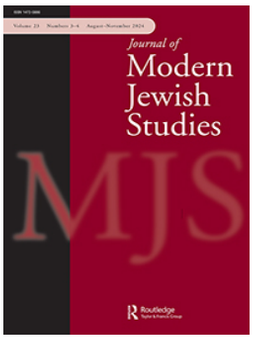

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Nino Aivazishvili-Gehne

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The pragmatics of migration: ethnicity as agency and reconfigurations of Georgian-Jewish identity in Germany

Nino Aivazishvili-Gehne

Leibniz-Institute for East-and Southeast European Studies in Regensburg (IOS), Regensburg, Germany

ABSTRACT

In this chapter I examine the multiple perceptions and ascriptions of identities amongst Jewish Post-Soviet Georgian migrants in Germany, focusing on the formation of community after emigration. The first line of discussion concerns the manifestations and perceptions of identities in the activities of people at both the personal and group levels. Analysing everyday relationships in one community in Osnabrück, I discuss how and why the member's new arrangements of belonging are formed, and how experiences of living and growing up in diverse ethnic and religious settings influences their self-perceptions of this belonging. The second strand of my argument is dedicated to Georgian-Jewish identities in general and specifically to entanglements of Georgian and Jewish identities during and after migration to Germany. What did it mean to be Jewish in Georgia during the Soviet period and after? What does it mean to be Jewish after migrating to Germany?

KEYWORDS

Jews from Georgia; migrants; Germany; community; belonging

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine the phenomenon of multiple perceptions and ascriptions of identities in circles of migrants from the former USSR in Germany. Its main focus is on Jews from Georgia, with special emphasis on the formation of community after emigration. What new arrangements of belonging are formed among those affected and why? How do experiences of living and growing up in diverse ethnic and religious settings influence the perception of one's own belonging?

To show how, why and in which contexts certain precise configurations of belonging emerge, I will analyse everyday relationships in one particular community in Osnabrück.[1] While this community is officially known as "Georgian," on closer inspection it becomes clear that the use of this term involves a much

CONTACT Nino Aivazishvili-Gehne aivazishvili@ios-regensburg.de

broader context of identification and that members have multiple affiliations. The community consists of ethnic Georgian, Jewish-Georgian, Jewish-Greek or German-Georgian families. This group of people is informally organized around an association (*Verein*).[2] However, individual self-designations and perceptions are far more complex than these hyphenated identities suggest. In everyday relationships, state, ethnic and religious affiliations intertwine and boundaries fade and blend. What would be considered the group "membership" depends on whether the focus is on religious belonging, kinship relationships, friendship networks, or the actions in formal and/or public contexts. In short, in the case of migrant community in Osnabrück it is far from clear where exactly the "boundaries"[3] between different domains of belonging run.

Using the example of Jews from Georgia in Osnabrück, I argue against homogenizing representations of identity. The primordialist view still widely held in the South Caucasus, both in ethnography and historiography, holds to a "once and always" sense of belonging to the Georgian, Azerbaijani (Albanian), Armenian (etc.) culture –, with little attention to sociocultural construction and even less to the current situation and self-perceptions of the groups concerned.[4] This contribution underscores the plastic nature of identity formation and the need to move beyond rigid categorizations and recognition of constant changes in the lives of individuals.[5]

In this vein, I will investigate some complexities of Georgian-Soviet-Jewish identity in a post-migrant and post-Soviet context, in the accounts of participants in Osnabrück. The first line of discussion concerns the manifestations and perceptions of identities in the activities of people – or networks of immigrants – at both the personal and group levels. In interpreting and translating arrangements of identities, the concept of hybridity should be used critically. As Floya Anthias argues, hybridity is a concept "often examined in terms of the intermingling of cultural components, without considering the question of how they are used and in what contexts."[6] With my contribution, I would like to place a fine-grained focus on the *contexts* in which hybridity is "used" in diverse compositions of belongings, focusing on what Anthias calls "translocational positionality."[7]

The second strand of my argument is dedicated to Georgian-Jewish identities in general and specifically to entanglements of Georgian and Jewish identities in and after the migration process in Germany. What did it mean to be Jewish in Georgia during the Soviet period and its aftermath? What does it mean to be Jewish after migrating to Germany? There is a wonderful and rich literature on the Jewish diaspora in Germany that shows different facets of being able to, wanting to be, or refusing to be Jewish.[8] These authors above also emphasize the discrepancies and paradoxes found both within the group and in the perspectives of the host society. Jewishness involves different potential facets of belonging and can be lived out in different ways.[9]

Jewishness in my analysis is explored primarily as a secular cultural signifier of belonging, as it tends to manifest in networks of immigrants who shared

some aspects of Georgian identity and cosmopolitan Soviet urban culture. These belongings were a product of a specific lifestyle in the urban Caucasus (Tbilisi in my particular case) and significantly shaped understandings of belonging in the community after migration. In this sense, the "diasporic condition" of the life of the Jews from Georgia is closely connected and interwoven with diasporic life of other peoples from Georgia.[10] In this regard, my study contributes to a better understanding of how migration, mobility, transnational, diasporic and/or cosmopolitan studies can be made vivid in context of post migratory life of individuals and communities.[11]

In religious terms, Jewishness can range from the strictest religious practice to atheist rejection, with various levels of observance and "performing Jewishness" in between.[12] Since I did not have access to the synagogue, I could not include important aspects of Jewish religious life in Osnabrück, which leaves my account incomplete. Nevertheless, it is important to show different pieces of the puzzle in order to trace fluidity and the nesting of (non)belongings.

