance together. But because those coming from Batumi are conservative, two men dance together. In Upper Adjara too, two men dance together. Besides this dance, 'horon' is also performed. There is also another dance specific to women, called 'Nardaninoy'.

The BGCA, in particular, emphasised Georgian music and folk dances during its events. For example, the association generally invited Georgian folk dance groups to perform during their events and there was Georgian music being played in the background while the guests were taking their seats. In line with their religious identity, members of the dance group were wearing relatively 'traditional' dance costumes. However, I did not come across the *Kolsama* dance during the events. Two youngsters with Caucasian folkloric dresses were taking their places at the entrances of the facilities to welcome those coming. Some of the guests were having their photos taken with the two youngsters. As I mentioned in Chapter 5, although ultimately unsuccessful - due to a lack of interest and poor attendance - the association attempted to create a traditional folk dance group.



Figure 20: Traditional Georgian folk dances during an event organised by the BGCA (Source: The BGCA's website, accessed 20 April 2017).

7.5 Conclusion

As I discussed in Chapter 6, both associations connect their members to the country of origin. While the IGA has transnational relations based on religion, the BGCA has trans-local relations based on kinship. The associations provide a space where association members can practise the specific and differing dimensions of their Georgian identity. They reflect this aspect of their identity through their ancestral language, food, and music, which are ‘essential’ traits that my participants believe constitute their identity. In this respect, both associations were mainly a channel for self-expression and collective identification. Moreover, both associations served as spaces where, if only for a small amount of time, members can speak their ancestral language and no longer be a ‘minority’, but part of a majority in a safe shared place. In this sense, the associations provide members with a space for cultural intimacy, where they feel comfortable,

and a sense of belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). They emphasise the Turkish side of their identity, which is particularly constructed on the basis of their ‘Muslimness’ outside the associations. This shows that their loyalty to the state and ‘the worry of being misunderstood’ have influenced their decision over what identity they would like to project to the Turkish society and in what context.

Respondents tended to use language to assert their belonging to their ancestral identity. While the majority of members of both associations do not know the ancestral language, they know a few words. However, this is enough to signify their ‘Georgianness’. If someone has a degree of literacy, it’s because of their educational background, experience in the village, where the ancestral language was used, or their use of it at home. In particular, young urban Georgian Turks are not generally interested in learning their ancestral tongue. The reason why, as we have already seen, is because of its ‘uselessness’ and low value on the ‘language market’. They only learn a few common words they need in their daily conversations. However, a sense of belonging does not necessarily correlate only with linguistic ability (Antonsich, 2010; 648). Although some of my informants could speak only a few words of the ancestral language, this is enough to express feelings of attachment to their ancestral background. A study by Butcher (2008), which focuses on the use of language as an explicit marker of belonging and identity amongst second-generation migrant youths in western Sydney, reached a similar conclusion. At other times, participants acknowledged a sense of belonging to Turkey, a place where they have been living for a long time, by relating to the current lifestyle and by speaking Turkish in other contexts outside the associations, such as workplace, shops and schools.

My data suggest that, in general, while my informants feel ethnically Georgian, they identify themselves as Turkish citizens. Although they accept Georgian as their ethnic origin, they do not consider themselves to be part of the Georgian nation, mostly because of their religious distinctiveness. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the heterogeneity of the Georgians in

Turkey. Depending on context and circumstance, they have used different terms to identify themselves. At the same time, various terms have been used by the state, researchers, journalists, politicians and others to identify them. These terms provide insights into their understanding of the nature of their identity and belonging to both the homeland and ancestral homeland.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to qualitatively explore the role of Georgian Turkish associations in the process of identity construction as they emerge and develop over time amongst Turkish citizens of Georgian descent in Turkey. After the 1990s, many Georgian Turkish associations were established in different cities. Alongside changing relationships between Turkey and Georgia, a large number of Georgian Turks began to establish links with their ancestral homeland. As a consequence, an ethnic resurgence occurred amongst Georgian Turks.

