Border Studies. Cultures, Spaces, Orders | 2

Concha Maria Höfler

Boundaries and Belonging in the Greek Community of Georgia

Nomos

Border Studies.
Cultures, Spaces, Orders

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Volume 2

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To my parents, Johanna and Felix Höfler

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Transcription conventions

The transcription is based on the *Gesprächsanalytische Transkriptionssystem* GAT 2 nach Selting et al. (2009).

°h / h°	in-/exhalation
(-)	short estimated break of about 0.2-0.5 second
(–)	medium estimated break of about 0.5-0.8 second
(—)	longer estimated break of about 0.8-1 second
(1.3)	longer measured break
[ ]	simultaneous articulation of two or more speakers
because_ah	slurring
bec_	abrupt cut-off
((laughs))	para- and non-verbal activities
<<smiling> >	smiling utterance with range
(x), (xx)	one/two unintelligible syllables
((unintelligible 1.2))	unintelligible sequence with duration
(and)	unclear or probable item
(they/they're)	probable alternatives
: :: :::	lengthening, duration analogue to breaks
akZENT	focus accent

Chapter 1: Introduction

I first heard about the Greek community in Georgia in a casual conversation with Stavros Skopeteas in early 2010. As he talked about his most recent research project over coffee, my fascination grew. The community's ancestors had come to Georgia from present-day Anatolia during Ottoman times. They (self-)identified as Greek, but spoke little or no Standard Modern Greek (SMG). Instead they spoke a Turkish or Greek variety as heritage language, and otherwise communicated in Russian and some Georgian. At that point, I had only begun to explore how social categories are established in interaction, the use of language in national(izing)[1] projects and the production of putatively unitary belongings. With its unique mix of languages and complex points of potential identification, I was captivated by this community.

That fall, having secured funding to actually go to Georgia to find out more, I first met Violeta Moisidi in Berlin. A self-identifying Greek living in Georgia, she had taken on the task of being the first to put her heritage variety into writing for the *Urum Documentation Project* (Skopeteas et al., 2011a). When I tried to ask her all the potential interview questions I had thought up, she smilingly softened my zeal: "you want too much from the Urum language". Still, and very luckily for me, she and her family hosted me in Tbilisi in 2010 and 2013 and treated me like a (slightly eccentric) family member. Violeta patiently answered my myriad questions (not all of which made much sense to her) introduced me to potential consultants, translated during the interviews in 2010 when my Russian was still very shaky, and took me to meet her friends. In short, she was a consultant, interpreter, gatekeeper, and friend all in one. My learning and research trip to Tbilisi in 2010 resulted in an MA thesis (Höfler, 2011) that might be considered a pilot to the present study. This book, then, tells the story of my ongoing fascination with the Greek community in Georgia.

In this Chapter, I will first introduce the Greek community of Georgia in Section A., briefly summarize the current state of research in Section B.,

1 I borrow this term from Brubaker (1996) who uses it to describe nation state-building projects in the post-Soviet sphere as facing the task of not only establishing institutions but also imagining the nation.

elaborate my research questions in Section C., and finally outline the structure of this book in Section D..

A. *Introducing the Greek community of Georgia: A note on naming*

The Greek community of Georgia today looks back on a history of diverse migrations, which I will explore in more detail in Chapter 2. In this Section, I will focus on how to speak about this community and its individual members for the purpose of a scholarly text exploring the construction of identification and belonging in conversational interactions.

Eleni Sideri (2006, p. 26) lists a great number of labels for the community: "'Pontic-Greeks', 'Pontians', 'Greeks of the Black Sea', 'the last of the Byzantines', 'Greeks of the Soviet Union', 'Rōssopontii', 'Ellēnopontii', 'Rōmii', 'Urumebi', 'Tsalkalēdes', 'Greki', 'Pontiyski-Greki', 'Greek-Georgians', 'refugees', 'migrants', 'diaspora', 'deportees', 'repatriates'..." She rightly points out that while these labels are used in different languages, varieties and registers to refer to the same "group" of people, they "hide different histories, represent specific status and power relations, provoke differing feelings and memories" (Sideri, 2006, p. 26). While Sideri aims to uncover the histories behind these labels, I will explore how the ones used in my interview corpus are established, contested, filled with ascriptions, and evaluated – all in order to communicate identification and belonging and thereby to make and unmake boundaries. These labels do not merely "tell a story", i.e. reference the temporal dimension of the people thus categorized, they also reference spaces and social constellations. One of the theoretical aims of this book is to uncover the interplay of these dimensions through a uniquely instructive case study.

