

THE TURKS OF *BORÇALI* IN GEORGIA: ETHNIC IDENTITY IN
BORDERLAND

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ABSTRACT

THE TURKS OF *BORÇALI* IN GEORGIA: ETHNIC IDENTITY IN BORDERLAND

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This study examines the history and ethnic identity of Turks living in *Borçali* (Kvemo-Kartli) region of Georgia. It focuses on the mechanisms that led to the formation and strengthening of their ethnic identity and the impact of the shifts in political borders on ethnic identification. Characteristics of the region and the people are provided and socio-political developments are analyzed with an historical perspective. Different dimensions of the concepts of ethnicity and ethnic identity are discussed with an interdisciplinary approach.

Keywords: Georgia, Turks of *Borçali*, Ethnic Identity, Azerbaijan

ÖZ

GÜRCİSTAN'DA *BORÇALI* TÜRKLERİ: SINIR BÖLGESİNDE ETNİK KİMLİK

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Mastera, Avrasya Çalışmaları Bölümü

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Bu çalışmada, Gürcistan'ın *Borçalı* (Kvemo-Kartli) bölgesinde yaşayan Türklerin tarihi ve etnik kimliği incelenmiştir. Etnik kimlik oluşumuna ve güçlenmesine yol açan süreçler ve siyasi sınırların sıkça değişmesinin etnik kimliklerine olan etkisi incelenmiştir. Bölge ve halkının özellikleri ve sosyo-kültürel gelişmeler, tarihsel bir perspektifle analiz edilmiştir. Etnisite ve etnik kimlik kavramlarının farklı boyutları disiplinler arası bir yaklaşımla irdelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gürcistan, *Borçalı* Türkleri, Etnik Kimlik, Azerbaycan

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

The present study focuses on the ethnic identity of Turkic population living in the Republic of Georgia, in the region of Kvemo-Kartli, historically known as *Borçalı*, which is now a borderland on the border between Georgia and Azerbaijan. Its aim is to analyze various sources on the history of this people, their current situation and the mechanisms that form their ethnic identity. It also focuses on the impact of changing political borders throughout history on the ethnic identification of communities living in the border regions. A review of some theories from sociology, anthropology and social psychology, dealing with various aspects of identity is provided. The main argument of this research is that state borders do not always form real divisions between ethnic groups and, in many cases there is no overlap between official state territory and identity of peoples living in borderlands. This entails the emergence of multiple identities and loyalties, leading to problems of ethnic identification. Furthermore, discriminative policies towards ethnic minorities, like assimilation, as well as imposition of certain historical versions of their origins, result in the strengthened sense of ethnic identity on the part of these minorities and their alienation. However, this is not only related to the discriminative policies of the state but also has a lot to do with the changes of political borders throughout history. The Caucasus is a region that has been characterized by a continuous shift of political borders and authority and for this

reason it provides a good field for studying the effects of such shifts on ethnic identities.

This type of political border shifts has also an impact on the naming of communities. Thus, a special note should be made on the reason for the use of the term ‘Turk’ throughout the study and what it means in the context. The Russians used to name Turks of the Caucasus as ‘Tatar’ or ‘Caucasian Tatars’ until the late 19th - early 20th centuries. Later, the term ‘Turk’ gradually replaced the term ‘Tatar’. In the 1920s and 1930s this term was also replaced by different names given to Turkic peoples of Caucasus, like ‘Azerbaijanis’. The Turkic population living in modern Georgia is referred to by different names in the literature. The most common of these are ‘Azeris of Georgia’ and ‘Azerbaijanis of Georgia’. Both of these terms have some limitations.

The term ‘Azeri’, frequently used in the literature, is a problematic one. Despite the fact that it denotes the Turks in the Republic of Azerbaijan and in Iran, some Turcologists have noted that, originally, the term described a small ethnic group living in Iran, related to Persians and fire worshippers by religion. So, they have stressed that the term cannot be applied to the Turkic people of Azerbaijan and Iran. Consequently, it is even more irrelevant when referring to the Turks of *Borçalı*. Historically, the region of *Borçalı* has had close ethnic and cultural links with some of the minor Turkic states that eventually formed the Republic of Azerbaijan. However, *Borçalı* has never been a part of either the short-lived Azerbaijani Democratic Republic or its successors, the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialistic Republic and the modern Republic of Azerbaijan. Consequently, ‘Azerbaijanis of Georgia’ is not an accurate term to describe the Turkic population of *Borçalı*.

It should be noted that, unofficially, up to this day, Georgians call the Turks of Azerbaijan and *Borçalı* by the ethnonym ‘Tatar’. The Turks of *Borçalı* call themselves by different names, like ‘Turks’ or ‘Azerbaijanis’, the first name being more prevalent and favored. Due to this and the neutrality of the term, they will be referred to as ‘*Borçalı* Turks’ in this study. This people should also not be confused with the *Ahuska* (Meskhetian) Turks who once lived in Georgia, were deported from there in 1944 and have not been repatriated still.

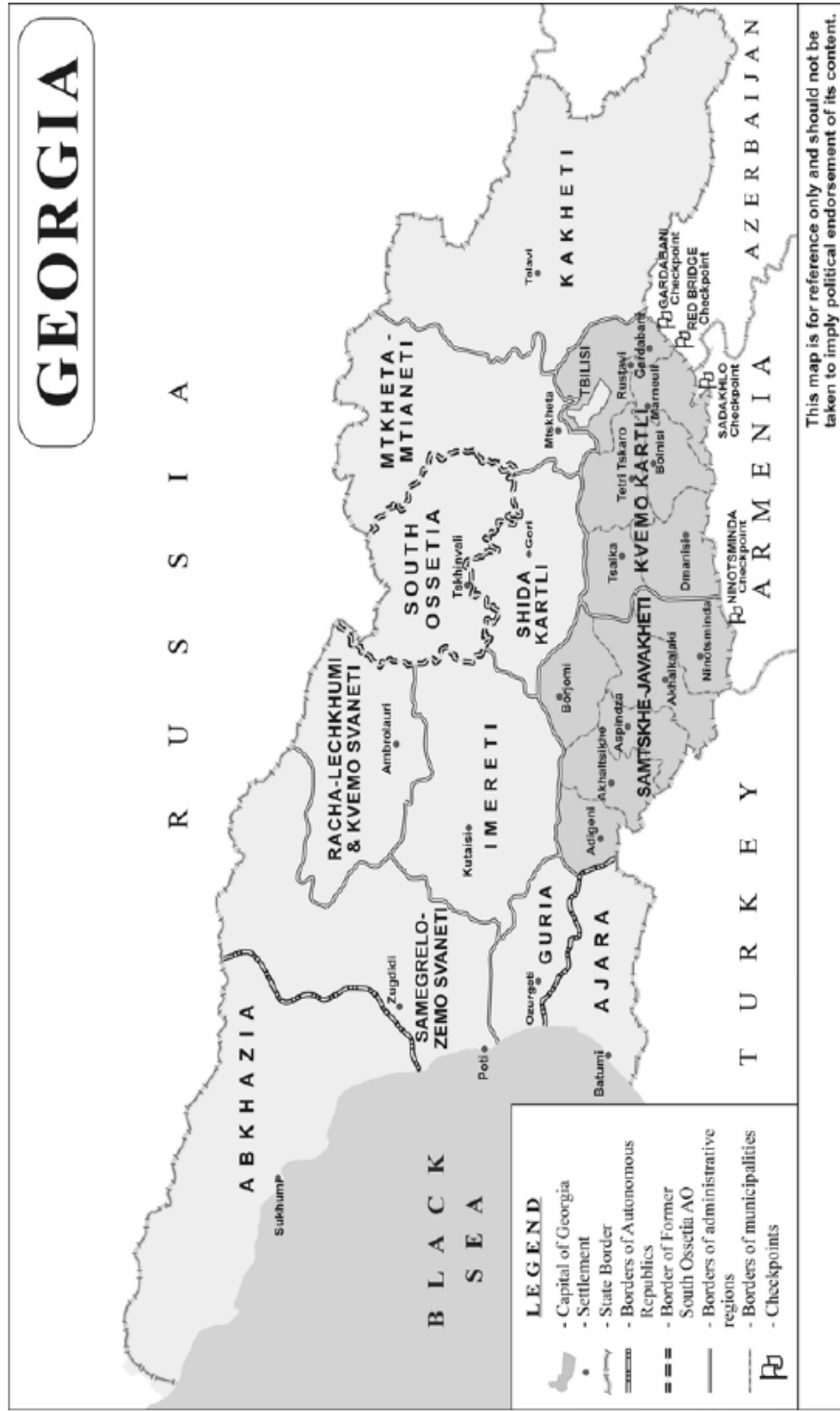
1.1 The Region

Georgia, a country in the southern Caucasus, borders Russian Federation, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Just like in the other parts of the Caucasus, different peoples are living in Georgia. Among these peoples are the *Borçalı* Turks. Turkic population has been living in the majority of districts of what is now eastern Georgia. According to the official census, in 1989, 91.923 of them lived in *Marneuli* district (955,2 square km.), 53.808 in *Bolnisi* district (804,2 square km.), 33.107 in *Dmanisi* district (1207,6 square km.), 48.781 in *Gardabani* district (1734 square km.), 15.804 in *Sagaredjo*, 7094 in *Telavi*, 7094 in *Lagodekhi*, 2872 in *Kaspiiski*, 1426 in *Karelski*, 2228 in *Tsalkha*, 2499 in *Tetritskharo*, 2199 in *Mtskheta*. Also, 17.986 lived in the capital, Tbilisi and 11.576 in the town of *Rustavi*. 947 were recorded in *Samtkshe-Djavakheti*, 600 in *Gori* and 1700 in *Adjaria*.¹

Traditionally, the major region where Turks have lived is *Borçalı*, officially called *Kvemo-Kartli*, in the south-east of Georgia. The governorate of *Kvemo-Kartli*

¹ Haladdin Ibrahimli, *Azerbaijancy Gruzii*, (Moscow: Evropa, 2006), <http://lib.aldebaran.ru/author/haladdin_ibragimli/haladdin_ibragimli_azerbaidzhancy_gruzii/haladdin_ibragimli_azerbaidzhancy_gruzii_1.html> (accessed January 29, 2009).

FIGURE 1. MAP OF GEORGIA AND ITS ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICTS (SOURCE: International Crisis Group, *Georgia's Armenian and Azeri Minorities*. Report N° 178, 2006).



This map is for reference only and should not be taken to imply political endorsement of its content.

was founded after Georgia's independence and centered in *Rustavi*. It incorporates administrative districts of *Gardabani*, *Marneuli*, *Bolnisi*, *Dmanisi*, *Tetri-Tskaro* and *Tsalka*. According to the official Georgian data, its territory is 7000 square km. Its population is shown as 600.000, 49 % being Turks, 40 % Georgians, 11 % other nations. The region stretches along Georgian-Azerbaijani border, Georgian-Armenian border and reaches *Çıldır* pass on Turkish border.²

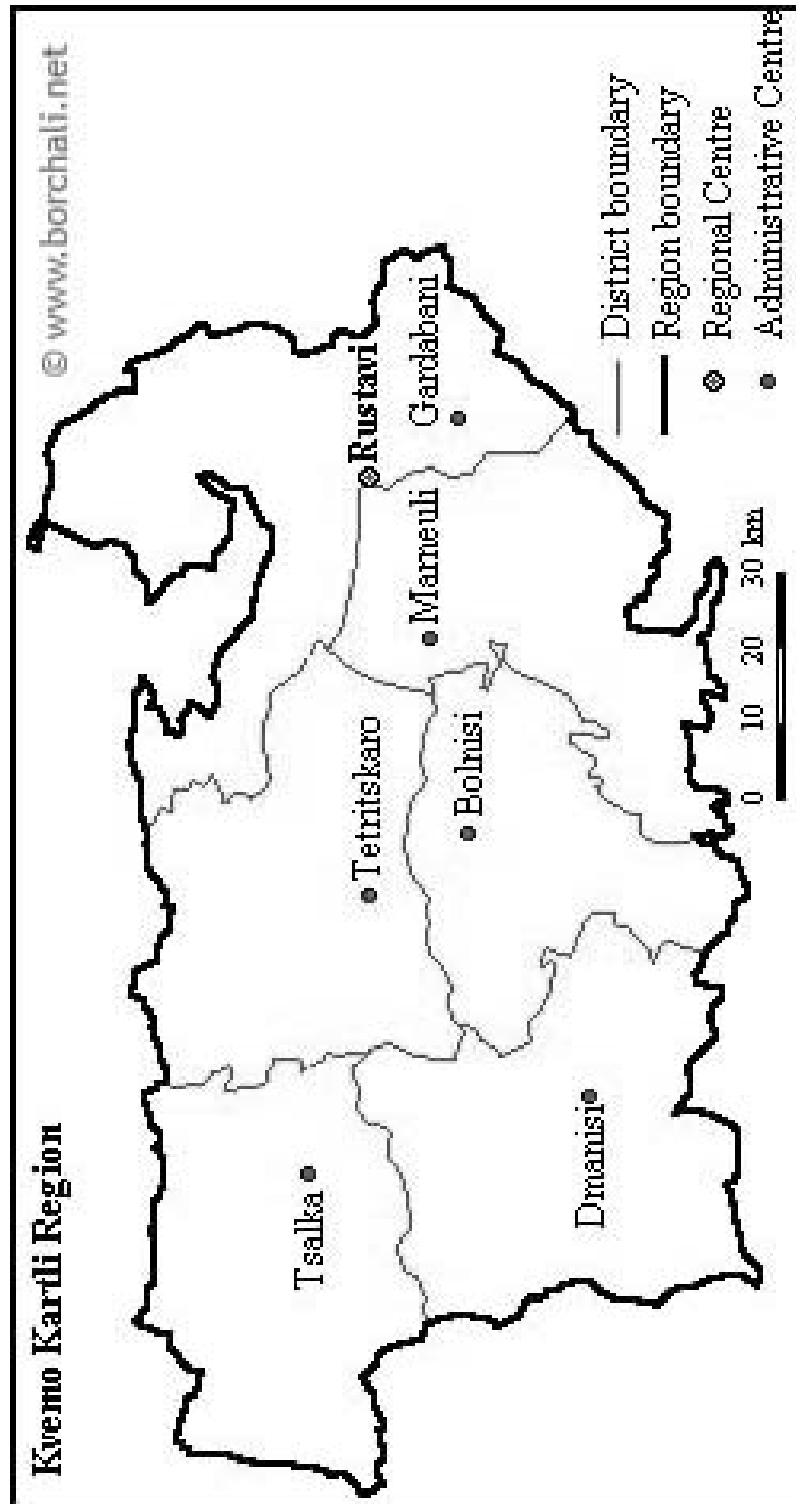
The borders of *Borçalı* have changed throughout history. In 1887, Aleksandr Eritsov wrote that the district, which included the *Borçalı* plain, *Lori* and *Ardjivan* mountain range was in the south-east of *Tiflis* governorate. It bordered *Gazakh* and *Alexandropol* districts of *Yelisavetpol* and *Erivan* governorates respectively. Its southern border was *Goşadağ* mountain range and in the west it was separated from *Ahalkalak* district by *Ayrigar*, while *Jam-Jam* and *Ardjivan* mountain ranges marked its border with *Lori*. *Sarıdağ* mountain in *Manglisi* separated *Borçalı* from *Tiflis*. Eritsov also noted that the district's territory was larger than those of the neighboring districts. This description shows that *Borçalı* totally covered *Dmanisi*, *Bolnisi*, *Marneuli*, *Gardabani*, partly *Tsalkha* districts and the town of *Rustavi* in present-day Georgia and also *Spitak (Hamamlı)*, *Amasiiski (Agbaba)*, *Stepanavan (Calaloğlu)*, *Kalininski (Taşır)* districts of what is now Armenia.³

The Russian census of 1832 showed that in *Borçalı* there were 145 settlements with 4092 households. The male population was 3634 Armenians, 787 Greeks, 669 Georgians, 213 Germans and 8479 Turks. According to the data of 1886, there were 12.385 Turks in *Borçalı* zone; 10.028 Turks, 543 Georgians, 1436 Armenians and 1966 of other nationalities in *Yekatirinenfeld (Bolnisi)* zone; 8974

² Ibrahimli, *Ibid*.

³ Musa Nebioğlu and Memmed Sarvan, *Borçalı mahalinin sahesi, serhedleri ve tebiî şeraiti*, <http://www.borchali.net/?s=cografiyasi> (accessed February 5, 2009).

FIGURE 2. MAP OF KVEMO-KARTLI (BORÇALI) REGION (SOURCE: www.borchali.net).



Turks, 7 Armenians and 5488 of other nationalities in *Trialeti* zone; 1483 Turks and 2226 Georgians in *Lori* zone. Apart from that, there were 5768 Turks in *Tiflis* zone, with a total population of 30.950. They also formed absolute majority in the zones of *Garayazı*, *Garaçöp* and *Guşirakh*. A famous Georgian writer and public figure Ilya Chavchavadze also noted in his newspaper in 1890 that Turks comprised two thirds of *Borçalı*'s population.⁴

Several censuses were held in Soviet period. In 1930 census the number of *Borçalı* Turks appeared as 200.000, in 1979 as 250.000, in 1989 as 307.556 (5,7 % of total). According to the census of 2002, their number was 284.761 (6,5 % of total).⁵ ⁶ Ibrahimli argues that these figures do not reflect the actual number of Turkic population of Georgia because *Borçalı* Turks had higher birth rates as compared to Georgians, while this is not apparent in official statistics. Another reason for doubt is the fact that *Borçalı* is the most densely populated of all regions in Georgia.⁷

Ibrahimli also states that figuring out the actual number of Turks in *Borçalı* is not that difficult because there are around two hundred Turkic villages in Georgia. A certain number of representatives from each village live in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. They can help in determining, at least approximately, the number of inhabitants of each village. This method was used by the members of organization named *Borçalı*, formed in Baku by intelligentsia of the migrants from the region. Their research showed that the total number of *Borçalı* Turks was about

⁴ Quoted in Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

⁵ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

⁶ International Crisis Group, *Georgia's Armenian and Azeri Minorities* (In Russian). (Report N° 178, 2006), 5.