The main research question that guided this study was therefore:

- What is the role of Georgian Turkish associations in the formation of identity amongst their members, with respect to their homeland and ancestral homeland?

The four empirical chapters explored the activities of two Georgian Turkish associations. These chapters revealed how the wider political cultural context influenced the nature of the associations and identity construction of associations' members. The chapters further showed that different associations create different types of identities. The thesis approached the notion of the role of associations from a constructivist perspective and focused solely on active Georgian Turkish associations that have strong ties to both the ancestral homeland and homeland. An inductive, ethnographic approach was taken, relying heavily on participant observation and in-depth interviews as the main methods of data collection. The basis for the research methods was to show associational activities embedded in aspects of everyday life and which shaped relations, and which were shaped by local, national and transnational relations.

8.1 Key Findings and Contributions of The Research

In this section, I summarise my main empirical findings and discuss the contributions of the research, as well as the insights I gained through the empirical study.

This is the first ethnographic study of Georgian Turkish associations in Turkey. It shows that these associations provide a space where Georgian Turkish identity and sense of belonging to the country of origin is formed (Antonsich, 2010; Guibernau, 2013; Yuval-Davis, 2006). The target ethnic group of my study was Georgian Turks; research into this group is limited in comparison to other Caucasian groups in Turkey. Although some researchers conducted studies in relation to Georgian Turks, they focused on those who did not experience forced displacement (Toumarkine, 2001). Furthermore, these studies were conducted before the establishment of an independent Georgia (Magnarella, 1976, 1979). As a result, my findings showed that the fourth (or later) generation descendants of people who fled from their country of origin began to get in contact with their ancestral homeland, even after a century has passed. This led to the establishment of new associations amongst fourth (or later) generation immigrants.

In addition to paving the way for future research, this thesis has made a number of significant contributions to the literature on ethnic associations, identity formation and religious transnationalism, even in spite of its limitations. My investigation of these concepts through a novel case study increased the originality of my study. Although they have been applied to different cases (Levitt, 2004; Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; Çağlar, 2006; Lampert, 2013; Boccagni and Pilati, 2015; Vermeulen and Keskiner, 2017), the concepts and their meaning in the case of Georgian Turkish associations have allowed us to understand them more thoroughly. Therefore, I hope that the findings of my study can attract other researchers and policy makers to apply these concepts in similar ways.

Firstly, we saw that wider political and cultural factors external to the associations shape significantly the nature of the associations themselves and the way they influence identity formation processes (Kaya, 2004; Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005; Sardinha, 2009; Portes, 2015; Iskander, 2015; Guarnizo, 2017). As a result of forcible Cold War politics, association members grew up with little or no direct contact with their ancestral homeland. Although their ancestors settled in Turkey permanently and had no intention of returning, their emotional connection with their ancestral homeland remained strong, although it was not formally acknowledged in public. The memories concerning the place of origin and forced displacement have been transmitted through generations to maintain ancestral cultural identities. It further emotionally kept them connected to the place of origin during the long years of isolation. Their ancestors' religious-driven migration led them also to worry about those who remained behind and whether they were able to practice their faith under the Soviet regime. The independence of Georgia and the opening of the border with Turkey were crucial developments that brought opportunities for Georgian Turks to get in contact with their Muslim co-ethnic peers and which created and reinforced a more formal and open sense of belonging towards the ancestral homeland (Sardinha, 2009; Vertovec, 2001; Fernandez-Kelly, 2015).

After 2000, a better atmosphere emerged in Turkey for ethnic groups' associational activities, driven by the democratisation process that accompanied EU accession negotiations. The legal changes made as part of the EU accession process played an important role in expanding the freedoms that associations had by reducing the scope of state intervention. This situation encouraged them to emphasise more openly the ethnic dimensions of their identity by opening new associations, changing their names and organising more ethnicity-oriented activities.