To my consultants, the most casual reference to their community, the one they perceive to be the most correct, and the one they will establish and struggle for throughout our interview conversations, is *greki* 'Greeks' in Russian and *berdznebi* 'Greeks' in Georgian.[2] As a researcher keen to recognize and respect my consultants self-identification, why look any further? This is where the distribution of heritage varieties in the community comes in: there are those who speak a Greek variety known to linguists as *Pontic Greek* and

2 The transliteration of Russian follows the BGN/PCGN standard (National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, 1949/2017), that of Georgian the *Georgian national system of romanization*.

those who speak the Turkish variety labelled *(Caucasian) Urum*.[3] Notably, *Pontic* refers to the southern coast of the Black Sea and thereby to the community's geographical location previous to migrating to Georgia. *Urum* refers via *rum* 'Rome' to the Byzantine Empire, as well as the Ottoman category system placing all Orthodox Christians in the *millet-i-rum* in contrast to other religiously defined groups in the *millet* system, which was only much later translated into the concept of "nations" (Fortna, 2013). For our purposes, the label Urum importantly categorizes this Turkish variety as "Orthodox Christian" and thus (later) "Greek", tracing the religious affiliation of its speakers from Byzantium until the present day.[4]

Pontic and Urum are mutually unintelligible and their speakers today live in different areas of Georgia following the massive Greek emigration from the country. Having been intrigued from the start by how these languages might be made (ir)relevant for identification and whether they might be used to create differences, I chose to label consultants according to their heritage variety at least in some contexts. I am acutely aware that the terms *Pontic Greeks* and *Urum Greeks* do not, in many cases, match the label consultants would have chosen for themselves[5] and I therefore use the label *(Georgian) Greeks* in as many contexts as possible. Quite frequently, however, the topic of the analysis is precisely the comparison of views expressed by speakers of the two heritage varieties and in these instances I will refer to them by their heritage variety.

Moving on to matters of typographic representations of the categories and quotes encountered in this book, I first of all follow the linguistic convention of citing sequences in languages other than English in *italics*.[6] Depending on the necessity of their being understood literally, they are followed by their semantic equivalent in single quotation marks and then by an idiomatic

3 See the entries for the ISO 639-3 codes *pnt* (Pontic) and *uum* (Urum) in Eberhard et al. (2019).

4 Note that some historians write of *Ottoman Rums* rather than *Ottoman Greeks* (Fortna, 2013, p. 6), thereby underscoring that equating Orthodox Christianity with the national affiliation "Greek" is a link established only by the advent of the nation state. In order not to complicate the complex historical picture beyond the scope of this book, I will refer to Orthodox Christians living in Asia Minor during Ottoman times as Ottoman Greeks.

5 This is more pronounced in the case of consultants who speak Urum as heritage variety, as will become apparent in Chapter 5, especially in excerpt 5. Thanks are also due to Dionysios Zoumpalidis for our discussions on this topic.

6 Key terms are also introduced in italics at first mention, and I use italics – sparingly – for emphasis.

translation into English in double quotation marks or simply by the latter. Quotes from, and categories brought up in, the excerpts discussed are given in double quotation marks. Categories emerging as relevant for the analysis and methodical devices established and used frequently by consultants are set in Small Caps throughout the analysis. Note that especially in the chapters leading up to the analysis, I will refer to spaces, countries and national affiliations without constantly typographically highlighting their constructedness. This, as well as my choice to avoid marking the labels Pontic, Urum, and Georgian Greek unless they are established in the analyzed excerpts, is a concession to readability rather than a claim that these categories are in any way less constructed than the others.

A final note on naming concerns the label given to the individuals who agreed to the recording of our conversations, and whom I extensively quote in this book. I mostly refer to them as *consultants* instead of *informants* – a term commonly employed in linguistics but carrying unpleasant connotations, especially in the post-Soviet space. I also find the term *interviewees* lacking, as it conveys too little of what these individuals actually do: they are not merely taking part in an interview, they are consulting us on the relevancies of their lifeworlds.[7]

B. Research on Georgia's Greek community

To date, very little scholarship has been dedicated to the Greek community in Georgia, most of whose members have emigrated to Greece since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Numbering around 100,000 in 1989 (Geostat, 2013), only 5,500 were counted in the latest census carried out in 2014 (Geostat, 2016). Almost no other numbers are available regarding the community – apart, perhaps, from the estimation in 2011 by the president of the *Federation of Greek Communities of Georgia*, Foti Chitlov, that roughly 80% of the remaining Greek population in Georgia still speak or used to speak Urum as heritage variety.