⁷ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

600.000. Some 100.000 of them were forced to leave their homeland as a result of certain discriminative measures by Georgian government. Consequently, the number of remaining Turks was roughly 500.000.⁸ This number, however, has been on decline throughout recent years due to constant migrations.⁹

As a result of formation of *Kvemo-Kartli* district, the municipalities where *Borçalı* Turks predominated were merged with mostly Georgian-populated regions. *Borçalı* Turks were also displeased with the fact that the city of *Rustavi*, where Georgians predominate was made the administrative center, instead of *Marneuli*, where *Borçalı* Turks form the majority. Even in regions where they dominate numerically, the municipalities have not been headed by Turks, with only several deputies being of Turkic origin. Despite the promises of Georgian government about delegation of power on municipal instead of regional level, there has been a tendency towards stronger centralization.¹⁰

1.2 The Methodology

In order to collect the necessary data various methods, like documentary research, mailed questionnaire and expert interviews are used in this thesis. Different printed materials, like books, newspapers and academic articles, related directly or indirectly to *Borçalı* Turks are examined. Unfortunately, while there are, relatively, many works devoted to late Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia, the works dealing with *Borçalı* Turks are scarce. Among the examined documents are the official documents, like reports of Georgian and international non-governmental

⁸ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

⁹ International Crisis Group, *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰ International Crisis Group, *Ibid.*, 12-13,16.

organizations. Additionally, different publications, like books, journals and newspapers (*Borçalının Sesi, Gruzıya, Ekho, Rezonansi, Sabakh, Sovetskaya Gruzıya, Sovetskaya Rossiya* between the period of 1990 and 2005) in Russian, Azerbaijani, Turkish and English are reviewed. This is done to get an overall idea about the nature of the topic. In the light of the data obtained from written sources, a questionnaire is prepared to collect the additional information, as well as to verify the available one.

As it was not possible to carry out a field work, method of mailed questionnaire (provided in Appendix A) is adopted. The advantage of this research technique is that it allows for quick distribution of questionnaire and provides confidentiality, while low rate of response is its main disadvantage. Contacts with 20 *Borçalı* Turks of different age, sex and professions who either live or lived in the region, are established. The prepared questionnaire in the form of series of open-ended questions is sent to them and they were asked to provide their opinion on different issues. The response rate was relatively low, as is characteristic of this type of survey, only 7 of them replied back. In addition to that, interviews with three experts on *Borçalı* in Turkey were conducted, using the same questionnaire, in October and November, 2009.

1.3 Organization of the Study

The present work is divided into several chapters. Each of them is dealing with a different topic. The first chapter provides general information about the region and its population. It describes where *Borçalı* is located geographically. Data

from censuses conducted in different periods is provided. The administrative systems in pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet periods is also briefly described.

A special focus in the first chapter is made on the political events in Georgia in the late Soviet period and after the fall of the USSR. The rise of nationalist movements and their reflection on the *Borçalı* Turks of Georgia is shown. Different measures used by Georgian nationalist groups to apply pressure on *Borçalı* Turks are also mentioned. The chapter also describes how the developments in the political life of the republic, like the changes of governments and the establishment of close relations with Azerbaijan affected the Turks in *Borçalı*.

The second chapter examines different theoretical approaches from such disciplines, like sociology, social anthropology and social psychology towards the questions of ethnicity and ethnic identity. It shows the advantages and disadvantages of the cognitive and interactive approaches to social identity in social psychology and how both of them can be used for better understanding of the issue. The concept of identity and social identity, as viewed by the mentioned disciplines is explained. A section of the chapter focuses on ethnic identity as a separate concept. The views of various famous scholars about ethnicity are briefly reviewed and theories that were thought to be helpful for understanding the processes of identity of *Borçalı* Turks are described.

The third chapter is dedicated to the different approaches about the origins of *Borçalı* Turks and the brief political history of the region. There are different positions regarding their origins and the time they have lived on their lands. Most the modern Georgian historians claim that these people are relative newcomers, while Azerbaijani and Turkish scholars point that they have lived there since ancient period. A section in the chapter is devoted to explaining the connection of

ancient peoples, like *Scythians*, *Sarmatians* and *Alans* with Turks of Caucasus, which is vital for understanding their ethnogenesis. The chapter also tells about the role of Turks in Georgian history and the political developments in recent centuries that led to *Borçalı*'s becoming a part of Georgian Republic.

The final chapter is devoted to the current problems that *Borçalı* Turks experience. It provides information about issues that are mentioned by Turks to be the most vital, such as the land distribution, the language barrier, unemployment and migrations from the region. The importance of these issues was established through the interviews conducted with *Borçalı* Turks. For this reason, their views are provided in the form of quotations and form an important part of the chapter. These interviews also helped to get an idea of the way these people perceive their identity and their connection to their lands. Additionally, they showed how these problems have affected *Borçalı* Turks' views of their future in Georgia.

CHAPTER 2.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter focuses on the review of different views of social and, particularly, ethnic identity in social psychology and sociology. In the field of social psychology the importance of social factors in shaping group perceptions is being increasingly realized. The fact that ethnic identity is affected not only by mental processes but also by social and political determinants has become apparent. The issue of similarities it shares with other social identities and its peculiarities that make it stand apart are provoking a particular interest.

Social psychologists were often criticized for preoccupation with individual cognitive processes and ignoring the effects of society. As a result, the field saw emergence of two opposite approaches: one focused more on cognition, while the other concentrated on interaction. The two schools have been known respectively as psychological social psychology and sociological social psychology. The former tends to explain the social behavior of the individuals by examining mental processes in their minds. On the other hand, the latter approach holds that it is the interaction between individuals in particular contexts that is responsible for their actions.

However, in some recent works it has been pointed out that sticking to only one of the mentioned views would be counter-productive. Instead, it is argued, that both could be used in the study of ethnic identity. Since each of them explores the

issue from different perspective and has slightly different research interests, the combination of these approaches can be very fruitful. The cognitive approach places too much freedom of action on individuals, while the interactive one views them as more passive instruments of social processes. However, the fact that individual is connected to society by through his or her identity means that neither of the approaches should be disregarded.¹¹

Individualistic approaches place importance on individual's cognitive actions and choices. According to this view, identities, including ethnic one, are consciously chosen by them. The interactive approach, on the other hand, views society as the main factor, which affects individuals' thoughts, feelings and actions. Particular circumstances are believed to be responsible for their behavior. As a result, this school holds that identities are assigned to people, while ethnic identity is shaped by current political and ideological discourses.

Both of the views have both strong and weak points. Although society, indeed, has a great impact on individuals, it would be a mistake to think of them as of simple recipients of imposed identities and products of a certain culture. So, viewing identity only as a product of societal factors would be limiting. At the same time, the fact that individuals are able to cognitively perceive situations and take actions should not lead to the underestimation of effects of environment and the circumstances they may find themselves in. The choice of possible identities is, after all, limited within a certain spectrum determined by circumstances. In other words, there is a mutual relationship between individuals and society: people are

¹¹ Maykel Verkuyten, *The Social Psychology of Ethnic Identity* (Hove and New York: Psychology Press, 2005), 16.

able to influence circumstances but this ability, in its turn, is influenced by particular circumstances.¹²

Every individual has a special perception of social reality. It is shaped by interactions with others. The criteria of membership in a society are perceived and accepted by its members. The acceptance of this membership affects the way one views himself or herself and the world. Communication with other members in a certain context determines what person learns and accepts. However, this does not mean that all individuals will accept and perceive their identity in the same manner. Each one will still consciously interpret it and give it a somewhat different meaning. At the same time, identity needs to be confirmed by other members through interaction. An individual may try to meet the expectations of a group and be accepted or resist them. The criteria determined by society need to be understood by person. Then he or she may choose to either comply with them or follow a personal path.¹³

To put it all in different words, an individual's being a member of a certain social group should not lead to ignoring the role of cognition. In the same manner, the effect social and situational factors on individuals need to be considered. Unfortunately, in the studies of identity either cognitive or interactive approaches used to be chosen. However, as mentioned above each of the schools has limitations in its views. In order to get a more comprehensive picture of identity phenomenon it is required to benefit from strong points of both approaches.

¹² Verkuyten *Ibid.*, 17)

¹³ Verkuyten *Ibid.*, 21.

2.1 Social Identity and Ethnic Identity

The concept of identity has been one of the most studied issues in social sciences. Despite its widespread use, the actual meaning of the term remains relatively vague. It may change from context to context. In social psychology there has not been enough explanation provided as to what social identity means as a concept. What has been evident is that the term is not as simple as it may seem at first.

When talking about identity one may refer to a wide range of traits, which are supposed to be related to it, like gender or personal tastes. So, the concept is used as an umbrella term for all of these phenomena. Having an identity is presented as a positive trait, while the lack of it is viewed in an opposite light. This lack may be often considered as the main reason behind different troubles that may befall certain groups. The term is also frequently used in politics, gaining also a normative status. This is due to the fact that the identity is believed to be influenced by history and politics, as well as by power differences.^{14 15}

Social identity defines the connection between individual and society. It emphasizes the things that a person shares with other persons and also shows what distinguishes members of a certain group from those of other groups. It indicates what an individual is in social terms and includes different traits that allow for categorization of the person. The categorizations provide information of what that person is and what he or she is not. This allows to group with individuals sharing

¹⁴ Verkuyten *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁵ Henri Tajfel, ed., *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations* (London: Academic Press, 1978).

similar characteristics and separate from those who do not. That is, to be one with holders of a particular identity and segregate from holders of another.¹⁶

Despite this, the information provided by such categorization is limited. When we learn about one's social identity it creates an impression that its bearer possesses certain characteristics that, supposedly, constitute that identity. Every person, in addition to social identity, also has a unique, personal identity. The latter is comprised of all different bits of information about a person, like age, gender, religion, etc. Social categorization presupposes that some of the characteristics are more important than the others, at least in certain circumstances.^{17 18}

Society determines which classes and categories are to be treated as components of identity. Theories in the field social psychology agree that formation of identity begins with social categorization. Many kinds of criteria may be used in the process. Categories serve to sort people out and to label them. For the social identity to exist, person needs to place himself or herself into certain categories which are also recognized by society as constituents of that identity. However, the fact that categorizations are made on the basis of certain preferences does not mean that the chosen characteristics are not important. In fact, for a society to function properly the use of categories is required. Depending on the situation, both making classifications and not making them may be criticized. This is especially obvious in the context of relations between different ethnic groups.¹⁹

¹⁶ Verkuyten *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁷ Verkuyten *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁸ Stephen Worchel et al., "A Multidimensional Model of Identity: Relating Individual and Group Identities to Intergroup Behavior," in *Social Identity Processes*, ed. Dora Capozza and Rupert Brown (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 18.

¹⁹ Verkuyten *Ibid.*, 44-5.

Simply labeling or giving names, however, is not enough for the formation of social identity. For a categorization to be more than just a label it needs to have content. This content is provided by certain behavioral expectations and their possible consequences. When some behavior is associated with a category, a perception of the social world is created that can be shared among different individuals. The cultural factor adds social meaning to categorizations. Members of the group are expected to behave in accordance with the categories they are assigned to. In this case, both in-group and out-group members will form different stereotypes concerning their behavior. Ethnic identity is thought of as sticking to certain values and behaving in a certain expected and approved manner. It is these expectations and their related consequences that can be opposed when making classification and not the fact of making distinctions itself.^{20 21 22}

Another factor that gives meaning to categorization is the ontological definition. The fact of a person's belonging to a certain category is supposed to give certain information about that person. In this way one may have some about a representative of a group without even knowing him or her. Such definition also sorts out those classifications that form social identity from those that do not. Ontology makes one think that there are some characteristics that are shared between people from the same group and that out-group members would behave in a different way.²³ It provides a clear-cut difference between being and not being a member of a group.

²⁰ Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity: Second Edition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 76-7.

²¹ Kay Deaux, "Models, Meanings and Motivations," in *Social Identity Processes*, ed. Dora Capozza and Rupert Brown (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 6-7.

²² Verkuyten *Ibid.*, 46.

²³ Verkuyten *Ibid.*, 47.

As each individual belongs to different categories, people have various identities at the same time. Realizing this helps to prevent focusing on one single identity that is considered to have greater importance. Despite this, some identities do have more weight both psychologically and sociologically. The number and importance of these may depend on different factors, like the type of society or the time period. Each identity may have a different meaning. One of identities may become more dominant, others serving as its sub-categories. In certain circumstances one of these may get a central role and affect person's thoughts and behavior.²⁴

Although, for the most part, the importance of identities depends on the context, some of them may rise to a point where they start to play the main role in most situations. In the process, people do not simply get influenced by society but rather give meaning to situations by interpreting them both individually and collectively. Behaviors that are easily recognizable may provide a basis to build identity on. When the fact of doing something differently from other groups is approved by society, it turns into that group's social identity. Also important in the process are ascription and self-ascription. That is, how groups are classified and how they react to this classification.^{25 26}

Since social identity is closely related to politics and power issues, it is not unusual to see politicization of identities, particularly ethnic ones. The value of ethnicity is felt by majority groups in a less prominent way, as compared to minorities. Majority often views itself as the reference point against which other

²⁴ Verkuyten *Ibid.*, 50-2.

²⁵ Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic groups and boundaries: The social organization of culture difference*. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969).

²⁶ Verkuyten *Ibid.*, 55-6.

groups are compared. This makes issues with minorities more visible, without considering prevailing concepts of group identity. Consequently, power is important for understanding ethnic identity. The power differences may be manifested in a variety of ways. One of these is the language. The basic ideas about the position of groups in society can be subtly inferred from vocabularies or narratives.²⁷

As mentioned before, identity has both psychological and sociological aspects. Even if people choose not to emphasize their identity, at some point, it will remind them of itself. That is, psychologically, individuals can modify their identity but on the social level their choices are limited. This shows that belonging to a social category does not necessarily mean that its member will have a certain identity. It is often not important if a person identifies with a certain ethnicity because both in-group and out-group members will still view him or her in that way. Identification is a result of certain psychological processes that is affected by various factors, specific to each individual. What people feel about their identity may differ from the way society views them.^{28 29}

2.2 Approaches to Ethnic Identity

There have been many different views on ethnicity in sociology, anthropology, and social psychology. These approaches differ in terms of critical points that their authors have held about the essence of ethnicity. For instance, Weber believed that ethnic groups were groups of people believing to have common

²⁷ Verkuyten *Ibid.*, 58-9.

²⁸ Deaux, *Ibid.*, 9-10.

²⁹ Verkuyten, *Ibid.*, 61-3.

origin that can serve as a basis for the creation of a community. According to him, it is important to have a belief in common descent, regardless if the actual history of the group matches it. Believing that they have a direct connection with people from the past, from whom the current group has descended is vital. Although this belief may show some changes in different times and conditions, it can help members of the group to realize their position in the world. He also stated that this belief is promoted, mainly, by a political community.³⁰ In addition to that, Weber believed that the concept of common history and origins can be made plausible and acceptable. For an identity to gain a sense, it has to be approved by both in-group and out-group members.

Despite the fact that ethnic identities can be subject to interpretation, it would be misleading to believe that they are totally invented. It is not possible to create traditions, not taking into account the history of people. Only when it is performed this way can the belief in ethnic identity have emotional value.³¹ The work called “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries”, edited by Barth displayed a rupture from approaches that took culture as a basis of ethnicity. This work demonstrated that culture alone was not sufficient to define ethnicity. Although Barth too viewed the belief in common history and descent as important, he also noted that ascription by group members and by outsiders was important. For a categorical ascription to become an ethnic one, it needs to refer to a basic identity that is shaped by people’s descent. He argued that in studying ethnicity, it is necessary to focus not on culture but rather on ethnic boundaries that define a certain group. These boundaries serve as a vessel for culture. Barth pointed out that ethnicity was a form of social

³⁰ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: an Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (CA: University of California Press, 1978), 389.

³¹ Verkuyten, *Ibid*, 75.

organization, while ethnic identity was about defining and preserving ethnic boundaries.³²

Although boundaries are important for the definition of identity, this does not mean that certain cultural aspects are to be neglected. Some differences in culture are visible when there is a contact between different ethnic groups. In such situations, this sense of difference is felt with a particular intensity. This implies that these distinctions are more than just stereotypes. Although it is often hard to clearly define dissimilarities in culture, they still show during interactions.³³

Roosens also accepted Barth's view of ethnic group as a social vessel. For him, a group becomes ethnic when it is imagined in a particular way. The critical points here are the genealogical dimension, related to origin, and the creation of a sense of kinship. When people believe that they have common origins that keep them together, an ethnic group exists. This belief shows that there is a continuity between generations and makes this group ethnic inside itself, decreasing the importance of outsiders' opinion.³⁴

While boundaries mark the differences between groups, the idea of common descent helps to form similarities within group. Only a slight reference to others is required here. This belief in common origins creates sense of unity and belonging. It can lead to a sense of being obliged to past and future generations. Often, the way a group's history is presented to its members helps in understanding ethnicity. Accepting the story of one's group may be one of the prerequisites for membership. Each ethnic group has also an explanation for the different mode of behavior of

³² Barth, *Ibid.*, 13-5.

³³ Verkuyten, *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁴ Eugeen Roosens, "The primordial nature of origins in migrant ethnicity," in *The Anthropology of Ethnicity: Beyond 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries'*, eds. Hans Vermeulen and Cora Govers (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1994), 83.

another group under the same circumstances and for the relations with other groups.³⁵

Reference to common descent makes it easy to mobilize people and, because of this, it is frequently used by nationalist movements. According to Verkuyten, there are, at least three reasons why ethnic connection has such a big emotional value. The first one is that people learn about their ethnicity since their childhood, through interaction with their family and close relatives. They learn language, history, values, and the mode of behavior, specific to their group. All these are internalized and form the core of ethnic identity that is not easy to discard. Secondly, the supportive behavior is extended to large masses through ideologies. Referring to origins and kinship helps to form a moral community. The values learned in childhood are applied to a wider group. While such community fosters moral obligation towards its members, at the same time, it excludes outsiders. The third reason is that ethnicity provides individuals with the sense of meaningfulness of existence. Cultural values may show that there is a sense in life and that it can be made more valuable. In addition, they may imply that a person is immortal, in a certain respect. When people behave in accordance with these values, they go beyond individual existence and extend both into the past and into the future.³⁶

The social psychology of ethnic minorities was researched by Tajfel. He claimed that ethnic minorities are defined by disadvantageous social position and it is essential for understanding their identity. Tajfel divided minorities into numerical and psychological ones. The latter feel a unity through common traits that are not properly respected. He was concerned with the differences in terms of power and

³⁵ Verkuyten, *Ibid*, 82-3.