Although there are different factors affecting the association building process, the receiving state appeared to be the most influential actor. Associations' members are always quick to remind to others of their strong sense of loyalty to the Turkish state, which has existed since

Ottoman times, and they consider themselves to be loyal citizens. Thus, they do not want to engage with activities or practices associated with left wing politics, the Kurdish people or Ahmet Özkan, which are deemed as ‘separatist’, ‘divisive’ in nature. This is because involvement in these types of activities may damage their standing in the eyes of the state. Therefore, the associations are careful and modify the way they present themselves and the activities they carry out so that they cannot possibly be seen as a threat or as ‘separatists’. This points to a dual type of Georgian Turkish identity; one is based on ‘home’ and one on the ‘ancestral home’. This finding is similar to Ali et al. (2017: 15), who argue that immigrants wish to become part of the host society, but at the same time they want to maintain the culture of their country of origin, leading to a kind of a dual identity.

The rise of Kurdish nationalist sentiments encouraged the resurgence of other ethnic groups such as Circassians; its effects, however, in terms of the ethnic resurgence of the Georgian Turks, appears to be more negative. This shows that restricting access to equal political and cultural rights in Turkey not only influences non-Muslims, Kurds, and Alevis but also Caucasian groups (Kaya, 2014: 52) including Georgian Turks. Moreover, Ahmet Özkan’s suspicious death and the possible links to the deep-state shows how the shadow of the state shapes identity and the association formation of Georgian Turks. Whether the murder was the work of the state or not, it is indicative of the fact that the state is embedded in the consciousness of Georgian Turks and seen as suspicious of ethnic groups.

Not only are associations shaped by bigger external factors, they themselves also influence the outside world. In fact, immigrants influence the receiving society’s religious landscape (Vertovec, 2001; Levitt, 2004; Wanner, 2007; Meintel and Hernandez, 2013). Besides, they also make a transnational religious contribution to the country of origin through associations rather than only, for example, church missionaries (Frigerio, 2013; Levitt, 2004). In doing so, the study has made a contribution to the concept of transnationalism by showing that religion

also transcends borders, from the host country to the country of origin, through immigrant associations. In doing so, the IGA's transnational religious practices play an 'educational role' and help co-ethnics and other Caucasian Muslims in the region. Therefore, Islam is important in the associations' members' identity construction. The board members of both associations have strong religious motivations. They identify themselves as more religious compared to other Caucasian ethnic groups, such as the Circassians. Therefore, religion creates a way of connecting; this type of kinship is central in shaping the IGA's transnational activities, thus reinforcing a sense of belonging to the country of origin.

Particularly after the visa and passport-free regimes were established between the two countries, Georgian Turkish associations became important players. Through their international connections, they established good relations with officials from both Turkey and Georgia. This helped the IGA to organise its religiously-oriented educational activities, free from some of the constraints they had been subject to in the past. As a result, by transferring religious knowledge to Muslim Georgians in Georgia, the IGA not only helped them to learn and practise their religion, but also to challenge dominant discourses about Islam in the ancestral homeland. This implies that feelings of group obligation introduce a moral dimension to transnational Georgian Turkish identity.

Secondly, associations are not just shaped by the external political and cultural context. The thesis has shown that the two associations differ from one another in a number of significant ways. Identity is also influenced by personal educational levels, socio-economic background, kinship, and understandings of cultural activities. Thus, identity is also shaped by the associations (Rex et al., 1987; Vermeulen, 2005; Strunk, 2014; Fauser, 2014); the association you belong to influences your identity. Put differently, different associations foster different dimensions of identity amongst the same ethnic groups.

The IGA connects its members to the country of origin through educational activities, which

represent 'high culture' and which became a glue that fostered non-kinship solidarity. The activities appear to be political in nature. However, the BGCA's associational activities represent 'low culture' and serve to reinforce kinship bonds amongst the association members. The activities seem to be carried out in a non-political manner. These different forms of being a 'Georgian Turk' are being shaped significantly by the associations' different respective socio-economic and educational backgrounds, kinship and resources available to them as well as by the local, national and international contexts in which they operate.

