

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A. Processes of groupness and belonging

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

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

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

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

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

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

I. Imagination: Categories and groupness

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

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

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

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

II. Community and belonging

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

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

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

III. Actors, processes, and context

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. *The limits of belonging: Boundaries*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I. Qualities of boundaries

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II. (Un)making boundaries

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

C. Methodological considerations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I. Categorization

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

44 For further elaboration cf. Edwards (2000).

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

III. Context

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