³⁶ Verkuyten, *Ibid*, 86-7.

status between majority and minority.³⁷ Theories in this field have treated minorities' attempts to define their ethnicity as a reaction to differences in status and negative effects of stereotyping and discrimination. This approach, however, has limitations. It tends to overemphasize the importance of status, somewhat ignoring ethnicity and failing to grasp all depth of such identities. Ethnic minorities are viewed as other social groups with low status.

Among the consequences of this is the decrease in number of possible references for comparison. In order to make such a comparison, the members must choose an out-group, to which they can compare themselves. For this purpose more than one group can be chosen. In fact, many ethnic minorities compare themselves not only to majority but also to other minority groups. It is also possible to make comparisons within a group, without outsiders. Often, such interactions play an important role in the formation of social identity.³⁸

Identities and the inequalities of power and status can be understood better in the context of broader social situations and particular circumstances. These issues can be seen as actively produced to adapt to certain conditions, resources, and boundaries. By different discourses and practices both individuals and groups can be given different positions but, still, there is always a possibility to challenge these.

2.3 Identity in the Border Regions

One area in anthropology can be particularly helpful in understanding the identity of the people, whom this study is dedicated to, the *Borçalı* Turks. This area, the border studies, examines the effects that delimitation of state borders has on the

³⁷ Tajfel, *Ibid.*, 1978)

³⁸ Verkuyten, *Ibid.*, 92-3.

identities of the peoples living in border regions and the role of these regions in the formation of nations and states. As Wilson and Donnan noted, the reason ethnographers study border peoples is to describe the experiences of people who are aware of their cultural ties with many other people in neighbor states. This area also focuses attention on how permeable borders are in cultural terms, how can border peoples adapt to political ideology and how some states try to control the cultural area that spans beyond their borders. They also point out that modern anthropologists, because of their preoccupation with ethnic groups and their boundaries, have sometimes overlooked the relationship between the ethnic and national identities. The politicization of ethnicity, in their words, leads to the formation of national identity in the process of national self-determination. This process often excludes those groups whose views on nation building are different from those of the titular community. As a result, these groups are termed as ethnic or religious groups, although they may feel as a nation or a part of another bigger nation.³⁹

The cases of some of the border peoples have certain similarities with the case of *Borçalı* Turks. For this reason, drawing comparison between the experiences of these peoples could help in understanding the mechanisms that shape the identity of the latter. One of such cases is that of Catalans on French-Spanish border, described by Sahlins.⁴⁰ It is particularly interesting because it shows how people of the same ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds formed different national identities, as a result of divided border. The valley of Cerdanya in

³⁹ Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan, "Nation, state and identity at international borders," in *Border Identities: Nation and state at international frontiers*, eds. Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4, 13.

⁴⁰ Peter Sahlins, "State formation and national identity in the Catalan borderlands," in *Border Identities: Nation and state at international frontiers*, eds. Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31-61.

Pyrenees was divided between France and Spain the middle of the 17th century. Villagers on each side of the frontier had some conflicts with those on the other side, over fields that lay in the border zone. Starting from the 18th century, the village communities appealed to the provincial and national authorities of France and Spain for the resolution of these disputes.

The culmination came in 1820s, when villagers started to use the language of the nation, which became popular after the French Revolution in 1789, on increased rate. Until that date, the village communities made distinctions between themselves and their brethren across the border, using terms, like ‘neighbors’ and ‘foreigners’. Now, however, they began to use national names, first referring to their opponents as ‘the French’ or the ‘Spanish’ and, later, developing the sense of national identity of their respective nations. Most importantly, at the same time, they managed to protect their identities as members of local communities.⁴¹

The example of Catalan borderlands shows how the perception of the border and of the state’s authority can affect the national identity of the same ethnic group divided by borders. Another related model can be found in the work of Laven and Baycroft, named ‘Border regions and identity’.⁴² The study examines the cases of the French Flanders and the Adriatic port of Trieste, comparing the processes of identity formation in these regions. The former case, due to having many similarities with that of *Borçali* Turks, deserves some attention.

The French Flanders is situated on the north east of France, on the border with present-day Belgium. It has been a part of France since the 17th century. The region has had a great economic value due to its inclusion of areas with intensive

⁴¹ Sahlins, *Ibid.*, 46-7.

⁴² David Laven and Timothy Baycroft, ‘Border regions and identity,’ *European Review of History – Revue européenne d’histoire* 15:3 (2008): 255.

agricultural and industrial profiles. It has also been important for trade and had a strategic significance. The people living in the region, the French Flemish had a lot of ethnic, cultural and other connections with the Belgian Flemish. Essentially, there was a cross-border regional culture. However, all cultural, social and economic ties with their brethren in Belgium did not prevent them from associating with France, as perception of border grew in the region during the 19th and 20th centuries. An important role in this was played by national institutions and mass media that influenced the culture in the second half of the 20th century.

The border, while not being there in cultural terms, became instrumental in the people's perception of their identity. The French Flemish had two communities that they associated with, a national that was defined by the border and a regional cultural one that crossed the border. However, the two identities were not in conflict, and the latter, gradually, lost importance during two centuries. There were periods when regional identity did gain importance over the national, like the periods when national economy was in conflict with the regional ones. Yet, this did not have any significant effects on national identity of the French Flemish. An important factor contributing to the building of French national identity among them was the development of secondary schooling in the second half of the 20th century. Until that date, despite high level of education and economic development in the region, the association with greater Flanders was still important, due to cultural interaction across the border.⁴³

Also critical for the formation of the French Flemish identity was the renaming of the region from the Flemish 'Westhoek' (west hook) to the French 'Nord'. This measure caused them to think of themselves as of 'northerners' of

⁴³ Laven and Baycroft, *Ibid.*, 257-60.

France, rather than the ‘westerners’ of Flanders. The French also depicted the culture of the region as an integral part of the greater French culture. Moreover, the Belgian Flemish on the other side of the border developed a view that those on the French side were no longer a part of their region and nation. As a result, two hybrid identities were formed, the French Flemish and the Belgian Flemish, which reduced the similarity across the border. Based on this, Laven and Baycroft conclude that in the regions where successful integration took place, the local practices, customs and personnel of the periphery were appropriated and its interests considered, while attempts of centralization and assimilation, often, resulted in adverse effects.⁴⁴

2.4 The Identity of *Borçalı* Turks

Throughout its history, the Caucasus has been a home to numerous ethnic and religious groups. Because of its strategic significance, various stronger states have always wanted to control it. Although *Borçalı* was also annexed to Georgia in the 18th century, the development of identity there took a different course. The region continued, by large, to live its own life, without feeling the authority of Georgian state in any significant degree. The Russian conquest of the Caucasus, in the 19th century, also prevented formation of any associations of *Borçalı* Turks with Georgia, as all regions of the Caucasus were divided into administrative districts of the Russian Empire. Throughout these periods, it is not possible to speak of the existence of any real border between *Borçalı* and the neighboring Turkic regions of what is now Azerbaijan, either in terms of socio-cultural ties or in the minds of the people. The fact that, after the formation of independent republics in the South

⁴⁴ Laven and Baycroft, *Ibid.*, 263, 269-70.

Caucasus, following the collapse of Russian Empire, the *Borçalı* Turks sided with the Muslim Turkic states is also noteworthy here.

The establishment of Soviet power meant that Moscow would once again become the main authority. Since borders between Union Republics of the USSR were more nominal, rather than real, Turks of *Borçalı* continued to feel closer to Azerbaijan in cultural and ethnic terms, rather than Georgia, while the use of Soviet national symbols, communist ideology, and Russian language in administration and education served for the development of Soviet national identity. Consequently, it is not surprising that Georgian nationalist rhetoric of the late 1980s and early 1990s was not met with understanding by *Borçalı* Turks. The rather crude methods adopted by Georgian nationalists, who openly stated that they wanted to see their country without any minorities, strengthened the ethnic and cultural identities of *Borçalı* Turks and increased their alienation from Georgia. Their regional identity and sympathy for Azerbaijan also showed an important rise. The change of the governments of Georgia, in their mind, did not alter the policy towards them. They believe that only the means were altered.

The renaming of Turkic toponyms in *Borçalı* was protested. As seen in the example of French Flanders, such renaming policy may, in fact, influence the identity of people. However, unlike the French, the Georgian administration does not seem to make any attempts to embrace the regional culture as a part of their national one. Instead, the rhetoric of *Borçalı* Turks' being 'guests' in Georgian lands is used by different means. The importance of education and mass media for identity formation and integration of minority peoples has been mentioned. This fact also helps to explain the reason why there are no signs of any significant integration of *Borçalı* Turks into Georgian society. As shown in other chapters of

this study, education is one of the major issues in the region. There is no clear education policy there, the rate of knowledge of Georgian language is low and measures taken to teach it are not effective. Moreover, most students have to travel to other countries, primarily to Azerbaijan, for university education, being unable to study in Georgian and due to the lack of programs in Turkish. People in *Borçalı* watch mostly Azerbaijani and Turkish television and read newspapers in Turkic, while Georgian mass media does not enjoy much popularity there. Naturally, these factors also do not help them to integrate.

The position of the Georgian government is also hard to define. It is not quite clear what their actual aim is, whether they really wish to integrate their minorities, including *Borçalı* Turks, or still view them as a threat. As previously mentioned, ethnic identity does not necessarily contradict national one. Moreover, if right policies are adopted, it is possible to create hybrids of the two identities. So, if Georgian officials show sincerity and determination in integration of *Borçalı* Turks, the latter may be willing to help them in building of their new nation state and national identity.

There are many instances in the world when people of the same ethnic and cultural backgrounds are divided by state borders. Although every case is unique in its own right, certain similarities between them still exist. Comparison with similar cases may provide ideas helping to understand why *Borçalı* Turks still do not feel as a part of the Georgian nation and which factors have affected their identity until today. The examples of Catalan borderlands and the French Flanders show that when a state adopts right policies towards minorities living in the border regions, it may prevent possible irredentist attitudes and successfully incorporate them as a part of its nation. When these examples are compared, it becomes evident why the

measures used by Georgian officials are ineffective, while the analysis of factors listed above may help to explain why *Borçalı* Turks have an identity where Georgian state does not have a significant part.

CHAPTER 3.
RECENT POLITICAL EVENTS IN GEORGIA AND THEIR IMPACT ON
***BORÇALI* TURKS**

3.1 The Political events in Georgia between 1988 and 1993 and their impact on
***Borçalı* Turks**

Among the Trans-Caucasian republics Georgia has the most diverse picture in terms of ethnic and religious composition. Following the fall of the USSR, this country experienced problems with its ethnic regions, the most prominent being the issue of breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Apart from these two problems, the Georgian state has also had issues with Adjarians, Armenians and *Borçalı* Turks. Although each of these issues has its own peculiarities and various factors that led to its development, an important role here can be attributed to the actions of Georgian political elites in the last years of Soviet Union and after independence. The late Soviet period was marked by the rise of nationalism throughout the republics and Georgia was no exception. The most popular slogan during this period was “Georgia for Georgians”. Actions of radical nationalist groups caused many problems in the country and resulted in alienation of ethnic minorities.^{45 46}

⁴⁵ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 318.

The *Borçalı* Turks were also affected by certain discriminative policies. Georgia's capital Tbilisi is surrounded by settlements that for centuries have been the homeland to Turks and this fact seems to worry the government. As previously mentioned, tens of thousands of *Borçalı* Turks were forced by different means to migrate to other countries, especially to Azerbaijan. Modern Georgian historiography maintains a view that the bulk of Turks only settled in the region in the 17th century, thus creating a belief that these people are not autochthonous. Moreover, this view is reflected into school textbooks.⁴⁷

Georgian national independence movement that began in 1988 brought about some discriminatory actions against *Borçalı* Turks. These events happened parallel to the mass deportations of Turks from Armenia and the growing tensions in Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, where the events had taken the form of armed conflict. As a result the Turks of *Borçalı* were, understandably, worried. Georgian non-governmental organizations “Saint Ilya Chavchavadzde”, “Shota Rustaveli” and “Merab Kostava” claimed that non-Georgians, including *Borçalı* Turks, were ‘strangers’ and advocated their deportation. Their actions did not meet any opposition from the elites. Houses of many Turks in *Borçalı* were demolished for being, allegedly, illegally built. Many Turks were fired from their workplaces for the lack of knowledge of Georgian language.⁴⁸

During the same period, the government settled in *Borçalı* many *Svans*, a Georgian ethnic sub-group, who had suffered from snow avalanches in their native *Svanetia*. Special funds acquired houses for them and built new settlements next to

⁴⁶ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union* (Ashgate, 2005), 41.

⁴⁷ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.* and International Crisis Group, *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁸ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

those of Turks. This resettlement resulted in the rise of tension as the newcomers started to be used as a threat against Turks. The act was seen by the latter as the government's attempt to increase the rate of Georgian population in the region. In addition to that, Borçalı Turks started to face other problems. For example, some limitations were applied during the passport registration of Turkic inhabitants of *Gardabani, Marneuli, Bolnisi* and *Dmanisi*. Young people who had completed their military service or received their education in other republics had some problems in getting record of place of residence (*propiska*).⁴⁹

NGOs encouraged Georgians to take active part in deportation of non-Georgians. The organizations blamed other nations for the troubles that the country had experienced and relations between ethnic groups worsened. The first Georgian president Zviad Gamsakhurdia in his interview for the newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossiya* stated:

Traitor government and traitor activists sold out the country, people, sold Georgian land piece by piece, directly to non-Georgian population. Non-Georgian population grows at a catastrophic rate. Our people may soon turn into minority on its own lands. We cannot let population from other republics to establish here. People come from all republics and take roots in Georgia, cultivate lands, build houses. You see, this is a death threat for us.⁵⁰

A similar view was expressed by a poet and a high-ranking officer of Georgia's Communist Youth Union (*KOMSOMOL*) Lasha Nadareishvili. He also said in an interview that the issue of demography was important and added: "The growth of Georgian population is very low, while that of some peoples settled on

⁴⁹ Ibrahimli, *Ibid*.

⁵⁰ *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, November 28, 1990.

this land is very high. We want Georgian people to form the majority because there is no other Georgia on earth”.⁵¹ Since 1989 Gamsakhurdia openly advocated the deportation of non-Georgians. During the public meeting in *Kakhetia* region he complained that the region had always been mono-national, with Georgians forming the majority. But communists, as he stated, ‘sold out’ lands to ‘foreigners’, so that ‘Tatars’, Legs (Lezgins), Armenians and Ossetians ‘rose up’ and turned into a threat for *Kakhetia*. He said that demands of ‘internationalists’ to provide all minorities with the chance to participate in elections were against the will of Georgian people. Gamsakhurdia continued: “The party called National Democrats, headed by Chanturia tells Tatars ‘stay, don’t leave’. They want non-Georgians to increase so they can easily deal with us. As a result, they already stopped. Neither Tatars nor Legs leave Georgia”.

He added that his party had the support of Georgian people and was able to deal with all traitors and deport all ‘sworn enemies’, the non-Georgians.^{52 53} These examples illustrate the dominant attitude among Georgian political figures and intelligentsia towards the national minorities. However, the Georgian Communist Party leadership did not take any step to normalize the situation. The army and police forces sent to the region instead of providing order harassed the *Borçalı* Turks. Georgian newspaper and magazine articles demanded from Turkic ‘guests’ to leave Georgia as soon as possible. The political elite did not oppose the nationalists and, in fact, assisted them with this passive attitude.⁵⁴ The Georgian

⁵¹ *Sovetskaya Gruzija*, August 24, 1992.

⁵² *Sabakh*, August 28 - September 10, 1992.

⁵³ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 325.

⁵⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, “Elite Transformation in Late-Soviet and Post-Soviet Transcaucasia, or What Happens When the Ruling Class Can’t Rule?,” in *Patterns in Post Soviet Leadership*, eds. Timothy J. Colton and Robert C. Tucker (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 155.

people, particularly the younger generation, were affected by this propaganda. In Tbilisi and other cities a political movement that adopted the slogan ‘Georgia for Georgians’ was formed. As a result of such attitudes, the country that struggled for independence began to face the problem of ethnic minorities and separatism, while trying to build a nation and a state. Gamsakhurdia and his political opponents used a negative rhetoric towards non-Georgians and blamed them with acting for the interests of Moscow.⁵⁵

Tensions started to show in *Borçalı*. In June 1989, Georgians who attended a meeting in *Kazreti* village, not far from *Bolnisi*, began to apply pressure on Turks of *Borçalı*. Forces of a paramilitary group called *Mkhedrioni*, comprised of nationalist and, partly, criminal elements headed by Jaba Ioseliani and Tengiz Kitovani entered the region, which led the Turks to believe they were would face similar events as those that happened to their brethren in Armenia. Many of the *Borçalı* Turks were fired from their jobs in industrial and construction sectors of *Borçalı*, as well as from party and district executive committees. Consequently, by the late autumn of 1989 no Turk was left in the administration posts of the region. The same was true of ordinary workers as well.^{56 57 58}

Some houses belonging to *Borçalı* Turks were blown. Bus routes and telephone connections were cut to prevent communication. Connections between the centers of *Dmanisi*, *Gardabani*, *Marneuli* and *Bolnisi* were cut and people had to travel great distances on foot. Some of the Georgian non-governmental

⁵⁵ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 324-5.

⁵⁶ Wheatley, *Ibid*, 45-6.

⁵⁷ Ibrahimli, *Ibid*.

⁵⁸ Irakly Areshidze, *Democracy and Autocracy in Eurasia: Georgia in Transition* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Pres, 2007), 30.

organizations created funds to buy houses from local Turks. Those who declined to sell their houses were subjected to various sanctions. In the districts of *Bolnisi* and *Dmanisi* this policy continued in villages as well and the inhabitants of villages, like *Muganlı*, *Saatlı*, *Garabulag*, *Gemerli*, *Salammelik* and some others, all from *Dmanisi* district had to migrate to Azerbaijan.⁵⁹

The Georgian government did not provide sufficient information about these events or declared them as actions of extremist groups. Furthermore, the abandoned villages, as well as recently built settlements, were repopulated by Georgians. However, the officials encountered some problems in repopulation attempts as there was not sufficient number of Georgian families. Many of the new settlements remained empty. As a result, only several families were settled in them, their names were changed and administrators of Georgian origin were assigned.⁶⁰

The situation worsened for Turks after Zviad Gamsakhurdia was elected president of Georgia. A presidential decree of July 16th, 1991 named “On the settlement of migratory processes in Georgian Republic” provided a legal basis for resettlement of minority groups, including *Borçalı* Turks. The decree stated that migration was a natural process and was to be carried out legally. It regulated the terms on which the houses and flats of emigrants and those who wished to emigrate were to be acquired and ordered that help be provided to the special state fund, which would be responsible for this.⁶¹ Following this, within several days in *Bolnisi* and *Dmanisi* were bought many thousands of houses and flats of *Borçalı* Turks who, allegedly, wished to leave or voluntarily demanded to resign from their

⁵⁹ Ibrahimli, *Azerbaijancy Gruzii*.