Both associations' activities relating to the country of origin create an attachment to the ancestral homeland, thus shape associations members' feelings of belonging. However, the fieldwork data reveals that both associations serve to create different forms of connections with their ancestral home (Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2009). While the IGA fosters trans-national relations based on religion, the BGCA fosters trans-local relations based on kinship. In the case of the BGCA, translocal positionality appears to be more important in terms of identity (Anthias, 2002). Those who are involved in these interactions feel a sense of belonging towards the place from which their ancestors came. Therefore, different Georgian Turkish associations strengthen different aspects of their members' identity, thus creating different forms of identities.

A sense of belonging to the group does not necessarily correlate with linguistic ability. Members of both associations use the ancestral language to establish the Georgian aspect of their identity, even though the majority do not know the ancestral language. If someone does know it, it is because of their educational background, having past experience in the village and or speaking the ancestral language at home. Most only learn a few common words that they use in their daily conversations. Although some of associations' members could speak only a few words of ancestral language, they still express feelings of attachment to their ancestral origin (Butcher, 2008).

Multiple identifications have allowed the research participants to be flexible in dealing with different issues, ethnic groups and the state. The informants strategically emphasise different dimensions of their identities, depending on the context (Gobbers, 2016; Itzigsohn, 2017). This is in line with other empirical studies on identity formation (see Hall, 1995; Burdsey, 2004, 2007). In other words, the interactions with co-ethnic peers, the dominant society and state actors are a determining factor in the types of identities deployed. This shows that the research participants have constructed their identity based on dominant culture/power, religion, group affiliation, their surroundings and interactions, and a historic sense of ethnicity and the place of origin. In this sense, this study supports the argument that “Turkish citizenship¹³⁷ is inclusive for those who fall into the category of Turkish Sunni Muslim and exclusive for those outside this category” (Kaya, 2014: 56). Despite this, they are now keener to express a Georgian dimension of their identity through various channels. The increase in the number of associations, language courses, Georgian related publications, ‘cultural’ activities, visits to the ancestral homeland and use of the word Georgian itself in the name of associations are indicators of this tendency.

Magnarella (1979: 116) stated that Georgian Turks have only a *partial ethnic identity*, which is slowly being eroded. This identification was made for those who are from Artvin. Nevertheless, the present study focuses on the associational activities of Georgian Turks who emigrated from Batumi and its surroundings. As discussed in Chapter 1, the division between those from Batumi and those from Artvin is due to the fact that the former’s collective identity has been strongly affected by their exile from their native land, whereas the people from Artvin have not experienced this traumatic displacement (Toumarkine, 2000: 409). The ethnographic data suggest that, in general, while my informants see themselves as (and feel) Georgian in

¹³⁷ The Constitution of Turkey, when talking about Turkish citizenship, says, “Everyone bound to the Turkish State through the bond of citizenship is a Turk.” (Constitution of Republic of Turkey, Article 66. Available at: https://global.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/constitution_en.pdf, accessed 25 January 2018).

terms of ethnicity, they see themselves as ‘belonging’ to Turkish nationality as a result of a shared legal citizenship, language and, to a certain extent, ‘culture’ and ‘history’ (Brubaker, 2006; Eriksen, 2010; Guibernau and Rex, 2003). Broadly speaking, in their policies, both associations emphasise ancestral cultural heritage, most notably language and religion, and the place of origin is the glue holding Georgian Turks together. For both, Georgian identity is based around ethnicity, rather than nationality.