There are some anthropological accounts, especially on the Urum Greeks living in the Ts'alk'a district of Kvemo Kartli (Jalabadze, 2011; Melikishvili / Jalabadze, 2016; Pashaeva, 1992) and a number of anthologies listing members of Georgia's Greek community collected by community mem-

7 Many thanks to Samantha Litty for our discussions on how to appropriately name people I would refer to as *Gewährspersonen* in German.

bers (Chitlov et al., 1992, 1995). Eleni Sideri has contributed a number of anthropological accounts carefully exploring the historical situatedness of the Greek community across Georgia, its heterogeneity, and the liminality of the migration experiences to Greece (Sideri, 2006, 2007, 2012, 2017). Importantly, she focuses on place-making and thus on Greek experiences in Georgia rather than across the entire post-Soviet space. The latter is a problem afflicting many sociological and anthropological contributions on post-Soviet Greek migrations to Greece, which overlook the very different experiences of Greeks in different Soviet Republics. This is something Zoumpalidis (2009, 2014, 2016) shows to be highly relevant in comparing Greek immigrants from Georgia and Russia to Cyprus in terms of the choices they make about their own and their children's language use.

From a linguistic point of view, a number of recent contributions have explored Urum (Böhm, 2015; Lorenz, 2019; Neugebauer, 2016; Schröter, 2019; Skopeteas, 2014) building on the research project *The impact of current transformations on language and ethnic identity: Urum and Pontic Greeks in Georgia*, which also provides the frame for this study. Crucially, the already mentioned *Urum Documentation Project* documented this hitherto unwritten variety for the first time (Skopeteas et al., 2011a,b; Skopeteas / Moisidi, 2011). Earlier accounts had taken it to be either "the same" or very similar to Crimean Urum (Podolsky, 1986; Uyanık, 2010) or had even categorized it as Azerbaijani (Kock Kobaidze, 2001). As a conservative Greek variety, Pontic Greek has received more scientific attention (Drettas, 1997; Sitaridou / Kaltsa, 2014; Tombaidis, 1988), albeit less so on Georgian territory (Berikashvili, 2016, 2017; Markopoulos / Skopeteas, 2012). The southeast coast of the Black Sea – referred to in Greek as *Póntos* – was home not only to the ancestors of Georgia's Greek community, but also to people who self-identify as Turkish Muslims and who speak a Pontic Greek variety labeled *Rumca* or *Romeyka*, which Sitaridou (2013, 2014a,b)[8] has recently explored. The sociolinguistic vitality and attitudes towards this variety are discussed in Schreiber (2016); Schreiber / Sitaridou (2018).

It is hard to identify comparable research on communities in which language use and ethnic or national identification appear not to coincide, as one might assume for the Urum Greeks in this study. This difficulty arises mostly because studies tend to employ rather essentialist conceptualizations of both a "stable identity" and of what exactly constitutes a "language". Early studies challenging this essentialism and pointing to the danger of category systems

8 See also the project website: www.romeyka.org (last accessed on 8/30/2020).

based solely on language use include Leach (1954) and Moerman (1965), who similarly underscore the importance of self-identification as well as the fluidity of systems of social categorization. Nevertheless, an interesting and geographically proximate case is that of the *Pomaks*, a Slav speaking Muslim minority in Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey. The conflicting attempts by larger political entities at state level to appropriate them for their purposes are discussed in contributions to Steinke / Voß (2007) and by Voß (2018). In Greece, their self-identification as "Muslim" was first met with attempts by the Greek government to re-categorize them as "Turks", in order to distance them from Bulgaria. When this shift had been successfully completed and Turkey became interested in this minority, the Greek government once again emphasized their "Greekness" (Meinardus, 2002, p. 88f.).

There is much to be gained from a careful and thorough look at how identification and belonging are established in interaction and related to the various languages spoken in Georgia's Greek community. Complementing research on an understudied community, this quite special case of a "minimal pair" is especially productive for research on identification and belonging, and the concomitant processes of (un)making boundaries. In the following two sections, I will outline the project of this book.