⁶⁰ Ibrahimli, *Ibid*.

⁶¹ *Gruziya*, July 20, 1991.

offices. Turks in Borçalı were also subjected to some criminal acts, which were performed by paramilitary and mafia groups, as well as by *Svans*. The lack of any serious response from the officials increased the worries of Turks. On the territories from *Gardabani* to *Dmanisi* many of them were killed, some others kidnapped and then ransomed.⁶²

By the autumn of 1991 the political situation in the country began to change in the disfavor of Gamsakhurdia. Some of his companions, like Tengiz Kitovani, turned into his rivals. President declared that the members of the paramilitary organization *Mkhedrioni* were criminals and directed from Russia. At the same time, he began to stress the historical friendship between the Georgians and the Turks. However, the tensions had gone too far, with many non-Georgians alienated and strong sense of regionalism cultivated in Georgians themselves.⁶³

Following the confrontation between the government and the opposition, Gamsakhurdia was replaced by Eduard Shevardnadze, a former first secretary of Communist Party of Georgia and an important figure in the country's previous political life. His return to power gave some hope to the ethnic minorities. Upon taking reigns, he, firstly set to settle the issues of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to improve the relationship with Azerbaijan, where people were concerned with the situation of their brethren in the neighboring country. So, in 1992, a delegation from Georgian parliament visited Baku. Although the delegation mentioned the importance of good relations between the two countries, their answers to the questions of Azerbaijani media hinted that they did not plan to introduce any radical changes to the situation of *Borçalı* Turks. The deputy from *Dmanisi*, in particular,

⁶² Ibrahimli, *Azerbaijancy Gruzii*

⁶³ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

stated that Georgia could give no guarantees regarding the Turkic population of the region and that officials had no right to keep those who wished to leave and were ready to help them.⁶⁴

No political organization, society or popular movement representing *Borçalı* Turks was registered before the elections. The appointment of the Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua and the Minister of Defense Tengiz Kitovani as candidates from Bolnisi and Dmanisi prevented any Turkic candidate from standing for election. The common explanations for the lack of *Borçalı* Turks in parliament usually stated that they were 'politically inactive'. Although this was true to some extent, still the results of polls were highly suspicious. In particular, it seemed very unlikely that Kitovani, whose men were responsible for many crimes against Turks in *Borçalı*, could have been democratically elected by them.

In February 1993, Eduard Shevardnadze and Tengiz Sigua visited Baku, where they signed a treaty with Azerbaijani side on friendship, cooperation and mutual security. The document stated that both sides took obligation to prevent any acts of violence based on national, ethnic or religious identity, to protect individuals or groups who were or had been subjects to pressure due to their ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious identities. The parties also guaranteed that minority groups were not to be subjected to assimilation against their will and allowed to freely express, protect and develop their cultures.⁶⁵ Despite this treaty, the excesses in *Borçalı* continued, partly because Shevardnadze still had to work with some of the popular figures of national liberation movement.

⁶⁴ *Sabakh*, February 10, 1993.

⁶⁵ *Gruziya*, February 9, 1993

Still, the new Georgian leader wished to bring some stability to the region for the sake of building good relationships with Azerbaijan but, at the same time, did not want to act with haste. So, he looked for a formula that would enable a policy satisfying his crew, Azerbaijan and the Turks in *Borçalı*. Such an opportunity was presented following the arrests of Tengiz Kitovani. However, as some researchers point out, there were no significant changes in terms of general attitude. It was only that after some form of stability was brought to *Borçalı*, the excessive methods used during Gamsakhurdia's period were replaced by milder and more refined ones.⁶⁶

Some of the actions taken during this period are shown as the manifestation of this new strategy. Among these was the change in toponymy of the region. The process of changing ancient Turkic place names started in 1940s and 1950s but gained pace in this period. Within several months 35 villages with population consisting exclusively of *Borçalı* Turks were given Georgian names. This process was presented by Georgian media as 'the triumph of historical truth'. Many petitions and demonstrations of protest on the part of *Borçalı* Turks passed unanswered. The officials did not take into consideration the decisions of village councils protesting against the renaming policy, claiming, at the same time, that Turks in the region were tolerant to the issue.⁶⁷

Petitions addressed to the presidents of Georgia and Azerbaijan also yielded no results. Georgian prime minister Tengiz Sigua, during his election campaign in the region, promised to *Borçalı* Turks that he would take care of the issue of returning the previous names to villages. He stated that officials had approached the

⁶⁶ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

issue irresponsibly and that no name would be changed without parliament's decision. Although, no name was, indeed, changed after this, the renamed villages were not returned their previous names either. Also, those who were responsible for the renaming were not discharged and the villages still retain two names each, an official Georgian and an informal old Turkic one.⁶⁸

Having had a negative experience with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgian government began to treat the issue of ethnic minorities with greater care. This time, however, Armenian special services attempted to destabilize the situation in *Borçalı* again with a series of provocations. Several terrorist acts were performed, mainly in *Marneuli* district. Several Turks were killed, some kidnapped. In August 1993, a bombing occurred at Marneuli market, killing and wounding many people. The act turned out to be the work of Armenian terrorists. The Armenian side wished to benefit from tensions between the Turks and the Georgians and to turn them into an armed conflict. Armenian media claimed that *Borçalı* Turks were responsible for kidnappings of Armenians in Georgia and for shooting and explosions on Georgian-Armenian border. The Georgian side, however, was aware of the actual state of affairs and the country's media wrote about Armenian provocations.⁶⁹

3.2 The Cooperation between Shevardnadze and Aliyev on the issue of *Borçalı* Turks (1993 – 2003)

Although *Borçalı* Turks have always denied Georgian version of their history, holding that their original homeland was in what is now the Republic of

⁶⁸ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

Azerbaijan and Iran, because of ethnic, cultural, geographical and historical links, they have seen Azerbaijan as their natural and primary patron. The events within Azerbaijan itself, particularly the problem of Armenian separatism in Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Republic and the displacement of Turkic population from Armenia, prevented the people and the elites from concentrating on the fate of their brethren in Georgia. The constant change of ruling elites only worsened the situation. This lack of interest from Azerbaijan also played part in the unpleasant events that occurred with Turks of *Borçalı*.

In 1989, a delegation was sent by the secretary general of Central Committee of Communist Party of Azerbaijan to *Borçalı*. The delegation investigated the situation in the region and decided that it became too serious to be concealed. However, due to the existing tensions with Armenia, the society and the government believed it would be unwise, at that point, to quarrel with Georgia as well. Consequently, despite the report of the delegation, the government did not approach the problem with care. Some preventive measures, however, were attempted. The Baku City Council stopped the exchange of households of *Borçalı* Turks with those in Baku. Those who wished to settle in the capital of Azerbaijan were subjected to certain limitations. Such measures, however, did not help the issue. Many of the migrants found different ways to bypass bureaucratic formalities and settled in Azerbaijan.⁷⁰

The visit of the first Azerbaijani president Ayaz Mutallibov to Georgia in 1991 and his meeting with Gamsakhurdia did not influence the situation in the region. In May 1992, Mutallibov was deposed and the power was taken up by the Popular Front, headed by Abulfaz Elçibey. Although this political movement was

⁷⁰ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

known for its Turkist ideas, the new government also took a careful stance in the issue of *Borçalı* because of the war with Armenia and hundreds of thousands of refugees, which created many problems in the country. The new elites also tried to conceal the situation from the society and denied the facts of mass migrations to Azerbaijan from Georgia. They made no demands from the neighboring country on this. The official media also did not mention anything, only some NGOs, as well as independent and oppositional media tried to attract attention to the problem.^{71 72}

Petitions addressed to the government stated that indifference would lead to unwanted consequences in the region. NGOs founded by Turks from *Borçalı* tried to inform the society. Members of intelligentsia from *Borçalı* met with Elçibey and informed him on some necessary measures to be negotiated with Eduard Shevardnadze. However, the president, was disappointed by the change of power in Georgia and, initially, demonstrated reluctance to meet with Shevardnadze because of the latter's former communist background. According to some sources, Elçibey agreed to Georgian president's visit to Baku only after several requests from him.⁷³

In an interview he said:

We have always been attentive towards Georgia and have always tried to maintain good relationships. We understand that due to the existing situation in the Caucasus, Georgia's position worsened. This is why we provide this country with fuel and other raw materials. As for the issue of Azerbaijanis living in Georgia, this issue is not a condition in negotiations. Because intervention in a country's internal affairs is not a civilized action. We only inquire the situation of Azerbaijanis during negotiations and express our

⁷¹ International Crisis Group, *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷² Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

⁷³ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

wishes to the country we build relations with to become a democratic country, giving guarantees to human rights and creating opportunity for the formation of cultural autonomy. Our partners accept these wishes.⁷⁴

As can be seen from this statement, the Azerbaijani government did not plan to take any serious step to ease the situation of *Borçalı* Turks. The Azerbaijani parliament spokesman Isa Gambar, however, stated that they were aware of the situation, had expressed their concerns to the Georgian side, that they would not allow for the repetition of ‘Armenian scenario’ and that soon the events would stop.⁷⁵ A great number of petitions forced the parliament to raise the issue of Turks of *Borçalı*. After discussions it was decided to examine the situation on site and to send a delegation composed of state and government organs to Georgia to make negotiations. Although the delegation was sent, the results of its visit were not as *Borçalı* Turks expected. Instead of performing a detailed analysis of the situation, it only visited the closest to Tbilisi village *Teodoreti* and then returned.

As a result, *Borçalı* Turks, as well as various political and social organizations in Azerbaijan were infuriated. Several organizations stated in a common manifesto that this useless visit had had a very negative impact on inhabitants of the regions where situation was most tense. They also added that if no serious measures were taken to ensure respect to human rights in the region, the historical responsibility for the consequences would be on the shoulders of Azerbaijani government. Despite this, there were some positive results. Firstly, it was shown that there were serious problems in the region and Georgian officials were responsible for this. Secondly, Georgian part was able to see that that its

⁷⁴ *Sabakh*, January 23 – February 10, 1993.

⁷⁵ *Sabakh*, September 12-25, 1992.

treatment of Turkish minority of *Borçalı* would be a factor in future development of relationships with Azerbaijan.⁷⁶

The government of Azerbaijan increased its interest in the *Borçalı* problem since the spring of 1993. There were even discussions about giving some *Borçalı* Turks positions in the government, with the hope that this would secure the votes of some 500.000-strong electorate who were originally from the region, as the popularity of Elçibey and his government was rapidly dropping. However, in the early June, 1993, Elçibey was replaced on his post by Heydar Aliyev. Just like in Georgia, a nationalist leadership was replaced by a former-communist figure.⁷⁷ Moreover, both leaders played important roles in the political life of the Soviet Union in its last decades. This fact contributed to the formation of closer cooperation between the two governments.

Both presidents wished to avoid additional problems when their countries were already involved in military conflicts. Georgia was struggling with Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatists. So, Shevardnadze, with the help of Aliyev, attempted to restore order in *Borçalı*. In cooperation with Azerbaijani side, Georgian officials disarmed criminal groups in the region. Many criminals were arrested and armed groups, responsible for murder, pillage and plunder, as well as kidnapping and torturing, destroyed. However, since former men of Gamsakhurdia also took part in these operations, some of the criminals still managed to escape responsibility. Both in Georgia and in Azerbaijan remained some oppositional forces that had financial and military power. The leaders also cooperated against

⁷⁶ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Suny, "Elite Transformation in Late-Soviet and Post-Soviet Transcaucasia, 152, 158.

these groups and, soon, they were eliminated. As a result, the power of the new leaders was secured.^{78 79}

Later, the partnership between the countries was strengthened by international economic projects concerned with oil and use of their territories as transport corridor. The tense atmosphere in *Borçalı* was gone and order restored. Communication in the region and on Georgian-Azerbaijani border was restored. Bus routes from Baku to most of the Georgian villages populated by *Borçalı* Turks were organized. Despite these positive developments, it cannot be stated that the problems of Turks in the region ceased completely.

From this period, they met with problems in two important aspects, in education and in agriculture that formed the basis of production in the region and was the main source of income for the population. The basis for these problems, which are the most important for them now, was laid in this period. Aliyev did not make interventions on this issue, obviously seeing what had been done for the restoration of order, the election of six Turks in Georgian parliament and strengthening of relationships sufficient. The effects of close cooperation between Georgia and Azerbaijan in energy transfer projects on Turks of *Borçalı* are controversial. Azerbaijani government firmly recommended them to support Georgian officials during land privatization process. The pressure from Baku also prevents them from openly manifesting their political views. In a sense, their loyalty

⁷⁸ Wheatley, *Ibid.*, 68-69.

⁷⁹ Ibrahimli, *Azerbaijancy Gruzii*.

towards the Georgian republic is highly dependent on the good relationship between the two countries.^{80 81}

3.3 The impact of National-Democratic movement in Georgia on *Borçalı* Turks and their current problems

Not only the issues of education and distribution of lands on equal basis but also the issues of returning of migrants, restoring them in their former workplaces, restoring the old village names were not discussed during the period of Shevardnadze's staying in power. Only very small number of *Borçalı* Turks returned to their homes and a small number taken as deputies in secondary political matters. On the large scale, the problems continued. The situation became apparent during the next change of government. People's demands of land, job, restoration of village names and opportunities for education of children started to show again. In 2002, Georgia once again went through tough times as the "National movement" began its activity. One of its leaders was Mihail Saakashvili.

When Saakashvili arrived in *Borçalı*, during parliament elections campaign in November 2003, in the village of *Fahralı* a clash occurred between the members of the "National Movement" and the supporters of the current president since Saakashvili was known to have anti-Turkish attitudes. However, this was not the only reason of the incident. The supporters of Shevardnadze in local administration also played a big role in organizing opposition. Before the elections, NGO of

⁸⁰ Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, *Ethnic-Confessional Groups and Challenges to Civic Integration in Georgia: Azeri, Javakheti Armenian and Muslim Meskhetian Communities*, 2002 (Tbilisi), 11.

⁸¹ Ibrahimli, *Azerbaijancy Gruzii*.

Borçalı Turks, named Geyrat stated that Saakashvili was known among their people for his radical nationalism and pro-Armenian position.⁸²

Despite this, during the parliament elections held in May 2004, Mihail Saakashvili received about 76 percent of votes in *Borçalı*, according to Georgian experts. Organizations of *Borçalı* Turks, however, stated that the actual figure was no more than 30-40 percent. Still, even this number, if true, can be considered significant. Such degree of support can be explained by various reasons. Firstly, government of Azerbaijan openly supported Shevardnadze. Several members of Azerbaijani parliament, originally from *Borçalı* and unpopular among the region's population, together with Jalal Aliyev, brother of Azerbaijani president came to the region and called for support for Shevardnadze. This caused reverse reaction. Secondly, news of Azerbaijani side's sending material and other forms of aid to Shevardnadze's proponents, which was confiscated by Georgian customs, put *Borçalı* Turks in a compromising situation. Many felt obliged to vote for the "National Movement" in order not to appear as opponents of democratic movement. Thirdly, Saakashvili's democratic rhetoric and promises played part in influencing Turks in the region. The fourth reason was the support of Saakashvili by the opposition in Azerbaijan, whose press also affected the choice in *Borçalı*.⁸³

After coming to power, the new government started to follow towards *Borçalı* Turks policies that were somewhere in between of those of Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze periods. Just like in time of Gamsakhurdia, special troops are sent to the region and police performs arrests of locals on different reasons. Many of the arrested are politically active figures. In large villages, special forces perform

⁸² *Ekho*, October 3, 2003.

⁸³ Ibrahimli, *Ibid*.

raids, allegedly, to fight smugglers and drug trafficking. According to their reports, the police entered their houses, confiscated goods for sale, arrested them and shot the ones they found suspicious. The population is terrified by these actions and they organize demonstrations of protest. They state that if the officials want to fight smuggling they should do this on the border and not in the villages and in the houses. It is also noteworthy that such operations are undertaken exclusively in Turkic villages of *Borçalı*.^{84 85 86}

Borçalı Turks believe that by sending troops to villages the government wishes to create unbearable conditions and force them to leave while arrests of political activists weaken their chances of resisting. In their view, the officials' struggle against smuggling is actually aimed at cutting everyday income of people involved in small business and forcing them to look for income elsewhere. The former mayor of *Gardabani* Fazil Aliyev, who emigrated during Saakashvili's period, stated that Turks from *Borçalı* doing small business in Georgia are not allowed to bring goods to the country and this is officially called 'struggle with smuggling'. In contrast, Armenians smuggle goods that make up almost 50 percent of the Georgia 's economy. However, so far, no Armenian has been arrested for this. Aliyev also comments the drug trafficking raids. According to him, certain structures in Georgia sell narcotics via their agents to villages in *Borçalı* and then arrest Turks. This way, they both get a good income and create an image of fighting drug trafficking.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁵ International Crisis Group, *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁶ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Borçalının Sesi*, September 10-16, 2005.

The feelings of alienation and exclusion among Turks in *Borçalı* are strengthened by economic problems, like the high rate of unemployment, lack of industrial production, insufficiently financed agriculture and damaged infrastructure that are characteristic of all regions of Georgia. These and the lack of confidence about their future cause their migrations to Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey. The hopes of Turkic population of *Borçalı* that the government of Saakashvili would improve their situation turned out to be vain. Demonstrations of protest were organized against distribution of farming lands on unequal basis during privatization. Turks claim that in this process Georgians were put in a privileged situation and the lands were given to persons in close relationship with local administration and clan leaders. The government tends to contact with moderate representatives of *Borçalı* Turks, ignoring more radical ones, who are more popular among the local population.

Another factor contributing to the feeling of estrangement on the part of *Borçalı* Turks is the low level of participation in the political life of Georgia. They believe the government discriminates against them by appointing, exclusively, ethnic Georgians on the most important posts. The most prominent NGO, representing *Borçalı* Turks is ‘Geyrat’, which has lost its previous power, having internal dissonances and financial problems. Many local community leaders were once its members. No NGO in the region is capable of mobilizing significant number of people. No more than 10 out of 30 organizations are working on regular basis.^{88 89 90}

⁸⁸ International Crisis Group, *Ibid.*, 6, 11, 22.