Thirdly, we saw that fourth (or later) generation immigrants can form more ethnically based associations (Vermeulen, 2006: 157). Fourth (or later) generation association members are redefining what it means to be a Georgian Turk. Their Muslim-Turkish identity is predominantly shaped by the impact of the state and as a result of sharing the same religion with the country in which they have been living for over a century. Although they always emphasise the Muslim-Turkish side of their identity, notably due to a ‘concern of being misunderstood’, they now more openly express their ethnic origin. This points to the fluidity and subjectivity of ethnic identity, which is formed in specific social, cultural, political, economic and historical contexts (Sokolovskii and Tishkov, 2002; Hornborg and Hill, 2011; Hall, 1990; Barth, 1998; Brubaker, 2006; Banks, 2003; Guibernau and Rex, 2003).

8.2 Areas for Further Research

In addition to the main arguments of the study, several issues that were raised require further research and analysis; a detailed discussion of them lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

First, by adopting a comparative approach, further studies regarding the role of associations in the process of identity construction amongst fourth (or later) generation immigrants in different cases would be worthwhile. Further research might also explore how these group of immigrants influence the religious landscape in their countries of origin through associational activities. This would be a fruitful area for further work.

Second, there is a need for more comprehensive research and in-depth analysis of all Georgian Turkish organisations in comparison to other Caucasian ethnic organisations from socio-economic, cultural, political and transnational perspectives. The focus of the research should address the level and content of Georgian Turks' involvement in the development process in the ancestral homeland and their relationships with other Caucasian groups and the states. This is important because Caucasian groups in Turkey became important actors for Turkey's relations with the Caucasus (Toumarkine, 2001; Kaya, 2004, 2014; Çelikpala, 2006; Aras and Akpınar, 2011). This would be also helpful in allowing policy makers to develop appropriate social, cultural, economic, educational and political policies directed at ethnic groups. Even though the research focused on Georgian Turkish associations in Turkey, the findings may be useful in understanding the discourse on identity construction, ethnic associations and transnationalism in Turkey and the Caucasus.

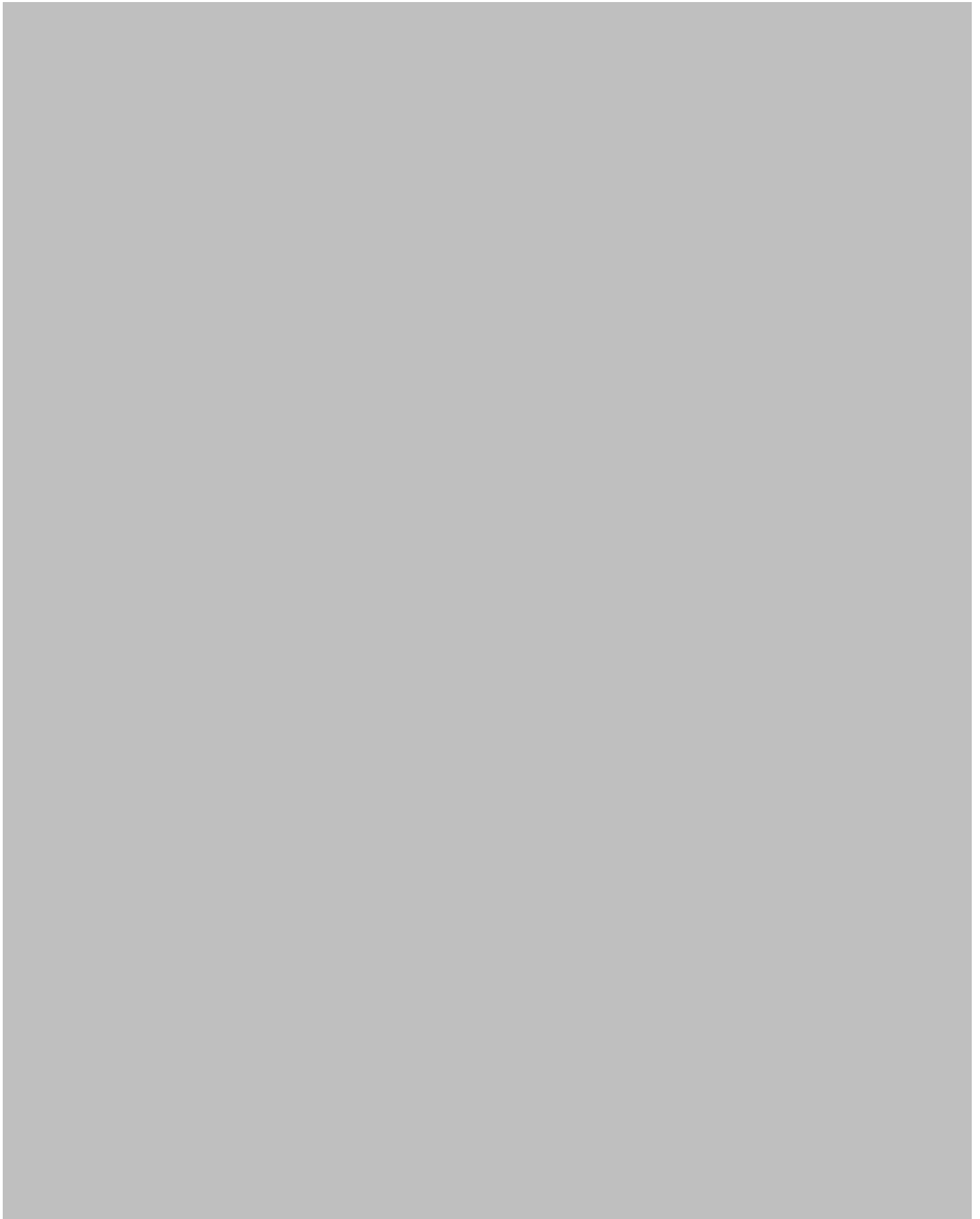
Third, while the findings are informed by an understanding of associational activities of other Georgian Turkish associations over the entire period of the fieldwork, the thesis has benefited from an in-depth study of two active associations. This allowed for an exploration of the ways in which the identity was shaped and represented. As my study showed, these two associations develop identity and relations with Georgia and the Turkish state in different ways. It would, therefore, be instructive to explore other Georgian Turkish associations located in different cities in Turkey and their relations with each other, other Caucasian groups and the ancestral homeland; we cannot assume they are all the same.