C. Research questions

As elaborated above, the most striking attribute of the Greek community in Georgia is that they self-identify as "Greek" and that some of them speak the Greek variety Pontic and some of them the Turkish variety Urum. My first research question is therefore: how are the languages spoken in the community made relevant for the identification and belonging of their speakers; and, closely connected to this, how do consultants, in their everyday lives, interactively respond when their self-identification is challenged with reference to their language use?

The second and third research questions also regard processes of identification and belonging, but focus on how boundaries are established, negotiated and contested through these. I will introduce the theoretical background in more detail in Chapter 3. It must be mentioned here, however, that research on boundaries has so far very rarely put equal analytical weight on their spatial,

temporal and social dimensions in their complex interrelation.[9] And while I am primarily interested in being Greek as an emergent social category, I will show how taking into account its temporal and spatial aspects is pivotal to exploring its full depth. The second question, accordingly, asks about the temporality of belonging, specifically about the implications the end of the Soviet Union has had for my consultants' Belonging to Georgia. The third question focuses particularly on boundaries and asks about the (un)making of boundaries by consultants and by members of the various out-groups they perceive and narrate as challenging their identification. The fourth research question, finally, is methodological in nature and asks how this is achieved in the interview conversations.

The contribution of this book is both substantive and theoretical and will further extant research in three ways. Firstly, it adds a methodologically novel and profound perspective to research on the severely understudied Greek community in Georgia, complementing historical and anthropological accounts, as well as work from the field of linguistic typology. The investigation thereby also contributes to regionally interested (post-Soviet) area studies of the Southern Caucasus and the post-Soviet Greek diaspora. Secondly, grounding the study in a thorough ethnographically informed conversation analysis, crucially highlights the interactional and context-dependent nature of not only identification and belonging, but also the (un)making of boundaries. Applying this finely grained approach to an analysis of the interplay of social, spatial and temporal dimensions in boundary processes, this book thirdly adds a methodologically succinct and novel perspective to transdisciplinary border and boundary studies.

D. Outline of the book

This book is structured as follows: Chapter 2 will provide the necessary historical background for an understanding of the analysis, elucidating in particular the continuities and ruptures of possibilities for identification and belonging for Greeks in Georgia today. Chapter 3 will provide the theoretical and methodological background for a thorough analysis of identification, belonging and the (un)making of boundaries. Chapter 4 serves as transition

9 This has been proposed for instance in Schiffauer et al. (2018) and elaborated in contributions to Gerst et al. (2018a).

to the analysis, detailing the interview and data collection, as well as analytic processes.

The presentation of the analysis itself follows narrative considerations and the research questions introduced above. In Chapter 5, I will start with a detailed exploration of how the languages spoken by community members serve them as resources to position themselves in the interviews and beyond. It is, after all, the question about the identificatory potential of the heritage varieties and the challenges they might pose for Georgian Greeks' belonging that first drew me to this community and that makes them such a special "minimal pair" in discussing matters of language, identification, belonging, and the concomitant boundaries. The second part of the analysis (Chapter 6) will trace the profound changes consultants link to the end of the Soviet Union, both in challenging their belonging to the newly emergent Georgian nation state and in offering new points of juncture. The third analytical Chapter (7) will take a snap-shot, as it were, of contemporary boundary (un)making at the time of the interviews and will analyze the spatial, temporal, and social dimensions of this boundary work, particularly as it relates to the categories Greek and Georgian. Throughout these three Chapters, I will delineate the interactional devices used by consultants to conversationally position themselves, their community, and relevant out-group members. In Chapter 8 I will consolidate the analysis on a higher level of abstraction and conclude in Chapter 9 with a summary of the answers to the research questions and the contribution of this book.

Chapter 2: Historical background

> [H]istorians can provide a more contextual and contingent view of the social and cultural construction of a nation that in its various incarnations over many centuries represented itself in different ways. History is full of experiences, only a portion of which are mobilized at any given moment for cultural purposes or political struggles. (Suny, 1994, p. 335)

In this Chapter, I will focus on the historical contexts and contingencies that consultants draw on in articulating the topics they make relevant in our interviews. Rather than attempting the impossible task of relating "everything" there is to know about the past roughly two hundred years of history in present-day Turkey, Georgia and Greece, my narrative will focus on moments of (dis-)juncture, as well as on opportunities and challenges for identification and belonging. I am particularly interested in how identification(s) were constructed as traceable through time in three ways: through language, because this is what sparked my interest in the community, and through ancestry and religion – because this is both what consultants make most relevant in our conversations, and also how they were assigned to categories over large stretches of time. Furthermore, the analysis should appreciate changes in their interplay and the weight attributed to them in the transition from empires to nation(alizing) states:

> While it would be exaggerating to maintain that empires or premodern territorial states were not at all interested in shaping and policing ethnic boundaries, the change from empire to nation-state provided new incentives for state elites to pursue strategies of ethnic – as opposed to other types of – boundary making. (Wimmer, 2008, p. 990f.)