⁸⁹ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, 151-2.

⁹⁰ Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, *Ethnic-Confessional Groups and Challenges to Civic Integration in Georgia*, 13-14.

Still, both governmental institutions and NGOs of Azerbaijan express their dissatisfaction with Georgia's treatment of *Borçalı* Turks. Some NGOs and political figures called for official warning to the neighboring state that if situation continued unchanged, bilateral relations would be affected. Such a position was stated by Azerbaijani parliament upon the murder of a Turk in *Marneuli* in 2004. However, the program presented by State Committee for the Affairs of Azerbaijanis Living Abroad for improving the situation in the region in economic, educational, cultural and other spheres was not met with interest from the Georgian side.⁹¹

Another factor contributing to the feeling of exclusion of *Borçalı* Turks from the Georgian society is the language barrier. In Soviet period, there was no need for minorities in Georgia to speak Georgian, as the common language of communication was Russian. The situation was almost the same in time of Shevardnadze but changed with the appearance of 'National Movement'. During his visit to *Borçalı* in 2004, Saakashvili stressed the importance of learning Georgian language by the local Turks. This, according to him, would help their children to have equal opportunities and advance into state structures. Despite being well integrated into Georgia economically, in social and educational issues *Borçalı* Turks rely, mostly, on Azerbaijan. However, as many of them report, even those fluent in Georgian language, still, have little chances of getting job in administrative organs. Among the positive developments of Saakashvili's period they point to reduced level of corruption and increase in public constructions, like schools or sports facilities.⁹² In spite of all difficulties, however, Turks of *Borçalı* continue to stick to their territory in Georgia and preserve their ethnic identity. All of the above

⁹¹ International Crisis Group, *Ibid.*, 26-28.

⁹² International Crisis Group, *Ibid*, 10, 28-29.

mentioned factors and discriminatory policies of the Georgian government contribute to the feeling of alienation of *Borçalı* Turks from the Georgian society, while also strengthening their ethnic identification, and render difficult their attachment to Georgian state.

CHAPTER 4.
AZERBAIJANI AND TURKISH VERSIONS ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF
***BORÇALI* TURKS, AND THE CHALLENGE OF GEORGIAN VERSION**

History and historiography have always been closely related to politics. The portrayal of history was both shaped by politics and also served them. This is very well exemplified in the case of Turks of *Borçali*. There is a drastic difference in views on the history of this people between modern Georgian sources and Azerbaijani and Turkish ones. Just like the origins of many other Turkic peoples living in states where they are not a titular nationality, the origins of *Borçali* Turks and their connection to the lands they live on have been a matter of debates.

One of the common problems is that, usually, Turkic peoples are presented in official historiography as either alien elements or Turkified ‘natives’. Such claims, often, rest on certain perceptions related to the history of Turks in general. Although, many of these views were effectively proved wrong by various scholars in different times, yet they continue to enjoy popularity in the academia of some countries. Georgia can be viewed as one of the examples. The reason for this is that these perspectives serve certain doctrines and thus are attractive to officials and related scholars, despite the changes in scholarly views.

Consequently, anyone attempting to describe the history of a particular Turkic group would have to address the said some of the misconceptions first. Indeed, in some cases, history of each such group is better understood when viewed

together with Turkic history in general. In the case of *Borçalı* Turks, we see that modern Georgian historiography states that their ancestors first appeared in Georgia during the *Seljuk* conquests and that the region was populated on large scale only in the 17th century during the reign of Persian Shah Abbas I. This view was also popular in Soviet period and is now reflected in schoolbooks. In some of these, it is said that most of the Turks of *Borçalı* are descendants of the nomadic tribe named *Borçalı*, resettled there by Shah Abbas, while the rest are descendants of *Mugals* that settled there much later.

Such statements are based on certain misconceptions concerning Turkic history in western and Russian/Soviet historiography. There are different reasons for this. Both in Tsarist Russia and in the Soviet Union, Turkic history was a strictly doctrinal issue. The Imperial and Communist officials were interested in maintaining a backward, barbaric and aggressive image of Turks, which made the Russian conquest and domination of them appear legitimate and just. The alleged threat of 'Pan-Turkism' was used as an excuse to oppose any 'heretics' who attempted to provide a more objective picture. At the same time everything was done to prevent the identification of Turks with each other.

Although after the fall of USSR the enforcement of these restrictions disappeared, still many scholars were reluctant to change their view of the issue. The western approach is in many respects similar to Tsarist Russian and Soviet ones. As a result, it becomes necessary to also address those misconceptions when describing history of a particular Turkic people. Of course, this paper cannot cover all stereotypes concerning the entire history of Turks, nor does it have such a purpose. However, certain aspects that can provide help in better understanding of the problem will be highlighted.

4.1 The History of *Borçalı* Turks: the Azerbaijani and Turkish

Versions

4.1.1 The Scythian-Turkic connection according to various sources

Since there is a lot of evidence coming from different sources about the prominent role of the peoples known as *Scythians* in the Caucasus, including its southern part, and their role in the ethnogenesis of Turkic peoples, it is vital to briefly examine different versions of their origins, before proceeding to the position of Azerbaijani and Turkish scholars. According to some ancient sources, in the early 7th century B.C. *Scythians* moved to the lands of certain *Cimmerians*. The latter were forced to move to the Southern Caucasus where the *Scythians* followed them again. Among the lands where these people moved to was the territory of present-day Azerbaijan and *Borçalı* (*Gazakh*, *Borçalı*, *Calaloglu*). *Cimmerians* occupied some zones that are currently in Georgia and close to the border with Azerbaijan, like *Gori*, *Sığnakh*, *Tbilisi*, *Başkeçid* and others. While larger part of them moved west, a small portion settled in the mentioned territories. The *Scythians* also occupied these lands as well as the North Azerbaijan.⁹³

Many western, Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet scholars have considered peoples known as *Cimmerians*, *Scythians*, *Sarmatians*, *Alans* or *As* the ancestors of Turks. However, traditional western and Russian historiographies view them as Indo-Europeans, precisely Indo-Iranians and consider Turks ethnical descendants of

⁹³ Musa Nebioğlu and Memmed Sarvan, *Borçalı ve qonşu bölgelerdeki türklerin tarixi*, <http://www.borchali.net/?s=tarixi> (accessed February 5, 2009).

Huns, not accepting their connection with other peoples.⁹⁴ These peoples are recorded by various sources, the most detailed and reliable being Herodotus' 'Histories' written in the 5th century B.C.⁹⁵ From these sources it is apparent that the ethnonym *Scyth* was used in two meanings, a narrow and a broad one. The narrow meaning referred to the leading tribe, while the broad one described all tribes of this confederation. Later, it was used, mostly, in broad sense, to denote different peoples with different ethnonyms. Sources report the so-called '*royal Scythians*', '*ploughman Scythians*', '*farmer Scythians*', '*nomad Scythians*'.⁹⁶

The question of ethnic origins of *Scythians* has concerned many scholars in various periods. Throughout 17th – 19th centuries many Russian and Western scholars, like Lyzlov, Tatishev, Suhm and others stated in their works that these peoples were multi-ethnic, the majority being the ancestors of Turkic peoples who lived on the same lands in their era. However, in 19th century some German scholars, like Müllenhoff, started to express the opinion of Iranian origins of *Scythians*, based mostly on some common words in *Scythian* and Persian languages and concluded that the majority of *Scythians* were Iranian speakers, that Iranians lived much further north of Iran and nowadays their remnants are the Ossetians.⁹⁷ This view gained popularity and became dominant in Western and Russian historiography.

Turcologists, however, have held that language alone is not sufficient to determine the ethnicity and noted that the bulk of these peoples were Turks, showing as evidence the linguistic, ethnological, mythological and archaeological

⁹⁴ Mirfatyh Z. Zakiyev, *Proiskhojdenie Tyurkov i Tatar* (Moscow: Insan, 2003), 26-27.

⁹⁵ Zakiyev, *Ibid.*, 125.

⁹⁶ Zakiyev, *Ibid.*, 126.

⁹⁷ Zakiyev, *Ibid.*, 134-6.

data and the primary sources. Moreover, they state, ancient sources clearly show that *Scythians* and *Sarmatians* were multi-lingual and there is no evidence of Iranian language in the toponymy of the regions where they lived.⁹⁸ Additionally, detailed analysis showed that many of the *Scythian* words classified as Iranian by Iranists may, in fact, be better etymologized using the Turkic languages. Many *Scythian* ethnonyms mentioned by ancient sources are also easily etymologized on the basis of Turkic languages.⁹⁹

Miziyev listed fifteen archaeological and ethnological parallels between *Scythians* and Turks, among which are the method of milking mares, the method of cooking meat in animal stomach, *Scythian* method of fortune-telling, the method of *Kurgan* forming, funeral ritual and others. All of these, he notes, remain in the traditional culture of Turco-Mongol peoples.¹⁰⁰

Many ancient and early medieval authors frequently associated *Scythians* and *Sarmatians* with Turkic peoples. Yelnitsky who examined these materials, concluded that there was a direct ethnic connection between *Uds* of 3rd millennium B.C., the peoples named *Uz*, *Dai*, *Se*, *Unu*, recorded in 2nd-1st millennia B.C. and *Sais* (Sakas) and *Huns*.¹⁰¹ Many of the primary sources associate *Scythians* especially with *Huns*.

Nebioğlu and Sarvan state that after *Cimmerians* (*Kemers*) and *Scythians* arrived in the mentioned regions in 652 B.C., their contacts with local Turkic and other peoples and assimilation of the latter started a new phase in the ethnic

⁹⁸ Kazi T. Laypanov and Ismail M. Miziyev, *O Proiskhojdenii Turkskih Narodov* (Cherkessk, 1993), <http://real-alania.narod.ru/alanialand/history/page2.htm> (accessed January 29, 2009) and (Zakiyev 2003, 140-141).

⁹⁹ Laypanov and Miziyev, *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Ismail M. Miziyev, *Istoriya ryadom* (Nalchik, 1990), 66-71.

¹⁰¹ Lev A. Yelnitsky, *Skifiya Evraziiskikh stepei: Istoriko-arkheologicheskii ocherk* (Novosibirsk, 1977), 4.

processes of different Turkic peoples in Azerbaijan.¹⁰² They also note that during the same period, in the process of consolidation, many places of the region were given names with various forms of *şın, şin, şen, sin, li, lu*, which are still preserved today. Examples are *Gemerli, Şindiller, Ormeşen, Tekeli* and others.¹⁰³

4.1.2 History of Turks in Azerbaijan according to Various Sources

While the modern Georgian scholars view the Turks in modern Georgia and some neighboring areas as an alien element, the works of Azerbaijani and Turkish researchers provide a totally different perspective. Below will be listed different aspects that are related to the origins of the Turkic population of *Borçalı*.

For a better understanding of the issue, it is necessary to view the history of *Borçalı* Turks as a part of history of Turks in the Caucasus in general. Due to their close ethnic and cultural ties to the Turks of Azerbaijan, the approaches to the history of the latter also need to be mentioned. The concept of history of Azerbaijani people, developed during the Soviet era was in its basic outline as follows: 1. There were no Turks in Azerbaijan B.C.; 2. Various Turkic tribes started to settle there compactly in 2nd-4th centuries A.D.; 3. In the 7th century the Arab invaders Islamicized the population on the plains, not doing so to highland peoples, and united the two parts of the country (*Caucasian Albania* and *Atropatene*) under the same ideology; 4. In the 11th century arrived the *Seljuks* who terminated the

¹⁰² Nebioğlu and Sarvan, *Ibid*.

¹⁰³ Nebioğlu and Sarvan, *Ibid*.

Turkification of the locals, while the loss of the latter's ethnicity lasted for nearly 1200 years.¹⁰⁴

The presence of Turks in the region since the ancient times was denied. Nonetheless, not all scholars shared this view. In 1965, a prominent Azerbaijani scholar Ziya Bunyatov noted that thinking that Turkification took place in 11th-12th centuries would be misleading, as well as to consider Turks a non-original element in Azerbaijan. In 1986-89 Y. Yusifov published articles where he provided the proofs of presence of Turkic tribes in Azerbaijan in cuneiform documents dating since the 3rd millennium B.C. These findings were later confirmed by M.T. Zehtabi.¹⁰⁵ While the opponents of this view agree that the peoples of two states in what is now Azerbaijan, *Albania* and *Atropatene* are among the ancestors of Azerbaijanis, they hold that they were of Turkic descent. This is important for our purpose as well, since the region of *Borçalı* was once a part of *Caucasian Albania*. This will be discussed in detail below.

4.1.3 Alan (As) and Alban connection with Turks

As said before, it is important also to examine the origins of people, known as *Albans*, that comprised the population of the so-called *Caucasian Albania* (hereafter simply *Albania*) and their connection with the *Alans* (or *As*) mentioned by many sources, since it is vital in examining the origins of Azerbaijani Turks and Turks of *Borçalı*. *As* is considered by some Turcologists, like Zakiyev, Laypanov, Miziyev and others to be one of the oldest Turkic ethnonyms and a common name,

¹⁰⁴ Alekperov, "Kavkazskaya Albaniya – Tyurkskiy Narod i Tyurkskaya Istoriya," *Zerkalo*, April 7, 2007, <http://www.zerkalo.az/rubric.php?id=16220&dd=14&mo=4&yr=2007> (accessed February 5, 2009).

¹⁰⁵ Alekperov, *Ibid*.

while *Alans* could have been one of the tribes of the *As* who gained overlordship over others spreading their name to all of them.¹⁰⁶ That Turks had such a tradition was noted by primary sources, as well as many scholars.^{107 108}

Just like *Scythians* and *Sarmatians*, *Alans* are also considered Iranian by Indo-Iranists, again on the alleged similarity of languages. Scholars like Miller and Abayev attempted to prove that *Alans* spoke an Iranian language by deciphering some preserved examples of *Alan* speech on the basis of Ossetian language, since Ossetians are considered by Iranists to be their descendants. To do this, they performed different operations, like adding letters to the text and changing their places. However, even after such corrections they failed to find any meaningful text. Moreover, Turcologists who studied these texts, noted that they contain many clearly Turkish words and can be easily read without any manipulations and prove that these people spoke a Turkic language.^{109 110} Along with that, just like in the case with *Scythians* and *Sarmatians*, there are many ethnographical features and reports of primary sources that point to the similarity of *Alans* to Turks, and not to Iranians.¹¹¹

As mentioned above, many researchers of the ethno-genesis of Azerbaijani people have based their approach on the belief that Turks were latecomers and not an autochthonous element in the Caucasus region. Firstly, it was held that their first coming was with *Seljuks* in the 11th century. Then this position changed and *Huns*

¹⁰⁶ Zakiyev, *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁰⁷ Murad Hadji, *Aziatskaya Evropa* (Moscow: AST, 2006), 659.

¹⁰⁸ Zakiyev, *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰⁹ Zakiyev, *Ibid.*, 169-70.

¹¹⁰ Laypanov and Miziyev, *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Laypanov and Miziyev, *Ibid.*

were declared the first Turkic element in the region, dating from the 4th century A.D. Later, some scholars pointed to the 1st century A.D. as the date of Turks' appearance in these lands.¹¹² However, many researchers, especially in the post-Soviet period, have opposed these views.

Basically there are two versions of the origins of *Albans* among Azerbaijani and other scholars. The first one, held by scholars who considered language the most important factor in ethnicity, claims that Albans spoke a language belonging to the North-Caucasian (*Nakho-Daghestani*) group and, thus, were related to the so-called Caucasian peoples, while the holders of the other provided various evidence, including linguistic one, of their Turkic descent. The supporters of the former version proposed that *Albanian* ethnic community formed as a result of consolidation of different 'native Caucasian' tribes who were close in terms of language and culture. An ancient Greek geographer Strabo mentioned that the total number of *Albanian* tribes was twenty-six. Some of these were named *Albans*, *Legi*, *Gels*, *Gargars* and others. It must be noted that there is no evidence that these tribes belonged to North-Caucasian language speakers, since no source states that. The same researchers believed that *Gargars* mentioned by an *Albanian* historian *Moses of Kagankat* were North-Caucasians because he wrote that they had a guttural pronunciation, although the author himself did not view them as such. However, Alekperov, one of the researchers of the issue, notes that those scholars failed to realize that some of the mentioned peoples were essentially the same. He also states that the said researchers have ignored all reports of Armenian historian Moses of Khoren (5th century A.D.), where he tells about the presence of Turks in Caucasus in the centuries B.C. and are reluctant to enter any discussion with the scholars who

¹¹² Alekperov, *Ibid.*

provide the evidence for Turkic origins of *Albans* and state that Turks were a native element in the region.¹¹³

The opponents of the concept of Turkification have noted that, firstly, it is not clear why only *Albans* and *Atropatenians* were Turkified. The same processes affected other peoples as well, such as Persians, *Talyshs*, Armenians and others that have lived in the region. Still, those peoples have retained their ethnic identities. Secondly, they hold, it is highly improbable that, allegedly, autochthonous Iranian and Caucasian speakers could have so easily abandoned their culture while Turks who, supposedly, had a low level of cultural development adopted the culture of the locals and produced many prominent figures in the world culture. Thirdly, they ask, why did *Albans* who, allegedly, spoke a Caucasian dialect and, supposedly again, Irano-lingual *Atropatenians* not join the peoples they were related to but, instead, joined Turks and adopted their language because up to this day Caucasian peoples live in many villages in Azerbaijan and have all conditions proposed by proponents of Turkification theory, yet have preserved their identities.^{114 115}

Another argument of the scholars proposing Turkification is that Azerbaijani Turks have Caucasoid features, while ‘original’ Turks, they believe, were Mongoloid. Special studies, however, have shown that ancient Turks were both Mongoloid and Caucasoid in appearance since the earliest periods, with the latter prevailing.¹¹⁶ So, the lack of Mongoloid features cannot be used as an argument against Turkic origins. In addition to that, physical anthropologists recorded the

¹¹³ Quoted in Alekperov, *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Alekperov, *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Istoriya Azerbaidjana: Obzor Kontseptsii*, <http://www.karabakh-doc.azerall.info/ru/azerpeople/ap013.htm>

¹¹⁶ Laypanov and Miziyeu, *Ibid.*; Zakiyev, *Ibid.*, 34; Alekperov, *Ibid.*

dominance of certain features characteristic of *Oğuz* Turks in the region before those of other peoples. Some examples from history show that when a relatively small group conquered another land with a different population, language and culture, it was always the conquerors that were assimilated.¹¹⁷

The claim that Arabs Islamicized only the inhabitants of plains has also been criticized by the opponents of Turkification theory. There are some minor Caucasian and Iranian-speaking peoples living in highland regions of Azerbaijan and all of them were converted into Islam. The *Udins*, (a *Nakho-Daghestani* people, claimed to be the descendants of *Albans*) however, despite living among Muslim Turks, were neither Islamicized nor Turkified.

