

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table 6.1: Evaluation of life in the Soviet Union

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 21 AK: *lyuboy perekhod dazhe deti kogda perekhodyat iz [e_iz]*
any transition even kids when pass_they from from
- 22 CH: [mhm]
- 23 AK: *°h e v yu_vot v em: v yunoshestvo*
in well in in adolescence
- 24 CH: [mhm]
- 25 NL: *[da]*
yes
- 26 AK: *devochki v devushek perekhod trudnyy*
girls in girls transition difficult
- 27 NL: *da*
yes
- 28 AK: *°h nu estestvenno [m] bylo nemnozhko m (-) trudno bylo no*
well naturally was little difficult was but
- 29 CH: [hm] hm
- 30 AK: *normal'no potom vsë tut uregulirovalos'*
normally then everything here regulated_N
- 31 NL: *vy ne obradovalis' možno skazat' (2)*
you_2PL not were_happy_PL may to_say
- 32 AK: *obradovalas' ili i net ya*
was_happy_F or and not I
- 33 NL: *hm da (-)*
yes
- 34 AK: *nu vot a chemu bylo radovat'sya*
well here but what was to_be_happy
- 35 CH: hm
- 36 NL: *da (1)*
yes
- 37 AK: *vot °h esli by eto perekhodilo vy znaete kak vot °h*
well if would this passed_N you_2PL know_2PL how well
- 38 *postепенno [godami] ne oshchushchalos' by [na chto °h]*
gradually over_years not felt_N would on what
- 39 NL: *[da]*
yes
- 40 CH: [mhm]
- 41 AK: *[togda] konechno bylo by [bole menee i]*
then of_course was would more less and
- 42 NL: *[mhm] [raz i rukhnulo da da da]*
since and collapsed_N yes yes yes
- 43 AK: *a eto vot kak po bashke tebya chem-to [udarili i*
and this here how to head you with_something hit_PL and
- 44 *nado]*
necessary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 1 LP: *shchas takoe vremya (-) esli est' esesskoe vremya [i brat]*
now such time if exists Soviet time and brother
- 2 *brata znal (-) sosed sosedu znal*
brother knew_M neighbor neighbor knew_M
- 3 CH: [mhm] [mhm]
- 4 NL: [mhm] [da]
yes
- 5 LP: *o h vse druzhno zhili (-) ni to chto eto gruzin ya*
all friendly lived_PL not that that this_one Georgian I
- 6 *armenin [eto] adzhar*
Armenian this_one Ajarian
- 7 NL: [mhm]
- 8 LP: *eto [svan] ne znayu o h h azerbaijdzhanets*
this_one Svan not know_I Azerbaijani
- 9 CH: [hm] mhm (-)
- 10 LP: *vse (—) kak bratya byli*
all like brothers were
- 11 CH: [mhm (1.8)]
- 12 NL: [mhm (1.8)]
- 13 LP: *i vse khorosho byl*
and everything well was
-
- 1 LP: that's how things are now, if it were the Soviet time, a brother knew his
2 brother, a neighbor knew his neighbor
- 3 CH: [mhm] [mhm]
- 4 NL: [mhm] [yes]
- 5 LP: they all lived amicably, it wasn't such that this is a Georgian, I'm
6 Armenian, this is an Ach'arian
- 7 NL: [mhm]
- 8 LP: this is a Svan, I don't know, an Azerbaijani
- 9 CH: [hm] mhm (-)
- 10 LP: all were like brothers
- 11 CH: [mhm (1.8)]
- 12 NL: [mhm (1.8)]
- 13 LP: and everything was good

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 1 SC: the government changes so often that it doesn’t know what to do
3 FD: if at home, an ordinary home, the master is strict
4 CH: mhm
5 FD: he’ll have everything [he needs] at home
6 CH: hm
7 FD: if he is some kind of drunkard or something, he will have nothing
8 SC: and the family already isn’t a family, it’s a ruin, [like the state]
9 NL: [yes of course,] [yes, yes]
10 FD: [the state] is also some kind of family
11 CH: mhm

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She first characterizes her relatives’ being gone as “very difficult” and then explains that she feels like crying when she talks to them on the phone. Importantly, this emotional state is not something that she felt “before” and that has softened with time, as one might imagine. On the contrary, *kogda* ‘when’

23 Recall that LP is the consultant who speaks highly of inter-ethno-national harmony during the Soviet Union in excerpt 18. I will discuss the situation in Ts’alk’a in more detail in Chapter 7.