My data is based on four months of intensive ethnographic fieldwork from July to September 2021 and March 2022 and on further shorter visits in 2022 and 2023. It involves participant observation, biographical narrative interviews and informal conversations. Further data that was analysed as part of the research included family photographs, social media entries and clippings from newspapers. The material provides relevant information about different facets of migrants' lifeworld in Germany. From one perspective, relations inside the community are an expression of the group's sociality of kinship and friendship; from another they are also influenced and redefined by the conditions and relationships of post-migratory life.

In order to present and explain the complexity of sociality and its influence on shaping belongings in post-migratory life (be it citizenship, ethnic, religious or geographical belonging), I shall present at the beginning an ethnographic vignette and analyse it in following subsections on different, personal as well as group levels.

The outline of this chapter goes as follows: in first two sections ethnographic vignettes are presented and facets of the identity of members of the Osnabrück community are discussed. The focus is specifically on various dimensions of Jewishness. In the following, I give a brief introduction to historical narratives and experiences of the past. As a next step, the pragmatic decision to emigrate and ethnicity are addressed and analysed as "room for manoeuvre" and finally I summarize my findings.

Who sits at the table?

> Today, Trio Nami, consisting of three very good friends from Georgia, are giving a concert in a Turkish restaurant in Osnabrück (*Gartlage*). About 30 people have gathered for this evening. Most of the Georgians present were their family and friends. The daughter of one singer travelled from Berlin especially for this. This meant

> there was hardly any room left in the restaurant for visitors from outside. Every now and then, passers-by stopped and smiled kindly at us or applauded. A man who lived directly above the venue stood at the window all evening and clapped enthusiastically after every song. This was more of an "emotional get-together" than a show for commercial profit (or it was, but for the restaurant). As far as I know, the event was also planned as a "have fun among ourselves" event. It was a way of seeing each other as a community during the pandemic. The staff was busy with many orders. The community members (including me as a guest) were paid for by Davit, affectionately known among friends as "the elder" (*ukhutsesi* in Georgian).[13] The evening started at 7pm and lasted until 11pm. The Trio sang and listeners (including me) sang along. They were familiar beautiful songs in Georgian, sung with piano accompaniment. One of singers had transported the instrument from home. We enjoyed melodies and a happy get-together. Languages of communication at the tables were Georgian, Russian and German, as apart from "Georgians" there were also Ukrainian, Armenian and a few German-only speaking friends or family members. There were guests mixing Georgian and Russian. I moved from one table to the other. I sat here and there and spoke Georgian, Russian and German. What was particularly remarkable, however, was the table where, apart from me, Davit's family and two friends were sitting. I took a photo of this table: there where three Jews, an Armenian, a Greek and a Ukrainian present. (From the diary, 4 September 2021, Osnabrück)

Later that evening, when I was writing down the events in my diary and securing photos, I thought about how the interpretation of the ethnic affiliation of the person in the photograph depends on one's historical experience and "*ways* of seeing."[14] In this regard it is crucial to separate Halakhic Jewish affiliation from the Soviet path of ethnic-national categorization. According to Jewish religious law, a person who is the child of a Jewish mother is considered a Jew. However, the Soviet system also categorized children of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother as Jewish. I also recalled that the term *goimi* is part of Georgian urban slang.[15] A loan-word in Judaeo-Georgian, its sense of otherness has been transposed to those outside the urban culture. The word no longer means "non-Jew" (cf. Hebrew גוי goy) but the negative connotation of being old-fashioned, backward and unenlightened, something like country bumpkins.[16] Indeed, what I had felt that evening was that the sense of togetherness was defined by neither religious or ethnic belonging but by a lifestyle and attitude of "being from capital city" (i.e. Tbilisi), a sense of being a refined and elaborate person.

For example, "Aunt Margarita," who is close to Davit's family through her daughter, was introduced to me as a "real Tbilisian woman" (*namdvili tbiliseli kali)*. Only later was I told that she was Armenian, but I noticed that they spoke to her in mixed Georgian and Russian. Similarly, Rizvan, who joined us later, was introduced to me as a "boy from Tbilisi" *(tbiliseli bit'chi)*.[17] The value of being *tbiliseli* is more unifying than ethnicity. The community does have members who are from rural areas, but the point is the lifestyle of a "refined," cultivated person, with broad horizons, openness, and shared values. The non-Jews at the table certainly do not perceive themselves as *goimi* in the Georgian sense.

This relates to the discourses on cosmopolitanism and lifestyle identities analysed by Bruce Grant. In their specific Caucasian and post-Soviet contexts, my interlocutors' statements bear comparison to the narrations collected by the author about cosmopolitan ideologies. As a "product" of Soviet socialization, cosmopolitanism was also a "project of desired ideals that 'advanced socialism' promised."[18] This specific socialization was not about suggesting diversification, but rather about sharing the same world (in this case the capital city) and realizing that this way of living transcends ethnicity. At least on an ideological level, religion and ethnicity were not supposed to play a decisive role in the Soviet Union. Instead, commonalities such as being part of "Brother Republics," being "Soviet citizens" etc. were stressed.