As already mentioned, the information provided by *Moses of Kagankat* does not support the idea of *Nakho-Daghestani* origins of *Albans*. He wrote that their ancestor was named *Arran* and was of *Scythian* descent (*Sisak*). Above were discussed two versions of *Scythians*' origins, Iranian and Turkic, the latter being supported by more evidence. There is, however, no version of their being *Nakho-Daghestani*. It must be noted that the word *Alban* is not available in either Caucasian or Iranian languages. Nor is it etymologized in them.¹¹⁸

Alekperov and Gorkhmazoglu state that the term *Ud* is not related only to modern *Udins*. The ethno-toponym *Uti/Udi* was present not only in *Caucasian Albania* but also in the North Caucasus and in Siberia. Pliny mentioned *Udins* as a *Scythian* tribe. In the *Shahseven* province of Iran lived a Turkic tribe *Udulu*. After the division of Azerbaijan between Russia and Iran in the 19th century, they migrated to the north and founded many villages there as well as in *Daghestan*. In

¹¹⁷ Alekperov, *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Alekperov, *Ibid.*

the 17th century Siberia lived Turkic tribes named *Udin*. Caucasian-speaking peoples are not known to have ever ventured as far as Siberia.¹¹⁹ It is highly unlikely that Turks, who haven't so far assimilated the non-numerous North Caucasians living side-by-side with them, could have done so to their supposed ancestors living in all of *Arran*.¹²⁰

F. Ağasioğlu writes that Northern Azerbaijan, including a part of present-day *Daghestan* was known under different names. It was called *Albania* in Greek and Roman sources since 4th century B.C. until the Arab conquest. During and after the Islamicization, the Armenian sources called it *Aghvan*, while Arab and Georgian ones *Arran*, *Rani*. After the partitioning of *Saka-Cimmerian* kingdom in the 4th century B.C., the tribes living to the north of river Araks, totaling 26, united under the strongest tribe named *Alban* and formed a single kingdom. Its territories included modern *Borçalı*, *Irevan (Yerevan)*, *Şeki*, *Karabakh* and *Nakhchivan*.¹²¹

As mentioned above, the etymology of the term *Alban* was not found in the languages of *Nakho-Daghestani* group. Turkic onomastics, however, enable its etymologizing on Turkic basis. During the Soviet era some scholars believed that the term was derived from Turkic word *Alb/Alp* (champion warrior).¹²² The supporters of the version of Turkic origins of this people provide many different facts. For instance, tribes named *Alban* exist up to this day among Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Karakalpaks and Turkmens. In Kazakhstan this tribe is known since the ancient times. These tribes used the same *tamga* (stamp) and all of them

¹¹⁹ Nail Gorkhmazoglu, "K Peresmotru Konceptii o 'Kavkazoyazychnosti' Alban", <http://karabakh-doc.azerall.info/ru/turkologiya/trk016.htm> (accessed February 6, 2009).

¹²⁰ Alekperov, *Ibid*.

¹²¹ Firudin Ağasioğlu, "K Interpretacii Etnotoponima 'Alban/Alvan/Agvan'", <http://karabakh-doc.azerall.info/ru/azerpeople/ap011.htm> (accessed February 6, 2009).

¹²² Ağasioğlu, *Ibid*.

speak a Turkic dialect. Moreover, they speak not the dialect of the country they live in but their own, particular one.

Moses of Kagankat stated that *Albans* were descended from *Ketarians/Keturians*. As J. McCarty believes, *Ketars/Keturs/Katiars/Kutiars* are none else than *Kutigurs* (*wolf Oğuz*) who were a part of *Bulgar-Oğuz* tribal confederation. The ancient Armenian chronicles and *The History of Albans* mention *Barsils, Huns, Bulgars, Khazars* and other Turkic peoples as ‘northerners’. *Moses of Kagankat* also mentions a *Hunnish* tribe *haluandur*, which, as Gorkhmazoglu states, is an Armenified version of *Aluan/Alban*¹²³ (*The History of Albans* exists in Armenian translation, which is believed by experts to be a somewhat distorted version of the original, which is lost.) Zakiyev also believes it is possible that the ancestors of Azerbaijanis, named *Aluan* lived in *Scytho-Sarmatian* period in the region. In accordance with Turkic phonetic rules, the term could take other forms: *Alban, Alvan, Alwan, Alan*.¹²⁴ Some of the male names of medieval *Albania* were also Turkic: *Oroys, Zober, Urnair, Arbatair, Davdag, Kazan*, etc. The modern inhabitants of Albanian cities and places speak Turkic and there is no evidence that they have ever spoken a different idiom. It is also noteworthy that in many Turkic epic tales champions are named *Alban, Alban-Er, Albanchas*.¹²⁵ Different forms of the term are used up to this day in Turkic onomastics.¹²⁶

¹²³ Gorkhmazoglu, *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Zakiyev, *Ibid.*, 177.

¹²⁵ Gorkhmazoglu, *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Ağasioğlu, *Ibid.*

4.1.4 Evidence for the Turkic presence in Georgia

Among the evidence of ancient presence of Turks in what is nowadays Georgia scholars point to the toponymy, particularly of the region where Turks live today. Sources of the 5th-7th centuries mention a particular region of *Albania*, known as *Gardman* or *Girdman*, which corresponds to modern northwest Azerbaijan and southeast Georgia. It roughly covered the districts of *Agstafa*, *Gazakh* and *Borçalı*. The name of the province is preserved today as *Gardaban* (*Garayazı*). Sarvan and Nebioğlu believe the name was given by the *Scythians*, who came from Central Asia because some early medieval oriental sources tell about a province there named *Gardman* and inhabited by *Scythians*. The name of *Cimmerians* (or *Kemers*) and *Sadaks* can be seen nowadays in the names of such settlements as *Kemerli* (in *Gardabani* district), *Gemerli* (in *Başkeçid*) and *Sadakhli*. There are many other toponyms in the region, reflecting different Turkic ethnonyms, like *Kemer*, *Sadak*, *Kypchak*, *Oğuz* and others.¹²⁷

In the 6th century, latest, *Kypchak* tribes arrived in *Albania* and settled mostly in *Gazakh-Borçalı* region. As a result of coming of new Turkic tribes, some new tribe names are recorded, like *Kebirli*, *Ulaşlı*, *Garaçorlu*, *Bozallar*. Their names can still be traced in the names of some villages, like *Ulaşlı*, *Gara-çöp* and others.¹²⁸ A medieval Arab author Yaqut al-Hamavi wrote that *Borçalı* was a province in *Arran*. Gardizi, another Arab chronicler named the region *Börüçölü* meaning ‘steppe of wolves’, while Rashid-ad-din considered the term both a toponym and an ethnonym. The name of the province in Georgian sources is *Gurdis*

¹²⁷ Nebioğlu and Sarvan, *Ibid* .

¹²⁸ Nebioğlu and Sarvan, *Ibid*.

khevi (valley of wolves), while Persians named it *Gordman* (the land of wolf people).¹²⁹

Moses of Kagankat, as well as modern Turkish scholars Togan and Kırzioğlu, noted that *Borçalı* was derived from the name of *Barsils*, a Turkic tribe. Some primary sources inform that around the turn of the 1st-2nd centuries two groups, named *Barsils* and *Khazars* performed raids in the region. Togan noted that certain *Borusks*, mentioned by Ptolemy in the mid-2nd century, were a branch of *Bulgars* known as *Boroç*, *Boroçoğlu*, *Borçalı*.¹³⁰ He also stated that the same tribe was named by Arab sources *Barsula*, *Al-Borşaliye* or *Al-Borsul*, while Byzantine sources called it *Baselia* or *Barsla*. The people called in *Volga-Bulgar* tales *Baraç* and a branch of *Kypchaks*, *Boroç-oğlu* are also considered by him to be the same people.¹³¹ Kırzioğlu expresses a total agreement with Togan here.¹³² *Barsils* performed another raid in the late 3rd or early 4th century and, reportedly, spread until *Erzurum*, *Muş* and *Karabakh* and conquered *Kartel* (Georgia).¹³³

İbrahimli also notes that apart from Persian and Arab sources, it is the Georgian ones that are in conflict with the claims of modern historians of Georgia concerning the history of Turks in this country. One of these sources, *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (the life of *Kartli*) starts its description from the 8th century and tells about the relationship between *Khazars* and *Kartli* (Georgians), the fall of Sassanian Empire and the foundation of Emirate of Tiflis. In the beginning of another

¹²⁹ İbrahimli, *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ A. Zeki Velidi Togan, *Umumi Türk Tarihine giriş*, vol 1. (Istanbul, 1970), 456.

¹³¹ Togan, *Ibid.*, 456.

¹³² M. Fahrettin Kırzioğlu, *Karapapaklar: Borçalı-Kazak Uruğu'nun Kür-Aras Boylarındaki 1800 Yılına Bir Bakış* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1972), 3.

¹³³ Kırzioğlu, *Ibid.*, 1972, 3.

chronicle, *Moktsevai Kartlisai* (the conversion of *Kartli* into Christianity) it is said that Alexander the Great met with tribes of *Bunturks* along the river Kura, living in four cities and having strong fortresses. It also states that *Huns* asked for refuge from the king of *Bunturks*.¹³⁴

The first publisher of the latter chronicle in 1888, E. Takaishvili classified these *Bunturks* as ‘*Turadians*’, while N. Marr believed the term meant ‘native Turks’. A Soviet Georgian historian S. Djanashia claimed the author committed an anachronism here. His view was later criticized by E. Chkhartishvili who blamed Djanashia with being biased and noted that *Bunturks* could well have lived on the lands of modern Georgia in the 4th century B.C. Another Turkic people frequently mentioned by sources are the *Bulgars*. Moses of Khoren, an Armenian chronicler, calls the lands to the north of Caucasus ‘the *Bulgar* lands’, while Moses of Kagankat considered *Barsils* a *Bulgar* tribe. Consequently, *Bunturks* and *Bulgars* and *Khazars* are of the oldest Turkic tribes recorded in Borçali.¹³⁵ As mentioned above, many of these peoples were viewed by primary sources as essentially the same.

Moses of Kagankat reported that around 442 - 445 a *Hun* king crossed the river *Kura* and conquered Georgia and Armenia. He also reports of cities built by *Huns*, *Khunan* and *Khalkhal*, both of which were in *Ağstafa-Gazakh* regions of Azerbaijan. In 447-48, another Turkic tribe, *Onogurs*, conquered *Kolkhis* in Georgia. Since the 6th century there are reports of a tribe known as *Kepenekçi* in

¹³⁴ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*; Nebioğlu and Sarvan, *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

what is now *Bolnisi* district. In 853 an Arab force led by a Turkic commander is said to have settled 300 *Khazar* families in *Dmanisi (Başkeçid)*.¹³⁶

Kırzioğlu notes that of the two tribes, *Kazakh* and *Borçalı*, the former settled around river *Gazakh*, while the latter to the west of them, around river *Borçalı*. The rivers were named after them. The *Kazakhs* are known to have been Muslim by the 10th century, while the *Borçalıs*, being in the sphere of influence of a Christian kingdom, remained Christian. However, after the conquest of those lands by *Seljuk* sultan *Alp-Arslan*, they also adopted Islam.¹³⁷

An important role in the formation of *Borçalı*'s population was that of *Kypchaks*. As previously stated, their arrival in Georgia is dated 6th century A.D., latest. In 1018 the king of Georgians and Abkhazians David IV, who was married to the daughter of *Kypchak* khan *Atrak*, invited, reportedly, 40.000 *Kypchak* families to settle in his kingdom. The Georgian sources called them 'New *Kypchaks*' as opposed to the 'Old *Kypchaks*', those who had lived in Georgia before.¹³⁸ According to the estimates of the experts, the total number of migrants would be around 300.000.¹³⁹ Each family was expected to provide one warrior when needed. As a result, David possessed an army of 40.000 professional and well-equipped warriors. In addition to that, 5000 *Pecheneg* and *Uz* warriors captured by *Kypchaks* formed the king's personal bodyguard.¹⁴⁰ Some of the migrants were settled in *Borçalı* and it is known that they included the so-called *Karapapaks* (black hats).

¹³⁶ Nebioğlu and Sarvan, *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Kırzioğlu, *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³⁸ Nebioğlu and Sarvan, *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ M. Fahrettin Kırzioğlu, *Anı Şehri Tarihi (1018-1236)* (Ankara: SAN, 1982), 67.

¹⁴⁰ Kırzioğlu, *Anı Şehri Tarihi*, 67.

These are also known from Russian sources as *Chornye Klobuki*, since they formed the bulk of the armies of *Kievan Principality*.

40.000 - 45.000 men was a really strong force for that age, even if this number is slightly exaggerated, as some scholars believe. It must be noted that rulers in Iran, Middle East, *Rus* principalities and Byzantium used forces of Turkic warriors much smaller in number to great effect.¹⁴¹ With this new military force, David was able to resist and defeat the neighboring *Seljuks* who were occupied with internal struggle. *Kypchaks* were instrumental in strengthening of Georgian state and king's power.¹⁴² It was also with their help that David IV extended the borders of his realm, conquering the *Emirate of Tiflis*, fortress of *Tumanis (Dmanisi)* and the city of *Ani*.¹⁴³ *Kypchaks* continued to play a prominent role in the life of Georgian state in later periods as well, not only as warriors but also as statesmen, like *Kutlu Arslan*, an advisor to queen Tamar (1160-1213), who initiated limitation of royal power and her general *Kubasar*, responsible for conquest of neighboring lands during her reign. The queen herself was largely of *Kypchak* descent. Unfortunately, modern Georgian historiography, usually, does not provide such details.

After the Mongol conquest of the 13th century, the Southern Caucasus was included into *Ilhanid* State. In 1386 the *Kypchak* settlements to the north of *Tiflis* were conquered by *Tamerlane*. The *Seljuk* and Mongol conquests of the 11th –13th centuries also contributed to the already strong Turkic element in the region. It should be noted that Mongol forces consisted almost exclusively of Turks.

¹⁴¹ Nazir M. Budayev, *Zapadnye Tyurki v Stranakh Vostoka* (2002), <http://buday.narod.ru/gl6.htm> (accessed February 5, 2009).

¹⁴² Ibrahimli, *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Kırzioğlu, *Anı Şehri Tarihi*, 68-71.

Throughout the 14th-15th centuries Georgia was either a part or under the influence of *Turcoman* states of *Karakoyunlu* and *Akkoyunlu*. According to Kırzioğlu, the *Borçalı* and *Kazak* tribes were so numerous and powerful that the eastern part of Georgia, with the center in *Tiflis*, became known as *Terekeme Gürcistanı* (*Turkmen Georgia*), while European travelers called it *Turkish Georgia*. Since the 16th century, in the course of wars between Ottomans and *Safavid* Iran, the region frequently changed hands, remaining mostly under the latter. During the reign of *Shiite Safavid* shah Tahmasb (1524-1576) *Shiism* began to spread among the *Sunni Borçalı-Kazaks*, as a result of different policies of the monarch. However, in 1587, when their ruler switched allegiance to the Ottomans, most of them re-adopted *Sunnism*.¹⁴⁴

The name *Karapapak* (black hat) became widely used for this people because they wore black hats to denote their *Sunnism*, like *Karabörk Kypchaks* of *Daghestan*, as opposed to Iranian *Shiites*, who wore red caps and were known for this as *Kızılbaş* (red head). *Safavid* Shah Abbas I, during his reign, brought and settled some Turkic tribes in the region. However, he also re-settled some of the *Karapapaks* in *Ganja*, *Karabakh* and *Shirvan* due to their pro-Ottoman sympathies.¹⁴⁵

4.2 Political Events from the 18th to 20th centuries

When in 1736 Nadir-khan usurped the Iranian throne from *Safavids*, the prominent dynasty of *Atabeks* of *Ganja* and *Karabakh*, named *Ziyadoğlu* opposed

¹⁴⁴ Kırzioğlu, *Karapapaklar*, 10-11.