I begin by recounting the migration(s) from the Ottoman to the Russian Empire that my consultants make relevant (Section A.). I then explore the complex dynamics of Soviet attempts at both supra-national homogenization and national particularization (Section B.). Finally, I deal with the post-Soviet encounters with the nation state (Section C.), covering the transition from a multi-national political entity (the Soviet Union) to the Georgian nation state (I.), and the Greek migrations from the post-Soviet space to Greece and the challenges encountered there (II.).

A. *Migrating from the Ottoman to the Russian Empire*

The ancestors of Greeks living in Georgia today migrated from the Ottoman Empire to what was since 1801 the *gruzinskaya guberniya* "Georgian Governorate" of the Russian Empire.[1] I have already mentioned their region of origin as Pontus, which denotes the territory "roughly between the river Kizil Irmak (west of Trebizond), the Georgian/Turkish borders (east of Trebizond) and the Taurus mountains (Ala/Bulghar-Dagh) in the south" (Sideri, 2006, p. 24). Figure 2.1 depicts the areas of origin based on historical sources and oral histories of the community, as related in accounts collected for this book and during the various documentation efforts outlined in the previous Chapter. It also shows the areas Ottoman Greeks were settled in.

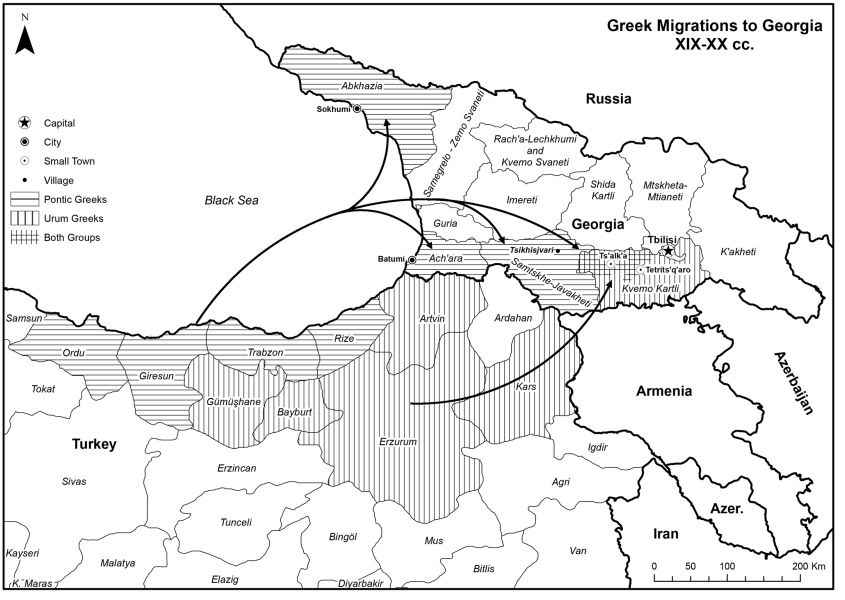

Figure 2.1: Areas of Origin. Map compiled by Nika Loladze (Loladze, 2019, p. 31).

Historical sources date Greek settlements on the territory of the contemporary Georgian nation state to as early as 1000 BC (Kokoev et al., 1999, p.

1 For an excellent and comprehensive history of *The Making of the Georgian Nation* cf. Suny (1994).

23) or 800-600 BC (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1991, p. 357). Neither these movements nor the settlement of Ottoman Greeks close to mines on Georgian territory in the second half of the 18th century AD (Kokoev et al., 1999, p. 23) are mentioned in the narratives collected in recent research projects. The migrations discussed in this book are thus not the first east-west migration of Greeks onto the territory of the contemporary Georgian nation state. This is corroborated by Fonton (1840, p. 149), who puts the number of Greeks living in the Georgian Governorate at roughly 3,000 prior to the migrations of the 19th-century. Fonton was an eyewitness to General Ivan Fyodorovich Paskevich's military campaign in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828-29, triggered by the Greek War of Independence. I mention Paskevich because his name comes up with some frequency in the narratives told by members of Georgia's Greek community today. This allows us to specify which of the four main migratory movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries consultants believe to have brought their ancestors to present-day Georgia.[2] Importantly, all four followed armed conflicts involving the Russian and Ottoman Empires.