Another relevant pair of terms from Georgian language that community members always use for describing a person officially declared as Jewish is whether someone acts "very Jewish" or "not Jewish" (*dzalian ebraelobs* or *ar ebraelobs)*. Those who "*act very Jewish*" are more particularly seen as "Jews from Georgia." This means that on the one hand, they are categorized and defined as somehow very close to Georgians emotionally and culturally.[19] On the other hand, those who *act very Jewish* are people who choose Jewish religious life, thus distinguishing themselves from being Georgian in the religious sense. Accordingly, those who *do not act (very) Jewish* remain closer to being mainstream Georgian. Those who do, however, become *particular* Georgians by, following the Jewish faith.

This complex belonging was shaped in a peculiar way by the post-Soviet experiences of identity formation. After independence in Georgia, religion and religiosity became more and more important for identity construction and its understanding. In the 1990s, the massive chauvinist, nationalist wave in Georgia also made it very difficult to have such a hybrid identity as being a Georgian Muslim, for example.[20] And although, according to interlocutors, even in 1990s it cannot be said that being Jewish in Georgia became as difficult as being Georgian Muslim, there were certain complications. The brother of one of my interlocutors was brutally beaten up for being a Jew, after which he and his family decided to immigrate to Israel.

Complex and interlocking belongings when it comes to illustrating what it means to be a "Georgian Jew" are also visible in other field examples. This shows not only the interweaving of ethnic and religious domains of belonging, but a shift between geographical and state frames of reference. Marita's case shows this very well.

Facets of identity of members of the Osnabrück community

Marita is very good friends with Davit's wife, Lile. Together with Neli, another active member of the community, they are an inseparable team. The women studied art together in Tbilisi. Then came separation due to migration from

Georgia at different times, but gradually all three friends were reunited in Germany. Although Marita lives far away in another city, they are in touch literally every day via mobile phone and camera and share their lives with each other.

Marita was introduced to me as a Jew from Tbilisi. "But such a Jew: A Georgian through and through: Georgian in her soul" (Davit, 57 years old). After migration, homesickness became so strong that Marita began to express her emotions in poetry as well as painting.[21] The poems are dedicated to Georgia, Tbilisi and self-identification, among other things. To illustrate these facets of identity and self-positioning, I turn to my diary:

> On 11.08.21 I was invited to a birthday party in the "allotment garden of the Georgians."[22] Lile and Neli convinced Marita to celebrate Gabriel's [Marita's son] birthday in Osnabrück and she indeed arrived for two nights. It was a beautiful celebration. The friends had not seen each other since the pandemic and were obviously enjoying their time together. There was a lot of laughing, cooking and singing together. Lile and Neli had cooked plenty of Georgian dishes beforehand. Since Marita's son is the kind of Jew who "acts very Jewish," the dishes had been prepared strictly separately.
>
> There were three types of shashliks (beef, poultry and salmon) and dishes were prepared for Gabriel in separate containers.
>
> Gabriel played the guitar and the guests sang along in Georgian. I was deeply impressed by this event. The mobile phone literally did not stop ringing. And every time the bell rang, the guests cheered: And now Tbilisi is online and now it's Israel's turn. At some point Davit, Lile and Neli asked Marita to recite her poems to me, which she did. One of them I found particularly helpful in expressing the complex nature of her identity. It goes like this:
>
> "I am a small grain,
> Blown over, a speck of dust, between two lands.
> Jewish by faith,
> Georgian by origin." (From field diary, on 8 November 2021, Osnabrück)

This diary entry shows how complex the belongings, self-descriptions but also attributions are. Mainly, however, the above-mentioned example indicates the situational significance of identity. The celebration is an event where the religious dimension (in form of religious dietary laws) merges with the ethnic and friendly dimensions of sociality. The people gathered around the table are mainly close friends who respectfully perceive the religiousness of some and want to bring joy to each other. And although religious differences become noticeable (separate containers) it is friendship sociality that is the main factor for being together. Everything else is organized and arranged around it so that balance and satisfaction prevails.

Further, my example shows also that city of Osnabrück is not the only centre of life for this community and it is vividly embedded in translocal and

transnational networks. My interlocutors are people who accumulate the knowledge of diverse cultural codes, develop sensitivity and awareness to acting according to several sets of rules and develop strategies for manoeuvring between different societies and beyond ethnic or national boundaries.[23] Many members live with experience and praxis of "long distance family culture" (*long-distance*-Familienkultur).[24]

Davit for example has a grandchild in Israel, and Marita's sister's family also mostly resides there. Liles and Nelis family members, on the other hand, live in Georgia. The ethnic-religious alliances are also drawn across Germany. As I mentioned above, Marita lives in another city about four hours away from Osnabrück. When she came with her son, she brought along a friend of hers: a non-Jewish Georgian woman who many in the community didn't know. The connections within Germany are particularly strong among synagogue members, as I could hear from several interlocutors. There are children in the community who participate in various events organized by the synagogue and thus form their acquaintances and circles of friends in various German cities. For example, one boy from Osnabrück's circle of friends takes part in Jewrovision.[25] I was always told about him with pride and joy.

After depicting special emotional ties among my interlocutors as coming from the same country and same city, I would like to turn my attention to the history of "Georgian Jews" and report on dominant discourses that have influenced identity formation of this group.