¹⁴⁵ Ibrahimli, *Ibid.* and Kırzioğlu, 1972, 16.

this. To punish them, a year later, Nadir Shah took the lands of *Borçalı-Gazakh Sultanate* and put them under the reign of his vassal, Georgian king Teymuraz II. After the death of Nadir-Shah in 1747 his state fragmented and Azerbaijan turned into a mosaic of miniature khanates and sultanates, including the *Sultanate of Borçalı*. It included the lands of *Garayazı (Gardabani)*, *Sarvan (Marneuli)*, *Ağbulağ (Tetritskaro)*, *Bolnisi*, *Dmanisi* and, what are now parts of Armenia, *Calaloğlu*, *Baran*, *Taşır* and *Hamamlı*. First, the transmission of *Borçalı* to Georgian king and, later, the wars between khanates caused a part of population to leave the region and many families moved to Turkey and Iran, despite the requests of the king of *Kartli* and *Kahetia*, Irakli II, who feared depopulation his lands. After the Russian conquest of Southern Caucasus in the early 19th century, *Borçalı* was given the status of ‘Tatar dynasty’. The exodus of population from the region continued. In 1828, over 800 *Karapapak* families migrated to the vicinity of Tebriz. Those who moved to Turkey settled in the province of Kars. Reportedly, there are 92 settlements around Kars, whose names match those in *Borçalı*. Some 45.000 more settled there after 1924.¹⁴⁶

In 1880, the *Sultanate of Borçalı* was abolished. Instead, was created a *Borçalı* district as a part of *Tiflis Governorate* with the lands of *Garaçöp* and *Garatepe* separated from it. After the October Revolution in 1917 the region became a matter of dispute between the three newly formed republics, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Following the declaration of independence on May 26, 1918, Georgian government moved troops to *Borçalı*. The local Georgian officials confiscated food stocks from local population and forced them to leave by methods of pressure and terror. The locals did not wish to leave their homeland and asked for

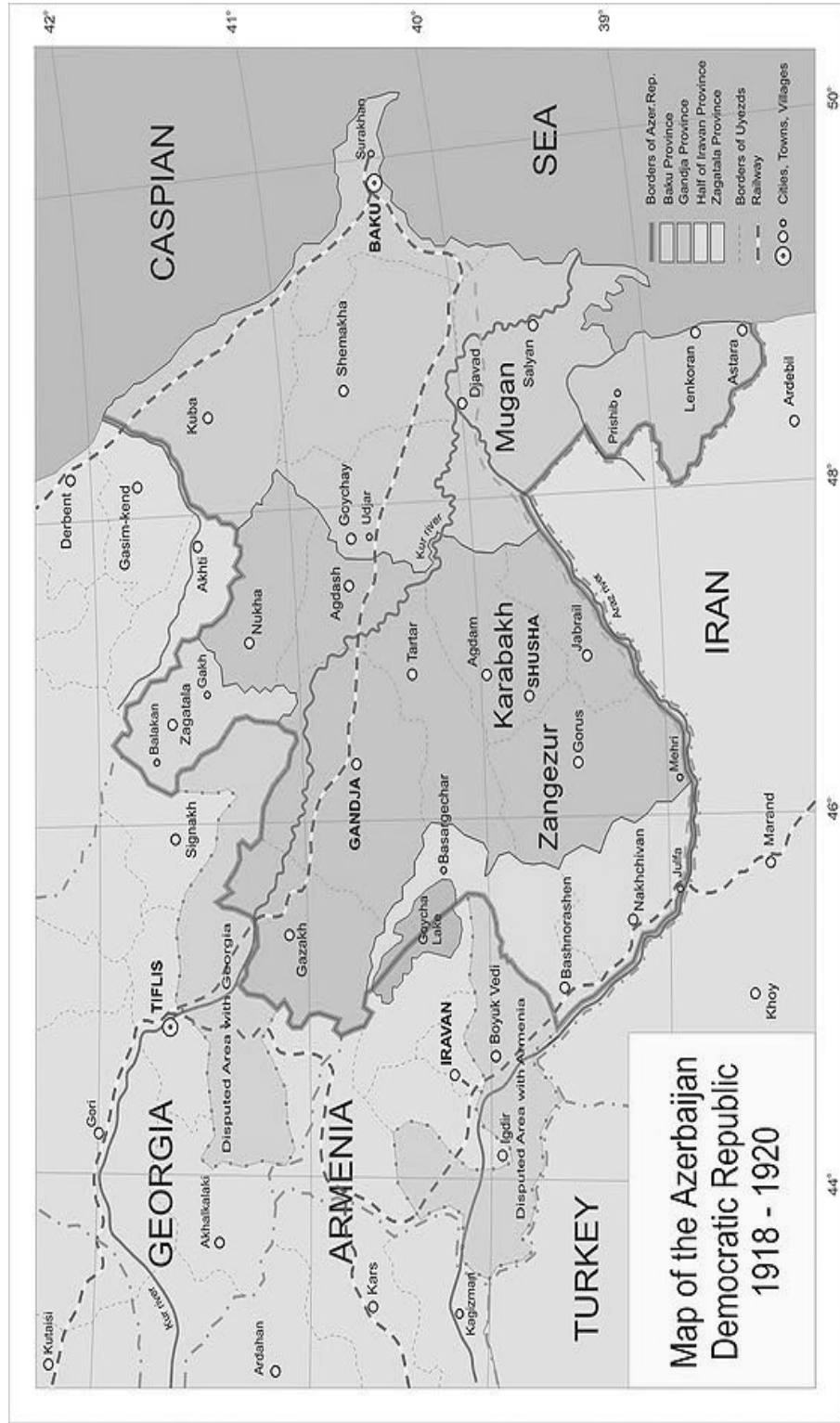
¹⁴⁶ Ibrahimli, *Ibid*.

help from Azerbaijani Democratic Republic (ADR). On June 14th Azerbaijan sent a protest note to Georgian side and stated the problem should be solved by means of negotiation. In July Georgia issued an ultimatum, demanding withdrawal of Azerbaijani troops from *Garayazi* district. In response to this, Azerbaijan once again stated that it was best to avoid confrontation before the borders were determined and suggested the creation of international commission.

Under the pressure of Ottoman Empire and Germany, Georgia agreed. Later both sides decided for the question to be discussed at Istanbul conference. Before the conference both sides expressed their views in press. Georgian side claimed the region on the basis of its immediate proximity to the capital of the republic, Tbilisi. The main argument of the Azerbaijani side, however, was the presence in *Borçalı* of overwhelming Turkic majority and the demands of the locals for unification with ADR. The Istanbul conference and, later, the Paris peace conference did not yield any solution. In such uncertain situation, the local Turks declared the establishment of their own state, *Karapapak* and applied to Ottoman government for help in joining Azerbaijan. But, to ensure security of local population, decided in 1919 to join the *Turkish Republic of South-Western Caucasus*.¹⁴⁷ In December 1918, Armenia declared war on Georgia. The territories of *Borçalı* became the main battlefield. Two weeks later, after the failure of Armenian forces and with the intervention of British-French commission, the hostilities ended. *Borçalı* was splitted in three parts. The northern part was given to Georgia, the southern to Armenia, while the district of *Lori* was declared a neutral zone. The opinion of the Turkic population of the region was not considered, which caused great anger among them. In 1920, after a series of failure in its war with Turkey, Armenia

¹⁴⁷ Ibrahimli, *Ibid*.

FIGURE 3. MAP OF THE AZERBAIJANI DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC AND DISPUTED LANDS (SOURCE: az.wikipedia.org).



applied to Georgia for help. In return, *Lori* was given to the Georgian side. After the establishment of Soviet power, Armenia continued to demand *Lori* and in 1921 the local Armenians organized an uprising, which caused Georgian troops to withdraw. Following this, the Red Army occupied Georgia. After long negotiations, *Lori* was given to Armenia. In 1929, the old *Borçalı* district was abolished and three new administrative districts created: *Borçalı (Marneuli)*, *Luxemburg (Bolnisi)* and *Başkeçid (Dmanisi)*. The name *Borçalı* was officially changed to *Marneuli* in 1949, although the old name is widely used up to this day. The Turkic population of the part given to Armenia, after a series of pogroms by Armenians, was driven out in 1988-89, mostly to Azerbaijan. After the independence of Georgia in 1991, in the Georgian part of *Borçalı* was established *Kvemo-Kartli* governorate with the center in *Rustavi*.¹⁴⁸

4.3 The History of *Borçalı* Turks: the Georgian Version

The Modern Georgian historiography is, unfortunately, quite laconic on the issue of history of *Borçalı* Turks. According to Georgian history books the Turks first appeared in the region in the 11th century. Their role in this and the following periods appears as exclusively negative and destructive. On the other hand, as will be described in the following section, primary Georgian sources provide a different view.

For instance, in the work “History of Georgia” written by a group of Soviet Georgian scholars, like Berdzenishvili, Dondua and Melikishvili, it is said that *Seljuks* were a group of Central Asian nomadic tribes that attacked the ‘cultural’

¹⁴⁸ Ibrahimli, *Ibid*.

lands of the Middle East, eventually subduing them, as well as Byzantium. Following this they performed raids into Georgia, starting the so-called ‘Great Turkish yoke’ (*didi turkoba*). The *Seljuk* nobility is said to have mercilessly exploited the Georgian peasantry, the population of the country facing total destruction.¹⁴⁹ A similar picture is portrayed in another work on the history of the country by Vachnadze et al.¹⁵⁰

Berdzenishvili et al. state that Georgia acted as a unifier of ‘fraternal peoples of the Caucasus’ in their struggle against *Seljuks* and to increase the military potential of Georgia, the king David IV invited 40.000 *Kypchak* families to his lands and married the daughter of *Kypchak* khan. David allocated lands to them, encouraging them to adopt sedentary life-style. Gradually, they became warriors, adopted Christianity and, as the authors claim, assimilated with the local population. Thus, the king possessed an army of 40.000 professional warriors and a personal bodyguard of 5000. This enabled him to break the influence of strong feudal lords and gain a vast power.¹⁵¹ Moreover, as stated by Vachnadze et al., a great portion of Georgian population was freed from military service and was able to practice agriculture, providing for the economic development of the state.¹⁵² As can be seen, the *Kypchaks* are portrayed in a more positive light than the *Seljuks*. Despite this, their role in the struggle against the latter and in the ensuing rise of Georgia seems

¹⁴⁹ Berdzenishvili, N.A., V.D. Dondua, and G.A. Melikishvili, eds., *Istoriya Gruzii* (Tbilisi: Tsodna, 1962), http://www.nplg.gov.ge/ic/DGL/work/History_of_Georgia/History_of_Georgia_I/4%20Epokha_razvitogo_feodalizma/9/5.htm (accessed March 17, 2009).

¹⁵⁰ Merab Vachnadze, Vakhtang Guruli and Mikhail Bakhtadze, *Istoriya Gruzii s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei*, http://www.krotov.info/lib_sec/04_g/ruz/ia_kr3.htm, (accessed March 17, 2009).

¹⁵¹ Berdzenishvili et al., *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Vachnadze et al., *Ibid.*

underestimated. Also, nothing is said about the part of either group in the ethnogenesis of Turks of *Borçalı*.

The descriptions of the period of Mongol domination in the 13th century, the campaigns of Tamerlane in the 14th, as well as the Ottoman - Iranian wars throughout the 15th-17th centuries, with domination of Georgian lands switching from one side to another, also give the impression of constant destruction. It was during one of these conflicts, as the modern Georgian sources state, that the current Turkic population of *Borçalı* appeared in the region. According to Berdzenishvili et al., in 1616 the Persian shah Abbas I invaded the *Kartli-Kakhetian* kingdom to suppress the revolt of the king Teymuraz I. As a result of this, around 100.000 'Kakhetians' were forcibly re-settled in Iran. In their place he is said to have settled *Turcoman* tribes.¹⁵³ Vachnadze et al. provide a different version. According to them the said tribes were settled there somewhat earlier. It is claimed that Abbas I requested these lands from the kings of *Kartli* and *Kakheti* around 1603, during his previous war against the Ottomans, and settled there the tribe named '*Borchalu*'.¹⁵⁴

Unfortunately, Georgian scholars do not provide much detail on the ethnic composition of historic Georgia. The presented description is pretty much how modern Georgian historiography views the origins of Turkic population of *Borçalı* region.

¹⁵³ Berdzenishvili et al., *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Vachnadze et al., *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 5.

CURRENT ISSUES AND THE IDENTITY OF *BORÇALI* TURKS

The last years of the USSR's existence were characterized by a number of issues, like the economic crisis and the rise of nationalism in union republics. The fall of the state in 1991 brought about new challenges, in one way or another, for all nations that once formed its population. This, naturally, was also true for the Turks of *Borçalı*. In addition to economic problems, present throughout the whole of the former Soviet Union, they had to struggle with majority group nationalism, which was adopted by the political elites of the newly formed Georgian republic.

The government of independent Georgia and, especially, the first president Zviad Gamsakhurdia played on popular ambitions by blaming non-Georgians. In his speeches the president claimed that 'foreigners' aimed to divide Georgia and positioned them as responsible for the most of country's hardships. This attitude was reflected in the government's policies towards other ethnic groups in the country. The problems that *Borçalı* Turks have faced since then are also largely related to the ideology dominant in Georgia in early 1990s. In order to find out which matters Turks of *Borçalı* consider the most problematic for themselves nowadays in Georgia, questionnaire was mailed to Turks from the region and in-depth interviews with experts were conducted.

5.1 The Land Problem

According to all respondents, the most severe issue that has troubled *Borçalı* Turks since the fall of the USSR is the insufficiency of farming land. Traditionally, the population of the region has been involved in agricultural activity. However, as a result of legal regulations related to agriculture in the early years of Georgia's independence, most of the lands that were cultivated by Turks in the Soviet period were officially rented by government to ethnic Georgians from other regions. *Borçalı* Turks felt they had been wronged. Many of them were disappointed by the fact that their lands were given to people they have never met and who did nothing for cultivation but only took the share of production. An elderly male university professor told:

Our people are, mainly, involved in farming and herding. Every household used to have their own animal farm. There were also large farms belonging to *Sovkhoz*es and *Kolkhoz*es. Back in the days of my childhood, there were hard economic conditions. Only later, in the 1970s, the situation changed and people reached welfare. Much money was earned from farming. We had houses of two or three stories and cars. We lived well until 1990s.

A middle-aged male engineer said:

In the regions where Turks live, lands were not given to people. In *Kakheti*, *Kartli* and *Kutaisi*, after the fall of Soviet regime, all lands were divided and given to Georgians. However, in *Turkic* regions this process

is still unfinished and it will never be. No one there has his own land. Georgians rent you some ten hectares of land and tell you which percentage of production will be shared. They do not give land now and they will not do it in the future. They do not even think about it.

An middle-aged female teacher put it this way:

When something happens, officials say that in Gamsakhurdia period this land was given by mistake to Georgians. However, Georgians never lived in those villages. They brought Georgians from elsewhere and told them that the lands now belonged to them. Everything was given to only one person they picked up from streets. This person knows nothing about cultivating land, so he rents it to Turks and then shares the production. Saakashvili says: 'it was done back in those days. I cannot change anything now.' He does not even promise to.

The redistribution of lands was not the only negative consequence of the USSR's fall for *Borçalı* Turks. Another problem was the loss of previous market throughout the former Soviet Union due to the new geopolitical situation in the Southern Caucasus. The result of these was the loss of the relative welfare they enjoyed during the Soviet period. The following comment by one of the respondents gives an idea about this. An elderly male university professor said:

In the Soviet period we had no problems. Our life standards were quite good. I can even say that we were better off, as compared to Georgians because our people are more hard-working. We cultivated land, planted and cropped and then turned it into money. Unfortunately, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, investments decreased, the *sovkhozes* were abolished and no new system was introduced in their place. People had hard times selling their production because Georgia was a poor country

and due to the tensions with Russians, farmers were unable to trade either with Russia or Azerbaijan.

Some respondents, while also feeling unhappy about the land policies of Georgian government, found them rational. The view of a middle-aged female gives an idea about it:

If you approach it logically, why would Georgians give the best lands to Turks? If I were in their place, I would, probably, do the same. If a land is good and a Georgian wants it, they give it to him. However, Georgians do not work on land. They are lazy. They only want to profit from production. I cannot imagine a Georgian cultivating land. When you look from Turks' perspective, of course, we would like our people to live in good conditions but this is not realistic.

Complications for Borçalı Turks, who are largely farmers, are not only restricted by the lack of farming lands as a personal property, but also by the ever-decreasing number of young people who wish to continue this traditional trade. The migration of young population for various reasons, which will be described later, causes the insufficiency of effective work force. A middle-aged male engineer explained:

Young people cannot stay. There is no job for them. They are not very eager to cultivate land. Moreover, the products of farming do not bring much profit.

A middle-aged female teacher said:

I think the biggest problem is not the land itself but the fact that our young generation is leaving. Georgians play it high. The situation is serious. Even on the available lands there are not enough people to work.

Farming and herding have been the traditional modes of production for many generations of Turks in Borçalı. So, their concerns about the issues with land are related not only to the survival problems in current situation but also to their future in the region. Being unable to continue the trade of their forefathers, which is also the basic means of living for them, coupled with the migration of young generations means seriously compromising their very existence in the region. In that respect, the problem is more than just an economic issue. This land is considered by them a homeland, which is now part of Georgia and Armenia. Because of this, the land problem is related with the loss of power over the homeland and is perceived as a threat to their ethnic identity.

5.2 The Language Barrier and Job Opportunities

Another important problem for *Borçalı* Turks is the language barrier and, related to it, limited number of job opportunities. This problem has also appeared in recent years. As mentioned in the history chapter, the region has frequently changed hands in the previous centuries. However, it has always retained its largely Turkic profile. Naturally, the population has spoken Turkic language. In addition to that, up until the early 20th century Turkish remained a *lingua franca* in the Caucasus. So, there was little need for the bulk of Caucasian Turks to study other languages.

During the Soviet era, a good commandment of Georgian language was, again, unnecessary for the *Borçalı* Turks, since Russian was the language of

correspondence and communication between the peoples of the Soviet Union. Georgia's independence from the USSR brought changes in this sphere too. Now, the knowledge of Georgian became the primary pre-requisite for getting a job. A male university student commented on this:

Now, one of the most important demands from us is to learn Georgian language. Georgians say they cannot help us advance if we do not speak Georgian. In Bolus (Bolnisi), Marneuli (Sarvan) you can count Turks working in state offices on fingers. The same is true for Dmanisi. However, if the majority in the region is Turkic, their interests should be considered by the administration.

Some of the interviewees also noted that the measures taken by Georgian officials at eradicating the language problem are found insufficient. A middle-aged male NGO member noted:

Georgians demanded that all nations living in the country speak Georgian language. All correspondence is made in Georgian and people of old generation cannot find job because of that. As for the young generation, schools for them are not yet established. Nominally, there is education in Georgian language but in practice there is none. There are no teachers available. Georgian teachers are sent from district centers. They come for a day or two and then leave. So, children and young people still can not learn Georgian.

A middle-aged female teacher commented:

Recently, Georgian language classes started. However, they cannot find teachers. Georgians do not want to stay in villages. They just come and

go, but in winter time they, virtually, do not come and no classes are held.

Some respondents, however, stated that they did not view the language barrier as the actual reason why they were denied jobs. Instead, they believed that this was just an excuse used by officials and that there was little chance for advancement, even if you know Georgian, as stated by an elderly male university professor expert:

There are many problems but the language problem is especially important. This is the main reason why Turks cannot integrate in Georgian society. However, another reason is Georgian chauvinism. They use language as an excuse.

Or, in the words of a middle-aged male engineer:

If you know Georgian language, they may give you some job. But you cannot advance much. So, few people think it is worthwhile to learn Georgian only to get some minor job. The main reason why people leave is not the complete lack of job but, rather, the lack of serious prospects.

While most of the interviewed held similar beliefs, some of them displayed a certain degree of optimism, like another elderly male university professor in an expert interview:

There is a saying ‘each language is a person’. In previous times, our greatest dream was to speak Turkish. We secretly listened to Turkish radios because it was forbidden. We have always had a love for Turkey.