Fourth, the 'Kurdish peace process', which had been in place since 2009 and which resulted in increasing freedom of expression and the empowerment of ethnic groups, ended in the summer of 2015, when both sides suddenly restarted hostilities. Since then, hundreds of people have been killed and the level of violence has destabilised Turkey (Yeğen, 2015; Financial Times, 2018). As is discussed in Chapter 4, the Kurdish issue has had an impact on other ethnic groups

including Georgian Turks in Turkey. Further research, therefore, could usefully explore further how the end of Kurdish peace process affected the Georgian Turkish associations and their activities.

Fifth, more importantly, in mid-July 2016, during the time in which I was writing this thesis, a coup attempt took place in Turkey, resulting in an atmosphere of great uncertainty and national crisis, as well as the dismissal of over 100 000 public officials, including teachers, politicians, academics and journalists. Hundreds of media outlets, foundations and associations were shut down by the government (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Since those dramatic events, the government issued a series of state decrees that have left a legacy of huge uncertainty about human rights, civil society and fundamental freedoms in the country. The state of emergency, which gives more power to the government to ‘crackdown’ on opposition and which was imposed five days after the attempted coup was– at the time of writing –still in force. Therefore, further studies need to be carried out to look at the Georgian Turkish associations in the context of these new developments. After the attempted coup, while I was unable to provide accurate information about how the attempted coup has changed the associations and their activities, it is clear they feel ‘threatened’ and I can say that they began to put more emphasis on the Muslim-Turkish aspect of their identity and loyalty to the state through their social media platforms and websites. We see once more that identity construction is fluid and influenced by wider political and cultural events (May, 2001; Meer, 2014; Hutchinson and Smith, 1996; Brubaker, 2006).

APPENDIX



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