Historical narratives and experiences of the past

Many interlocutors mentioned the following narrative to me that is widely used in Georgia: that the Jewish community in Georgia has already existed for 26 centuries and that there have been no outbreaks of violence, anti-Semitism or serious conflicts during this long period of coexistence. The extent to which this information can be historically proven is a long discussion and beyond the scope of this paper.[26] I will therefore only focus on the details which frequently came across during conversations with my interlocutors (mainly in their 50s now) while they told me about their Soviet life. Firstly, emotional memories of Jewish friends or neighbours, who played an important role in the life of the surroundings and then "suddenly" went to Israel, leaving behind the painful emptiness. Secondly, talk about the pragmatic decision to leave Georgia and creative usage of one's own "Jewish identity" for and after emigration in such a manner that one continues to live the "Georgian way."

Historical embeddedness of being a Georgian Jew

According to the historical sources, there were several waves of Jewish migrations to Georgia from the various parts of the Byzantine Empire, the

Near East and the Ottoman Empire.[27] Authors talk about both Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews being present in Georgia.[28] According to Pourtskhvanidze and Tskhvediani, the

> first Georgian-Hebrew contacts are already documented in the fourth and third centuries BC.[29] During the first exile from the "holy land" to Georgia in the fourth century BC, Hebrew was the dominant language of the Jewish settlements in Georgia (Mtskheta, Urbnisi), whereas during the second great exile in the first century AD, Aramaic was the predominant language of communication among the settlers.[30]

However, over time, Georgian Jews have adopted Georgian as their mother tongue. The long coexistence greatly shaped the Jewish communities in Georgia and they have very long been a historical and integral part of Georgian culture.[31]

Lomtadze and Enoch analyse two widely used perspectives: the first is categorized as a Jewish perspective and considers Georgian Jewry as a part of the Jewish diaspora in terms of ethnic, religious, and cultural belonging. The second perspective is described by the authors as an assimilative perspective. Here, the Jews are considered

> a part of the Georgian nation due to their historical coexistence with ethnic Georgians in a shared cultural environment. Both perspectives emphasize religion and traditions, considering Georgian Jews to be different from Orthodox Georgians only by virtue of faith, customs, and traditions.[32]

The concept itself, "Georgian Jew," testifies to the complexity and plasticity of the belonging within the framework of the Georgian multinational society. According to Chikovani, Pirtskhalava and Kakitelashvili the term "Georgian Jews" has been commonly used since the nineteenth century to designate not merely the relationship between Georgians and Jews but the centuries-old relationship between Georgians and "Georgian Jews."[33] Furthermore, these authors argue that it is impossible to separate "Georgian Jews" from their Jewishness as well as from their existential orientation towards the Georgian language and culture. With this specific term, "Georgian Jews," the Jewish self-conception broadened and designated the members of the Georgian-speaking Jewish community as not merely Jewish but specifically Georgian. "The usage of the term "Georgian Jews" in Georgia harmonizes with the saga of a twenty-six-century long togetherness of the Georgians and the Jews."[34]

These idealized historical discourses, which of course are neither completely precise nor singular, powerfully reverberated among my interlocutors who often spoke about a harmonious, non-violent, centuries-long co-existence in Georgia (except in the one narrative where the brother was beaten up). This is backed by a strong emphasis on hospitality as a main attribute of Georgian culture. According to Florian Mühlfried,

> The hospitality narrative became embedded in Georgian national identity construction in the nineteenth century within the rise of the national movement. Jews played a special role within this narrative of tolerance and courtesy towards the individual and collective quests of Georgia. To the inside, hospitality and tolerance are manifested as essentialized features of Georgian identity. To the outside, a tolerant treatment of the Jews stands in stark contrast to Russia and its anti-Semite pogroms.[35]

Johanna Stigler has elaborated on the existing frictions and "othering" processes inside and outside the Jewish population in Georgia.[36] According to the author, the long-established (*alteingesessenen*) Jews were the sole representatives of this religious community in Georgia until the nineteenth century. Their "otherness" did not give rise to any potential for conflict that could gravely threaten the stability of the system, especially since they lived in separate residential districts according to traditional regulations and essentially occupied the same social position as the Christian bondsmen.[37] The situation changed with the immigration of Russian Jews. Georgian population began to differentiate between various Jewish groups. The Jews were divided between "own" and "alien" ones. "The resulting sentiment for the 'own' Jews was reinforced by the myth of a Georgia that grew out of an ideal image, in which, unlike the hated Russian foreign rule, there had never been repression against the Jews."[38] The local Jews also underwent a parallel process of consciousness-raising when confronted with the Ashkenazi Jews from Russia. They no longer saw themselves as merely Jewish, but as a distinct group of Georgian Jews with significant differences from the Ashkenazim. The relationship between these two groups in Georgia remained distant for a long time.[39]

Furthermore, there is a distinction to be drawn between Jews from the South Caucasus or so-called "Mountain Jews" and the "Georgian Jews." The Mountain Jews refer to themselves as *Juhur* and speak a *Juhuri/Judeo Tat* – that is, Persian – language.[40] The Georgian Jews are called *ebraelebi* and sometimes labelled as *Mizrahi* i.e. Jews descending from lands once ruled by the Ottoman Empire and/or Persia.[41] Johanna Stigler in addition reports on a small community of Kurdish-speaking Jews in Georgia, the so-called *Lachluch*.[42] Last but not least, there is a controversy concerning the language usage in this community. According to Toria et al., Jews in many other countries have developed their own language, but not in Georgia.[43] However, other sources mention that

> language was one of the distinctive markers distinguishing Georgian Jews from the rest of the population. Judeo-Georgian is a variety of the Georgian language (more precisely, it is based on Georgian), which does not entirely match either standard Georgian or any of the regional dialects of the Georgian language.[44]

Moreover, until the twentieth century, some professional groups of Georgian Jews are said to have had a specific "commercial language," which "enabled encrypted conversation for the buyer."[45]

In what follows, I will focus on my interlocutors' memories from the socialist period in Georgia and how they remember Jewish compatriots, friends, neighbours, and acquaintances. These memories are important building blocks for identity formation and influence the post-socialist as well as the post-migratory experiences.