The first movement took place after the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), which granted Greece independence, while Russia gave back to the Ottoman Empire much of the territory marked in Figure 2.1 as the area of origin of Urum-speaking Greeks (Eloeva, 1994, p. 458). As a result, about 42,000 Ottoman Greeks and a large number of Armenians fled the Ottoman Empire (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1991, p. 358).[3] The second and third large-scale migratory movements followed the Crimean War (1853-56) and the Russo-Ottoman War (1877-78) (Kokoev et al., 1999, p. 23). Taken together, these three migrations saw 150,000 Greeks resettle across the Caucasus as a whole (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1991, p. 360), i.e. not only in present-day Georgia. The latter two migrations in particular must be considered in light of Russian attempts at religious homogenization through population exchange, ousting Muslims and inviting Christians from the Ottoman Empire Empire and Qajar Iran (Sideri 2006, p. 105; Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou 1991, p. 359f.). A prominent example is the deportation of Circassians to the Ottoman Empire after their defeat in the 1860s and the allocation of formerly Circassian land to Russian, German, Greek, and Bulgarian settlers (Allen / Muratoff 1953, p. 107f.; Richmond 2013). The fourth large-scale migration of 80,000 Ottoman

2 That is, migratory movements larger than individual or family migrations, which also took place "continuously" along the Black Sea coast according to Sideri (2006).

3 The area marked as Pontic speaking remained under Ottoman control throughout the war.

Greeks, this time very clearly in flight from persecution, occurred during and towards the end of the First World War, when the Russian army retreated in 1917 from what is today Turkish territory (Allen / Muratoff 1953, p. 461; Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou 1991, p. 361; Kokoev et al. 1999, p. 24).

These four waves of emigration from Ottoman territory resulted, at least in part, from mounting pressure on the Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire during and after wars. This is especially the case for the periods following the Greek War for Independence (1828-29) and towards the end of the World War One, which for the Kingdom of Greece and the Republic of Turkey ended only on 24 July 1923 with the Treaty of Lausanne and the *ex post facto* legalization of a population exchange that had forcibly resettled about 1.5 million Orthodox Christian "Greeks" from Asia Minor and about half a million Muslim "Turks" from Greece. Areas exempt from the treaty were Istanbul, Western Thrace and the islands Imvros and Tenedos (Hirschon, 2008b; Meinardus, 2002). While the ancestors of the Greek community in Georgia had mostly left Asia Minor by that time, the treaty is notable because it used religious affiliation as the sole attribute deciding the future national affiliation of the uprooted individuals (Meinardus, 2002, p. 82).[4] According to Hirschon (2008b, p. 8) this was established as the relevant criterion by the Turkish negotiators, reflecting the Ottoman way of categorizing the Empire's subjects, to which I now turn.

The narrative corpus we have of Greeks in Georgia relates histories of subjugation and persecution: *pod igom turkov* "under the Turks' yoke" is one of the key phrases used when speaking about the time in the Ottoman Empire.[5] This is very understandably an account of the experiences of displacement following the wars outlined above, especially the Greek secessionist endeavors of the 1820s when Greeks in all parts of the Ottoman Empire were viewed as potentially dangerous (Barkey, 2008, p. 278). Contemporary historians, however, underscore the internal diversity of the Ottoman Empire, with Barkey (2008) even naming it an *Empire of Difference*, i.e. one based not on homogeneity but on heterogeneity, which was reflected in how it created institutions to govern its non-Muslim subjects. Importantly, Barkey (2008) also shows how Ottoman Greeks took part in the building and administration

4 Cf. the contributions in Hirschon (2008a) for a comprehensive transdisciplinary appraisal of the population exchange and its impact on the uprooted people and their governments.

5 Zoumpalidis' (2014) consultants in the Northern Caucasus tell similar stories. Cf. also the Section on heritage varieties in Chapter 5 on the narrative of Urum Greeks having been made to "choose between language and religion".