in the phrase *kogda govoryu s nim po telefonu* “when I talk to [them]²⁴ on the phone” (1) is a generalization, implying “every time when” (cf. Pomerantz, 1986; Roth, 2005). Overall, DG characterizes herself as being “lonely” and “left behind” against her wishes. This has not made her desire to emigrate herself, however. She makes this very explicit and tells me that she would not leave Georgia unless forced to do so, as this is the place she considers “home”, where she belongs and where she took her “first steps” (DG, 0:12:21-0:12:36). While few consultants are as candid as DG in talking about their personal losses to someone they met only shortly before the interview, many express their belonging to Georgia in a similarly explicit way. Thus, the metaphor of BEING ROOTED is not only mentioned explicitly or alluded to with some frequency – it also helps to understand the process of emigration as one of painful “uprooting” and one that many consultants say they do not wish to experience themselves (again).

I want to briefly discuss another way of dealing with the emigration. MP explains the last wave of Greek migrations in terms of an essential characteristic he ascribes to his in-group: *my lyudi kak kochevniki kochuem* “we are people roaming like nomads” (MP, 0:07:57). This essential “nomadism” is the only way for him to explain what he perceives to be a certain “pointlessness” in how often members of his in-group move from place to place. This “pointlessness” emerges from the other attributes he ascribes to his community a little later:

(23) History repeats itself (MP, 0:08:15-0:08:26)

- | | | | |
|---|-----|---|---|
| 1 | MP: | <i>vezde lyudi rabochie rabotayut rabochie lyudi [vezde]</i> | everywhere people workers work_they workers people everywhere |
| 2 | CH: | [hm] | |
| 3 | MP: | <i>trud stavyat svoj dom stroyat ostavlyayut i ukhodyat [v labor put_they own house build_they leave_they and go_they in drugooe] mesto</i> | other place |
| 4 | | | |
| 5 | CH: | [hm] | |
| 6 | NL: | [mhm] | |
| 7 | MP: | <i>[tam] opyat' samoe [opyat' ta ta vsya istoriya povtoryaetsya]</i> | there again same again that that whole story repeats_self |
| 8 | NL: | <i>[mhm opyat' s nachala]</i> | again from beginning |

24 *s nim* is masculine singular and translates to “with him”. Given the context of speaking about a number of her close family members having emigrated, the last one mentioned being her daughter, it is likely that plural *s nimi* “with them” was intended.

- 1 MP: everywhere people are workers, they work, [everywhere] working
2 people
2 CH: [hm]
3 MP: put in work, they build their house, they leave and go [to another] place
5 CH: [hm]
6 NL: [mhm]
7 MP: [there] it's the same again [again, this this whole story repeats itself]
8 NL: [mhm again from the beginning]

Excerpt 23 starts with MP characterizing his in-group as being hardworking *vezde* “everywhere”, i.e. no matter in which situation or on which national territory they find themselves (1). *Lyudi* “people” refers to “Greek people” in this segment based on the conversation immediately preceding and following this excerpt. In line 3, he describes exactly what he means by being “working people”: they put in the work, build a house – and thereby “a life”, as this is how MP and many other consultants characterize a “successful life” – and then leave again for another place. According to him, in the new place *opyat' samoe* “it’s the same again”, i.e. people settle in and “build a life”, before *ta vsya istoriya povtoryaetsya* “this whole story repeats itself” (7), with which NL aligns himself (8).

MP thus describes his in-group as never taking full advantage of the life they had “built” for themselves in any place, as they leave and start from scratch somewhere else. Hence, what he perceives as the driving force behind his community’s “roaming” is not merely the necessities imposed by a collapsing political and economic system, but an essential trait of being GREEK. Since this makes it somehow inevitable that GREEKS should migrate – with some “left behind” – this is arguably a way of explaining what he describes as a rather “pointless” “roaming” from place to place. A little later he talks about his life without his family being “lonely” (MP, 0:09:28). Seen in this context, excerpt 23 may therefore be read as a way for him to reevaluate the emigration in essential rather than personal terms, NORMALIZING it and making it perhaps easier to cope with.²⁵

The loneliness which MP and DG talk about directly, and many other consultants only hint at, is also expressed in the way LP and DP talk about the demographic change in the region of Ts’alk’a and the vulnerability they believe resulted for them and their community. Taken together with the