Saying good-bye: about history of Georgian Jews in Soviet times

The following story is by no means an exception. I heard several stories about "tearful goodbyes" and abandoned stages of life in Georgia. Memories as a significant part of identity shape today's perception and capture the emotional ties, the intimacy and closeness of people, friends and neighbours, colleagues, who have played and still play an important role for the person. Furthermore, some recollections are also good sources for understanding specific characteristics of Soviet life among and with Jews in Soviet Georgia (and not only in the capital city). The following example seems to me particularly well suited for this purpose.

Lile is married to Davit, a Jew from Borjomi, but he is not her first Jewish acquaintance.[46] Lile was very often as a child in Kutaisi, a city in West Georgia that historically had a high concentration of Jews.[47] They were good neighbours and respected people in Kutaisi: Skilled traders, doctors, and prospective people. Lile particularly remembers a beautiful house in the street where her grandmother lived. A Jewish doctor's family lived there. "They were one of the first to go to Israel in the 70s. It was very sad. People were standing in the street and crying. They were good neighbors, good people. It was a strange feeling of emptiness." Another large house with a very beautiful wooden staircase, which Lile remembers as a "special place," also belonged to Jews. "If any of us in Kutaisi wanted to buy something special, foreign goods, we knew we should go to the Jews. They had the goods in their own houses and sold there secretly." The Jews were very skilled in trade "under the bar table" (*dachlqvesha vach'roba*).

As we can see from Lile's narrative, during Soviet times Georgian Jews were well-established in respected occupations (e.g. physicians). They often lived in the cities and their socio-economic position was noteworthy. Not uncommonly, the Jews included representatives of the Soviet *intelligentsia*.[48] According to Lomtadze and Enoch

> the Jews of Georgia engaged in commerce, agriculture, and crafts, but their main occupation was petty trade until the second half of the twentieth century. They preferred to live in cities and towns, i.e. urban areas where there were favorable conditions for trading.[49]

It was not unusual for Jews from the USSR to see themselves as educated, urban and sophisticated.[50] They were very well connected locally and internationally. Similarly, from other interviews, I found that some were successful

entrepreneurs over several generations. Lile's husband and his father also ran successful businesses in Kalmykia and Odessa over the decades.

Similar to Chen Bram's interlocutors, the protagonists in Lile's memories, as well as the family members, were very good at "getting the 'right' connections with various officials."[51] According to Lile her neighbours traded freely during the Soviet time, so skilfully that they were able to avoid state surveillance.

Lile's story demonstrates another piece of the "puzzle of belongings" in the USSR, the city-periphery dimension of identity. It recalls the "vector of consumer migration" by Soviet citizens, whereby the urban centres were no longer exclusively recognized as a famous shopping destination.[52] In the 1970s and 1980s there was also movement in the opposite direction, when some seasoned urban shoppers went to the peripheries and small villages in search of desirable goods.[53]

This kind of creative coping strategies and skilful resistance to state regulations can be described as "making do" in intricated situations to overcome hardships which Deborah Reed-Danahay terms *debrouillardise*.[54] This became even more acute for countless citizens in post-Soviet times. Among other things, it was also handled pragmatically and creatively with regards to "using" one's own identity. This was facilitated by the end of the rigid Soviet regime that inscribed ethnic belonging into citizenship. Today, citizenship is no longer an unchangeable destiny for former Soviet citizens. The inhabitants of the former Soviet Union have gained more flexibility and options to determine their own citizenship themselves, to change it or to take on dual citizenship.[55]

But what is even more important for my analyses at this point is that ethnicity itself can be used flexibly and differently. In the following section, I will talk about strategies and contexts where ethnicity is used as a creative tool, creating "room for manoeuvre" to achieve one's own goals: to deal with new challenges during and after emigration.[56]

The pragmatic choice to emigrate and ethnicity as "room for manoeuvre"

Davit is a 57-year-old man from Georgia. He came to Osnabrück in 1998 with his family, his wife and baby, as a "quota refugee."[57] He was greatly supported in this by a close Jewish friend from their times together in Odessa. After spending eight days in a reception centre, the family moved to Osnabrück. Two years after their arrival, Davit's parents and sister with her husband and two daughters joined them. After two and a half years, Davit's and Lile's second daughter was born in Germany. They have been living here ever since.

In the interview, I asked Davit if there were certain expectations and obligations upon him in Germany (on the part of the state or of the Jewish community). He said:

> There is a Jewish community here, you only pay *kapikebi* [very little] for it and there are offers there, among other things for kids, singing etc., but I didn't want all that.[58] I am not a Jew. I wear a cross. It would be inappropriate. The congregation does pay attention [to this], but still let you in. The Germans don't give a damn. I just showed them the document that my father is Jewish, and that was it. They let us in. (Excerpt from the interview with Davit, 31 July 2021, Osnabrück)

Davit's example shows very well how hybridity (in this case of ethnic identities) is "used" and in what exact contexts.[59] Since I introduced him above as "a Jew from Borjomi" I will presently comment on why I do so when he's own self-description is different. The reason for this is that officially, Davit entered Germany as a "quota refugee Jew" and also declares himself to be a Jew depending on the situation.[60] When he enters Germany, he "turns into a Jew" and nothing else mattered to the German state other than his proof of having a Jew in the family, as he states, he also passes for a Jew.[61]