If, in addition to that, you also learn Georgian, you can say your word. So, I think you have to know the language of the country you live in.

Or as told by a middle-aged male:

When we learn Georgian we can be accepted to state offices. In the parliament only Georgian is spoken. So, if you do not speak it, what is the use of being there?

While Turks express some desire to learn Georgian and study in this language, there is another issue that worries them. They fear that abandoning education in Turkic may be threatening in terms of preserving their language and culture. As there is no clear-cut formula for the status of the two languages in their schools and how they should be taught, this issue remains a dilemma. Below is the view of an elderly male university professor:

Our language is important for us. If we lose it, we will lose everything. Language is one of the most important elements. When I was young, Georgian was a foreign language for us. I can read and write in it. We had a very good teacher of Georgian in high school. The system that was in Soviet era was good, now it is bad. We have to protect our language.

A middle-aged female teacher said:

We speak our national language. In our schools education is given in Azerbaijani Turkish. In every village there is a school but the number of students is dropping catastrophically. For example, if a school used to have some 300 students in the past, now there are only 80-100 students

attending. Young people go to study in Baku, stay there and do not return.

A middle-aged university professor told:

Most of the schoolbooks come from Azerbaijan. People do not know which language to study in. In Soviet period we studied Soviet history. Now students are taught Georgian history. There is no much place for the history of Azerbaijan. Learning the Turkic version of history is prevented.

As can be observed, the language problem has many dimensions. While it is not thought of as the main reason for unemployment, it is still believed that it does prevent integration into Georgian society in a certain way. The lack of any clear policy in this sphere only adds to the uncertainty of *Borçalı* Turks.

5.3 The Migration to Other Countries

As can be seen in the previous sections, there is another issue that is closely related to the land and language problems. This is the migration from the region. The shortage of farming land and the language barrier have caused many of the *Borçalı* Turks, especially the young ones, to migrate to other countries. Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey are the primary destinations. It becomes clear from the words of some interviewees that the primary reason behind this is the limited number of job opportunities and doubtful chances for advancement. The migration, in return, has a negative effect on the agriculture by decreasing the number of workforce and

lowering production. Listed below are some of the views about the issue. A university student noted:

Everyone upon completing high school goes to Baku to continue their education. We were three brothers and three sisters. All of us graduated from high school and went to Baku to study at the university and stayed there. Now all of my brothers and sisters are there.

A middle-aged male engineer stated:

Poverty came and this caused migrations. One of the biggest problems is that young people are unable to find job and migrate to Russia or Azerbaijan. Now, the situation is really bad and pitiful. This is the worst outcome of the USSR's fall.

A middle-aged male university professor noted:

Many of our young people are in Russia now. Some of them get married there. Others take their families with themselves. The situation is worrying. My greatest fear is that in the future many more of our people will have to migrate from there, just like it happened when Turks migrated from Armenia.

The commentary of an elderly university professor demonstrates that despite problems, some optimism remains:

If young people can learn Georgian language, they will be able to work in state offices and receive salary. When there is no salary, they have to work in agriculture, which they do not want to. They want to live in

cities. They go either to Azerbaijan or Russia. There are even whole villages in Russia, founded by Turks from Georgia. Another difficulty is the lack of university education in Turkic. In Tbilisi University there is a section in Azerbaijani but too few students are accepted. So, they have to go to Azerbaijan to study in college. There has to be some work environment for them to return afterwards. Once it is available, I hope the return will begin.

Many of the respondents also believe that the Georgian government's policies are especially designed to force them to gradually leave the region. While some of them expressed a slight optimism, the majority felt that, in a subtle way, they are being forced from their homeland. They do not see much difference between the regimes that have changed since Georgia's independence. Turks in Borçalı do not find their promises sincere and state that while the means used by the governments vary their aim remains the same.

5.4 The Identity and the Struggle for Future

As previously mentioned, *Borçalı* region has had a predominantly Turkic population. Most of the interviewed people showed that they have a very strong sense of being Turkic. According to some of them, this sense was even stronger, as compared to Turks in neighboring Azerbaijan or Turkey. Among their people's qualities they often stressed diligence and loyalty to traditions. A middle-aged female researcher told:

We are of Turkic origins. We are *Oghuz* Turks of *Karapapak/Terekeme* branch. When I came to Turkey, I heard some words that are not used in Azerbaijan but are used in our villages. The language we speak at home

is very similar to Turkish, especially the dialects of eastern Anatolia. I discovered that many phrases that were not understood in Baku were intelligible in Turkey. Many of us used to have horses. Everyone knew the villages and the forests well. In the summer we moved to upland pastures. This tradition still continues.

An elderly university professor noted:

Our difference from Turks of Turkey and Azerbaijan is in terms of certain relations within family, like respect towards elders, love and care for minors. In this respect, we are very different from Georgians or Armenians, and also from some regions of Azerbaijan. There was a hierarchical structure in our families. Our father was the elder of the house. At times, you could not even eat in his presence. I think this tradition comes down from ancient Turks.

A middle-aged female teacher commented:

There are many elements defining our identity, like ethnicity, religion, territory and culture. All of these are important. Historically, we are connected with Azerbaijan but now our children watch Turkish TV channels and many of them speak Turkish among themselves.

A middle-aged male said:

Even when you go to Azerbaijan, you are still treated somewhat differently because you are from another country. Of course, when compared to other nations, like Russians or Armenians, they view you as one of their kind, still, you are a Georgian Azerbaijani in their eyes, a foreigner.

In the previous chapters it was noted that according to the modern Georgian historiography, Turks appeared in *Borçalı* only in the 17th century. Turks believe that the reason why Georgians support this view is because they aim to show Borçalı Turks as a foreign element, which, they believe, should eventually leave Georgia. This version of historical events is also reflected in schoolbooks that are also used in schools of *Borçalı* Turks. While most schoolbooks come from Azerbaijan, the ones dealing with sensitive topics, like history or geography are provided by the Georgian Ministry of Education.

Despite this, there is a strong awareness among Turks in *Borçalı* regarding their origins, their region and their traditional relations with Georgians. It is particularly noteworthy that the story of the region's being given to Georgian king by Nadir Shah has become a part of local folklore and has been known even by illiterate people. Some of the answers provide information on these moments. An elderly university professor stated:

Turks know that their forefathers lived in those lands. Many of those who moved to Baku could not adapt there. They have a sense of belonging to *Borçalı*. Many Turks still tell which territory is theirs and which one is Georgian.

In one of the expert interviews, a middle-aged female researcher explained:

The concept of *Borçalı* as a region is still present. Turks still remember the events of previous centuries. If you ask villagers, they will tell you the story of how they used to live as a separate state and how Nadir Shah gave it to Georgia. Everyone knows the story of Nadir Shah. It is a kind of a folk tale. They tell that they were annexed to Georgia because of a certain favor that Georgian king did to the shah. Although there are

different versions in narratives as to what that favor consisted of, the fact of this transaction is present in all of them.

According to some of the interviewees, the way Turks are presented in Georgian history also forms a negative image of them in Georgian society. Many respondents also mentioned the events of the early 1990s when, trying to present Borçalı Turks as a foreign element, Georgian officials tried to force them to leave their lands. As noted by a middle-aged university professor:

After the collapse of the USSR, the new Georgian president, Gamsakhurdia used a motto ‘Georgia for Georgians’ and said that all other peoples were their guests and had to leave when they were told to. Pressure increased, armed bands were formed. They raided people’s houses and stole their cars. Then, towards the middle of 90s, tension decreased, since Azerbaijan intervened. Aliyev and Shevardnadze established connection and pressure decreased a little. Generally, there was a pressure in financial terms and then it changed to moral pressure. The situation is still not settled.

Despite these difficulties, there is a portion of Borçalı Turks who believe that things can be changed for better. They state that by overcoming the language barrier, taking a more active part in Georgian politics and securing the support of Azerbaijan, it could be possible to achieve some improvements. An elderly university professor stated:

People love their land. There are many scholars in Azerbaijan who are originally from *Borçalı*. They frequently visit the region. They tell people that, although there are many problems now, they should not

leave their land and keep on living there. Also, they say that everything will be settled in the future. So, I hope things will be better in the future.

A middle-aged engineer male said:

We have some political activists. However, when you deal with politics you have to accept certain challenges. It is hard to struggle with Georgians but there are a few people who do it.

A middle-aged female researcher said:

There is no hope for radical changes but even minor gains would help us. At least, people feel easier when they know someone is dealing with their problems. Politics do not affect a farmer too much. They live in certain isolation from the outer world. Village life is different. Farmers live in a traditional manner.

In another expert interview, an elderly university professor commented:

There is a very slight hope that things can improve. There has been no serious difference between Georgian governments. When there are demands from Azerbaijan, they do something. However, Azerbaijan does not press too much. They do certain favors for Georgia, like selling gas for a cheap price, so Azerbaijani president could demand more from Georgian government.

This comment shows that many of the *Borçalı* Turks, despite being citizens of Georgia, expect Azerbaijan to take care about them. This is a good example of the complex nature of their identity. The information provided by the interviewees shows different aspects of the most important problems for the *Borçalı* Turks. It is

observed that, despite all difficulties, there is a desire to overcome them. They know their history in the region and have a strong sense of belongingness to their land. So, they find motivation to struggle in hard conditions and try to achieve a better life.

CHAPTER 6.

CONCLUSION

This study has focused on the identity processes of *Borçalı* Turks, living in Georgia, on the border with Azerbaijan. The case of this people is in many ways characteristic of the peoples of Caucasus in general, who have lived in a region that has always been a subject of interest and domination of different empires and global actors. In this geographical region there is a multitude of ethnic, religious and confessional groups who have lived in close proximity to each other. This neighborhood, however, has not always been a peaceful one. In times of frequent conflicts these groups formed complex sets of alliances and hostilities that were affected by different factors that could gain or lose their actuality, depending on situation. This meant that there never were eternal friends or eternal foes.

In addition to that, since ancient times till modern days, due to its strategic importance, the region has always attracted a special attention of regional states that had imperial ambitions. These regional powers always took full advantage of the dividedness of the Caucasus along ethnic, religious and confessional lines, in order to install their control. The peoples of the Caucasus, in their turn, have always been too eager to side with a bigger state against other groups or another strong state or an alliance of these. As a result, the borders of states and ethnic groups have continually changed and groups that once were a part of one state could easily

become a part of another. Even minor sovereign states often became, in one form or another, subjects of an empire.

Quite naturally, such frequent shifts of borders and authorities had impacts on people's identities. *Borçalı* Turks provide a good example to this complex picture. This people comprise a majority of population in most districts of Kvemo-Kartli (*Borçalı*) region in present-day Georgia. Modern Georgian historiography insists that their ancestors arrived there only in the 17th century. Overall portrayal of Turks in Georgian history books is rather negative. They are mostly shown as invaders and destructors, with the possible exception of *Kypchak* Turks. As for the issue of origins of Turks in *Borçalı*, modern Georgian historians often suffice with brief explanations. Not surprisingly, this affects the image of *Borçalı* Turks in the eyes of Georgian society, as well as causing resentment on their part. In contrast, Azerbaijani and Turkish scholars state that presence of Turkic elements in the region has a long history. In particular, they state that Georgian primary sources, in contrast to modern Georgian historians, provide substantial evidence for that.

Since the 15th until the 17th centuries, *Borçalı* was a part of territories disputed between Ottoman Empire and *Safavid* Iran. In the 18th century, the region was annexed to Georgian kingdom by Nadir Shah of Iran, and when the Caucasus was conquered by Russia, it became a part of Russian empire until the fall of Tsarist regime in 1917. Following this event, states of South Caucasus declared independence. *Borçalı* Turks attempted to form their own state or join other Muslim Turkic states but their attempts proved unsuccessful and later, like the rest of the region, *Borçalı* became a part of the USSR, divided between Georgia and Armenia. After seven decades of Soviet domination, Georgia became independent once again in 1991, with *Borçalı* as a part of it. Such shifts significantly strengthened the ethnic

identity of *Borçalı* Turks, however they also created a confusion on their part, regarding the political loyalty.

The borders of the region have changed many times throughout history and the estimates of total number of Turks living *Borçalı* vary from 280.000 to 500.000. Georgia has the most diverse ethno-religious composition among the South Caucasian republics, so the rise of nationalist movements in the late 1980s has had many adverse effects, the most important ones being the separatism in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Among other minorities, who were viewed as a threat by Georgian nationalists, *Borçalı* Turks also experienced negative impacts of Georgian nationalism. They were told that they were ‘guests’ on ancient Georgian land and descended from nomads. Georgian officials attempted various methods in order to force Turks to leave *Borçalı*, like settling ethnic Georgians next to their settlements and creating problems with registration. In addition to that, they were terrorized by Georgian paramilitary units and criminal bands.

Georgian political elites did little to oppose the growing nationalistic attitudes in the country. Things worsened for *Borçalı* Turks with the election of Zviad Gamsakhurdia president, as resettlement policy gained a legal basis. However, the problems with breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as the internal struggles forced Georgian government to decrease nationalist rhetoric and change policy towards minorities. When Gamsakhurdia was, eventually, replaced by Eduard Shevardnadze, *Borçalı* Turks expected that things would get better for them. The new president accepted a more moderate stance towards them, as it was realized that strategic partnership with neighboring Azerbaijan was important for Georgia. However, discriminative policies continued in different forms, like renaming of toponyms.

Relations with Azerbaijan have always been important for *Borçalı* Turks because of the ethnic and cultural links, although they view *Borçalı* as their homeland, and because there is, virtually, a single cross-border regional culture. The internal problems of Azerbaijan, like internal political strives and the issue of separatism in Nagorno-Karabakh, however, distracted its attention from *Borçalı* and caused taking a careful attitude in this issue. Azerbaijan started to play a more active role here since 1993, especially after coming to power of Heydar Aliyev, who replaced Abulfaz Elçibey. Due to his being Shevardnadze's old colleague in Politburo, the efforts of the two leaders brought some degree of stability in *Borçalı*. Although, strategic cooperation of Georgia and Azerbaijan had some positive effects, other problems began to be experienced in the region, notably, the shortage of farming land, education issues and the migrations.

When Shevardnadze was replaced by Mihail Saakashvili, in 2004, the policies that were directed by the new government towards, the region, according to experts, turned into a mixture of aggressiveness of Gamsakhurdia era and more moderate ones of Shevardnadze age. Pressure on *Borçalı* Turks was applied by constant police raids and arrests of political activists. Their initial hopes for improvement of situation did not materialize. This led them to form a strong belief that all Georgian governments, despite their antagonism, are concordant in their wish to expel Turks from *Borçalı*.

The research indicated the reasons why *Borçalı* Turks do not associate with Georgia and have been unable to develop Georgian national identity. Throughout its history, the region has seen different political authorities. Despite annexation to Georgia in the 18th century, its mostly Turkic cultural and ethnic profile was, largely, unaffected. The authority of Georgian king was hardly present there and in

the 19th and 20th centuries, during imperial Russian and Soviet domination, the region had a Soviet national identity and maintained close socio-cultural links with Azerbaijan.

Aggressive policies of Georgian nationalists in the in the late 1980s and early 1990s alienated *Borçalı* Turks even further from Georgia and strengthened their ethnic and cultural identities. The examples of minority peoples living in border regions, similar to *Borçalı* Turks, show that whenever central authorities take into consideration the interests of periphery and apply policies helping their integration, instead of assimilation and centralization attempts, these minorities are able to develop national identities of their states without losing their ethnic and regional ones. Consequently, Georgian officials could display more activity in taking measures if they really wish to integrate *Borçalı* Turks into their new nation state.

The research has also indicated that another important factor behind the lack of strong Georgian national identity on the part of *Borçalı* Turks is, without doubt, the constant change of political borders. Especially, in the last few centuries this shift happened too frequently for them to be able to make quick reorientation in identities possible, if they ever had such an intention at all. It took many centuries to abandon a tribal identity in favor of Turkic one. It is also possible to infer from history, that their Sunni confessional identity used to have importance for them, as illustrated by their hostilities with *Safavids*, who were Shiite, though also Turkic in origin. However, it seems to have lost its significance with time, probably as a result of nationalist trends, that reached the Caucasus relatively late, and communist ideology during the Soviet period.

The virtual absence of real border between *Borçalı* and what is now Azerbaijan during the Tsarist and Soviet periods helped the Turks in the region to associate with their brethren in the neighboring country. However, the formation of an independent Georgian Republic seems to have only strengthened their sense of identity. Georgian officials have done little to help them associate with Georgia. In fact, they seem to have hoped that Turks would be forced to leave *Borçalı* by different means. However, the attachment of *Borçalı* Turks to the lands they consider their ancestral homeland has, so far, proven strong and the discriminative policies only alienated them. An analysis of historical events shows in what kind of relationship Turks of *Borçalı* have been in with Georgian state. One can infer from it that if any border has existed in their minds, it was rather with Georgians than the neighboring Turks of Azerbaijan. As a result of all these factors, according to the research data, they continue to view themselves as part of a bigger Turkic world, and particularly close with the Turks of Azerbaijan, rather than a part of Georgian nation. However, their homeland is within the borders of Georgia and Armenia.

The establishment of a strategic partnership between Georgia and Azerbaijan has had controversial for *Borçalı* Turks. On the one hand, the policies of Georgian officials towards them took different form, even if general attitude, indeed, remains unchanged. However, on the other, they cannot openly oppose Georgian government and demand for solutions to their problems. This trade-off between Georgia and Azerbaijan is a good example of the complex nature of alliances and hostilities between Caucasian states and peoples. Such relations are often dependant on the current geopolitical situation. How the changes in the situation will affect the relationships between nations and how, in particular, it will be reflected on the identity of *Borçalı* Turks remains to be seen. In a region like the

Caucasus, it is hard to foresee the future that is very much dependent on the global and regional dynamics.

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Appendix A
The Questionnaire

- What, in your opinion, are the primary elements that define the identity of Borçalı Turks?
- Which other ethnic groups, if any, do Borçalı Turks identify with or consider relative?
- How do you evaluate the Turks' position in relation to Georgian majority?
What, do you think, are the most problematic issues for Borçalı Turks?
- What, do you believe, is the significance of native language, if any, in Borçalı Turks' identity?
- How do you evaluate the various reforms of Georgian government towards its Turkic citizens?
- Do you believe that language barrier is important in terms of position of Borçalı Turks in Georgian society?
- How much interested are the Borçalı Turks in taking part in political life of the Georgian state?
- What is the view of Borçalı Turks on their history?