25 As Ryan Wyeth aptly pointed out to me, in the Georgian post-Soviet context ethnic or national groups are also stereotyped as having inherent personal traits, and Greeks are associated with moving around a lot. MP’s NORMALIZATION can therefore also be seen as drawing on a wider discourse of ethno-national characteristics.

transformations discussed in the previous sections, the dissolution of the SOVIET FAMILY through political changes and rising nationalism (not only) in Georgia, as well as the subsequent massive emigration of (not only) Greeks, led to the breakup of very real and tangible families for all of my consultants. This means that the FAMILY BREAKDOWN, which all my consultants talk about in terms of loneliness and vulnerability, is something they experienced on multiple scales.

C. Discussion

This Chapter has been devoted to exploring how the end of the Soviet Union is established as an important turning point for its former subjects. From a temporal perspective focusing on traces and tidemarks as per Green (2009), we have already seen how the traces of the Soviet way of structuring everyday life are found, for instance, in consultants' high competence in Russian and overall lower competence in Georgian (cf. Chapter 5). In this Chapter we have found them in laments for a “caring state” which in many ways acts like the “head of a family”, as told in narrations of SOVIET FAMILY and its BREAKDOWN. These metaphors and the one of BEING ABANDONED and left to one's own (economic) devices in a harsher “new world”, can be used to explore processes at the supra-national level, for instance rising nationalism, or at the personal level of very real families (nuclear and extended) dissolving through emigration. From this perspective, the key argument is that the boundary, the turning point itself, is not the center of focus. Instead, it is the temporal reference point for talking about the changing of orders and their historical relationship, as revealed by an analysis of traces of the former in the latter (cf. Hirschauer, 2014).

It makes little sense to focus on the end of the Soviet Union as a “moment” of transition – leaving aside the fact that there was no single moment in which everything changed. The point is that we can look at this meaning-making only from one side of the temporal boundary. The point of transition, then, is significant inasmuch as it enables interlocutors to establish meaningful points of comparison, relating TODAY to a very different YESTERDAY (cf. Tilly, 2004), and only thereby constructing both TODAY and YESTERDAY. This insight comes out very clearly in the excerpts discussed above: how good or bad things are TODAY is in the corpus very frequently established in comparison to YESTERDAY seen as “cozier/good overall” (the Soviet Union) or “utterly terrifying” (the 1990s). From this perspective, even though no

precise moment is made relevant in the interviews, the liminal phase of the transition process comes into focus as a *threshold* relating things that are constructed as starkly different.

Establishing a CONTRAST between YESTERDAY and TODAY is the interactive device most often used by consultants when relating these transformations. Another frequent device is to speak about the Soviet Union in terms of a FAMILY, as examined in this Chapter. The other three interactive devices are all used to interactively come to terms with unpleasant experiences or situations, and will accompany us into the next Chapter. They differ in terms of how they position the speaker. The first is to NORMALIZE difficult or painful experiences, like AK does in excerpt 17, in which her experiences are made “less interesting” by being “completely ordinary”, and thereby cease to be a topic “worthy” of our conversation. A slightly different example is MP in excerpt 23, who ESSENTIALIZES the behavior of “roaming” that he attributes to his in-group in order to explain it to us and to himself. While this still leaves him “alone” as a result of the emigration, this explanation makes his situation appear as the result of an inevitable “law of nature” rather than (painful) decisions made by close family members.

The second device is to self-ascribe a certain RESILIENCE in terms of being able to cope with even the most fundamental transformations. This also emerges from how AK talks about the end of the Soviet Union in excerpt 17. While this does not position her as particularly “active”, it does put her in a position of strength and of not being overwhelmed by the changes she describes as “difficult”. The third interactive device is to diagnose a fundamental LACK OF BASIC CIVILITY in the “times we live in”, and hence a degradation of social norms. In both instances in which this has emerged so far (LP just before excerpt 18 and AM in excerpt 20), the speaker assumes a position of moral superiority. AM shows herself to have used this to scold her attacker on proper manners, thus redefining the situation, actively “fighting back” and emerging “victoriously” – at least in how she tells this story. A related example is how she classifies “nationalism” as a “mental disorder” later in the conversation, again underlining her agency and – in this case mental – superiority.

These devices will become clearer and more differentiated in the analysis of the next Chapter, which sees consultants draw, negotiate and contest the boundaries of their social world.