Davit repeatedly uses his ethnicity as "room for manoeuvre."[62] For him, ethnicity (understood as nationality in the Soviet sense) is not an essential but a changeable and malleable construct.[63] In his Soviet passport, "Greek" was written in the fifth column, because it was a better fit for family matters at that time (during the late Soviet Era and for migration purpose in Greece).[64] Davit spent most of his Soviet and Post-Soviet life in Odessa, where he owned a restaurant. In everyday life, he spoke Russian and Greek in addition to Georgian. That was a good life he had, as he stated. The decision to emigrate to Germany was related to the desire of his second wife (ethnically Georgian), who as a young artist no longer saw any prospects for development and realization in post-Soviet Georgia.[65] While Davit was in Odessa for months, Lile stayed in Borjomi with her parents-in-law.

Similarly, whenever he "needs to be Jewish" in Germany, he can show it, but he does not feel Jewish at all. Firstly, he "wears a cross," as he says, which means he is Georgian Orthodox. Secondly, he simply feels affectively Georgian.

The decision to select his prescribed and self-chosen identities situationally is caused by the possibility of using Jewishness or being Georgian as a potential resource and symbolic capital in everyday interaction. This can also be seen in his statement about wearing a cross. It may well be that he was emphasizing this because he was talking to me, whom he saw as an Orthodox Georgian. It is not a topic of conversation e.g. when he enters Germany. It is not relevant.

From another conversation with him, however, I know that he used his "Jewishness" to find a flat. Davit said that he put pressure on certain people who first refused him. He confronted them with the accusation that as Germans they still had something against the Jews. The flat was found very quickly, he added with a smile. And while at first glance one would not necessarily consider this act a virtue, it would be explainable given the discriminatory reality of the housing market regarding migrants in Germany.

Currently Davit possesses double citizenship: German and Georgian. There were certain periods in the 2000s when one could apply for citizenship without giving up one's own old ones, he stated.[66] Georgian citizenship is very important to him and his wife. His children also have dual citizenship.

Dima, a secular Jew from Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine who migrated to Germany with his parents in 1997, provides another example from my fieldwork of how to use different facets of one's own Jewish identity as a resource. One day Golda, an old Jewish woman from Russia, took me to the Serbian Orthodox cemetery in Osnabrück to "visit" a friend there. And so, I learned from her the story of this deceased friend, a Jew who changed his faith because of love. Dima wanted to marry Neli, an ethnic Georgian who visited Davit's family in 2000. For Neli, Georgian Orthodoxy played a decisive role in getting married. So, Dima was baptized Christian Orthodox and the wedding was celebrated. For the state authorities in Germany, however, Dima remained a Jew and his family benefited from German state support available for Jews (such as state aid for housing assistance). Dima died in 2013 at the age of 63 and was buried in the Serbian Orthodox cemetery in Osnabrück. Neli continues to receive state financial support as the widow of a Jew.

To summarize my argument, these two cases and the two men's attitudes show very well how a person's assignment and belonging to a certain group (in this case Jews from the USSR/ Georgian Jew) is to be considered in the context of the post-Soviet transformation and further global changes. The groups are no longer firmly territorialized, spatially bounded, or culturally homogenous.[67] Nor do individuals spend their lives statically or in a vacuum, constantly changing themselves and their environment through their own practices and ideas.[68] Instead, such phenomena can be better explained by Floya Anthias's concept of "translocational positionality" which acknowledges that identification is an enactment that does not entail fixity or permanence, as well as the role of the local and the contextual in the processes involved.[69] Both Davit and Dima use their own ethnicity, in their particular cases their Jewishness, as "room for manoeuvre," therefore creating subject positionalities and building their lives in the way that suits them best.

Some concluding remarks

The aim of this paper was to discuss the phenomenon of multiple assignments of identities among Jews from Georgia in Osnabrück. The complexity of belongings and their influence on shaping post-migratory life was framed with field observations and theoretical considerations. Using the example of Jews from Georgia, I showed that neither formal entry as Jewish in the Soviet passport, nor proof of Jewish identity during and after migration, adequately grasps reality for migrants with such a history as "Georgian Jews."

In addition, another dimension of the identitarian combination was briefly mentioned – the "Georgian-Soviet-Jewish identity." The Soviet part in this identity configuration refers to the past of Georgian Jews in Germany. It is an "experienced" identity that is spoken about in the past tense.

The most important result of the analysis of plasticity of "Georgian Jewish" identity is the mismatch between nostalgic/politicized perspectives and the actual complexities of identity. What we see instead of a harmonious or homogeneous picture is that identification is an enactment that does not entail fixity or permanence.[70] Migrants use their own ethnicity (in this particular case their Jewishness or being Georgian) as a "room for manoeuvre" creating subject positionalities.

Furthermore, my analysis of everyday relationships in this community shows clearly that it is not ethnicity that is decisive for togetherness and membership/belonging, but rather lifestyle and attitude. In this particular case, "being from the capital city" in the sense of being a refined and elaborate person. For further contexts friendship is decisive.

Jewishness itself is to be considered on several levels. There are "Jews" and those who either act *very Jewish* or *not very Jewish*. Besides religious and ethnic domains, there is also a shift between geographical and state belongings. The city of Osnabrück is not the only centre of life for this community and it is intensively embedded in translocal and transnational networks.

Ethnic groups are no longer perceived as spatially bounded or culturally homogenous entities.[71] This is also the case for the groups from /in the former Soviet Union. Persons take one's life into one's own hands which sometimes means departing from "time-honored protocols,"[72] permanently changing themselves and their environment through their own practices and ideas.[73]

Notes

1. The city of Osnabrück in the northwest of Germany, located in the federal state of Lower Saxony, has 171,042 inhabitants. According to statistics, 13,995 of them (8.2 percent) have an international family history from the former USSR. Register of the city of Osnabrück, as of 31 August 2023.
2. *Osnabrücker Deutsch-Georgischer Kulturverein e.V.* officially founded in 2019 consists of 27 registered members. In fact, the number of members would be higher because not all members of the families are present in the list. As for active members, there are about 60 people in touch.
3. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*.
4. Aivazishvili-Gehne, *Staatsbürgerschaft an der Grenze*, 18.
5. Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture," 162.
6. Anthias, "New Hybridities, Old Concepts," 627.
7. Ibid., 633.

8. Klingenberg, *Materialismus und Melancholie.* Roberman, "Impostors of Themselves." Bernstein, "Sag mir warum isst Du immer noch das Schweinefleisch?" Körber, *Juden, Russen, Emigranten.* Becker, *Ankommen in Deutschland*.
9. Roberman, "Impostors of Themselves." Bernstein, "Sag mir warum isst Du immer noch das Schweinefleisch?"
10. Hage, *The Diasporic Condition,* 2.
11. See also Glick-Shiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic, "Defining Cosmopolitan Sociability in a Transnational Age."
12. Roberman, "Impostors of themselves," 200. The Russian phrase *"mi igraem v evreev"* [we are playing at being Jews], reflects the situation of many of the immigrants: they often find it difficult (or even fail) to pass for what is presumed to be their 'natural' identity.
13. Traditionally, the "elders" in Georgia, in Azerbaijan, or in central Asia, were those who received respect and exercised power: the village council and the clergy.
14. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 583 (original emphasis).
15. Lomtadze and Enoch, "Judeo-Georgian Language as an Identity Marker," 21.
16. According to Khalvashi and Manning, *goimi* means "hick," depicting not a rural person in the village but one who is behaving like a villager in the wrong context. Khalvashi and Manning, *Human Devils*.
17. A large music and dance competition of Jewish youth centres in Germany, which has taken place annually in German cities since 2002.
18. Grant, "Cosmopolitan Baku," 124.
19. According to Eldar Mamistvalishvili, the ethnonym "Georgian Jew" personifies historically sustained friendly coexistence of the Georgian and Jewish people. In spite of the fact that Georgia always was a multinational country, and representatives of some people live on this land many centuries, none of them could deserve the double (Georgian + Jew) ethnonym. Mamistvalishvili, *The History of Georgian Jews*, 42.
20. Pelkmans, *Defending the Border*.
21. Zmiejewski, *Georgian Women on the Move*. The author describes similar phenomena among Georgian migrant women in Greece. Her interviewees have also begun to express their suffering and sorrow in poems (forthcoming).
22. The "Georgian" community has been sharing an allotment garden for a few years now. Each member paid something for it. The amount was very small, almost symbolic. Whether it was for birthday parties for the members and their families, sudden meetings in good weather, games or singing evenings, the garden was very popular. I often had conversations there under a peach tree. Every time my official part was over, we had a meal together.
23. I call this fluid way of life and the accumulated specific knowledge "multiple intimacy," see Aivazishvili-Gehne, "'Multiple Vertrautheit'."
24. Darieva, "Russlanddeutsche, Nationalstaat und Familie in transnationaler Zeit," 361. The author also discusses "Russian Germans."
25. A large music and dance competition of Jewish youth centres in Germany, which has taken place annually in German cities since 2002.
26. But see Mamistvalishvili, *The History of Georgian Jews*. Kirmse, "Russian Imperial Borderlands."
27. Chikovani, Pirtskhalava und Kakitelashvili, "Jewish Identity in Georgia."
28. Ibid., 91. Pourtskhvanidze and Tskhvediani, "A Cryptolanguage of Georgian Jewish Merchants," 5. Ashkenazi Jews migrated from Russia in the nineteenth century, after Georgia's annexation by the Russian Empire.

29. Pourtskhvanidze and Tskhvediani, "A Cryptolanguage of Georgian Jewish Merchants," 5.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid. See also Mars and Altman, "The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia's Second Economy."
32. Lomtadze and Enoch, "Judeo-Georgian Language," 2.
33. Chikovani, Pirtskhalava and Kakitelashvili, "Jewish Identity in Georgia," 91. Some authors speak of "members of the Georgian nation of the Mosaic creed" [*Angehörige der georgischen Nation mosaischen Glaubensbekenntnisses*] – Icchak cited in Stigler, *Verwandtschaft*, 158.
34. Chikovani, Pirtskhalava and Kakitelashvili, "Jewish Identity in Georgia," 91. This is not yet specific to Georgian Jews but part of diasporic Judaism.
35. Mühlfried, "Not Sharing the Sacra," 161.
36. Stigler, *Verwandtschaft, Kultur, Religion*.
37. Ibid., 158.
38. Ibid.
39. Stigler, *Verwandtschaft, Kultur, Religion*, 158; see also Abakelia, "Synagogue as Infrastructure in Everyday Life," 321.
40. Chen Bram uses the term *juhuro*. Bram, "Moscow Azerbaijani-Juhuro 'Oligarchs'."
41. Mühlfried, "Not Sharing the Sacra," 153.
42. Stigler, *Verwandtschaft, Kultur, Religion*, 155.
43. Toria et al., *ebraelta ubani*, 16.
44. Lomtadze and Enoch, "Judeo-Georgian Language," 7.
45. Papisimedov cited in Pourtskhvanidze and Tskhvediani, "A Cryptolanguage of Georgian Jewish Merchants," 5.
46. Borjomi is a famous spa resort in Georgia. The mineral water from there, salty in taste, is still popular among people of the former Soviet countries.
47. Toria et al., *ebraelta ubani*. Before the Soviet era, there was even a school for Jewish children in Kutaisi, where Jewish history was taught. Schools were already closed at the beginning of Soviet rule. Religious institutions were also closed in the early 20s.
48. Plamper, *Das neue Wir,* 263.
49. Lomtadze and Enoch, "Judeo-Georgian Language as an Identity Marker," 4.
50. Klingenberg, *Materialismus und Melancholie*, 77.
51. Bram "Moscow Azerbaijani-Juhuro 'Oligarchs'," 6.
52. Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era*, 91.
53. Ibid.
54. Reed-Danahay, "Talking about Resistance," 224. The term "subsumes the concept of resisting domination along with a variety of other forms of social manipulation or even partial accommodation […] the ability to be resourceful, clever, or cunning in difficult situations."
55. Aivazishvili-Gehne, *Staatsbürgerschaft an der Grenze*, 56–7. Georgia itself recognizes dual citizenship.
56. I have adopted the term "room for manoeuvre" from Andrew Gordons and Trevor Stacks However, I do not use it only for the analysis of citizenship in a globalised world, but for ethnicity as well. Gordons and Stacks, "Citizenship Beyond the State," 125.
57. The "*Kontingentflüchtlinge*" program for Jewish people was analogous to the Aussiedler program from the former Soviet Union. Their number was limited. It was a humanitarian act and attempt to "correct" (*Wiedergutmachung*) the history of German anti-Semitism. Panagiotidis, "The Oberkreisdirektor," 47–8; cf. Cronin, *Russian-Speaking Jews*, 21–2.

58. *Копейки*. The coinage in USSR.
59. Anthias, "New Hybridities," 627.
60. Panagiotidis, "The Oberkreisdirektor," 532. The admission criteria changed constantly in the 90s. During this period applicants with "Jewish" nationality/ethnicity (in their Soviet documents) or descendants of at least one parent with such a registration were eligible for immigration as quota refugees.
61. The German state left the decision to define who was halakhically Jewish or not to the Jewish communities. However, the state chose not to "select" among Soviet-designated Jews. "Halakhic Jews could then be encouraged to join Jewish communities, while non-halakhic Jews would receive their welfare support from the state. This way the German government could continue to fulfil its responsibility to those persecuted Jews, while the Jewish communities would receive a contingent of halakhic Jews. After years of negotiations, a decision was made in 2005 that had a restrictive effect on migration. The immigration depended on three factors: prospective immigrants had to demonstrate, that they would be able to support themselves financially in Germany and would not be dependent on social welfare; that they could demonstrate a basic knowledge of the German language; and that they would be able to join a Jewish community." Cronin, *Russian-Speaking Jews*, 30–4.
62. Gordon und Stacks, "Citizenship Beyond the State," 125.
63. Nationality was mostly used in the sense of "ethnicity" or "ethnic group," but with a socio-economic connotation. The terms and categories used in Soviet scholarship often do not coincide with contemporary Western terms or are mixed up by different authors. See further in Aivazishvili-Gehne, *Staatsbürgerschaft an der Grenze*.
64. Davit's mother is a Greek from Georgia. He did not want to talk in detail about how exactly it happened with this pragmatic decision at the time.
65. His first wife lives with his child and a grandchild in Israel and they are in contact via mobile phone.
66. Cf. Plamper, *Das neue Wir*, 264.
67. Appadurai, "Global Ethnoscapes," 48.
68. Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture," 162.
69. Anthias, "New Hybridities," 633.
70. Ibid.
71. Appadurai, "Global Ethnoscapes," 48.
72. Jackson, *Exkursions*, 130.
73. Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture," 162.

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Notes on contributor

Nino Aivazishvili-Gehne holds a PhD in social anthropology and is a researcher at the Leibniz- Institute for East and Southeast European studies (IOS) in Regensburg. She has obtained her PhD degree from the University of the Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg and was simultaneously an associate Member at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle. After working in the social and educational sector with refugees and migrant organizations and as a lecturer at the Ruhr University Bochum, she was a researcher at RECET (University of Vienna) from March 2021 to March 2024 as part of the research network "Ambivalences of the Soviet: Diaspora Nationalities between Collective Experiences of Discrimination and Individual Normalization, 1953-2023". Her first book, Staatsbürgerschaft an der Grenze. Die georgischsprachigen Ingiloer in Aserbaidschan [Citizenship at the border. The Georgian-speaking Ingilo people in Azerbaijan] was published by Reichert Verlag in 2023 (in German). Her second book, Auf der Suche nach dem guten Leben. Postsowjetische Gemeinschaften in Osnabrück [In search of the good life. Post-Soviet communities in Osnabrück], was published by transcript in 2024 (in German).

ORCID

Nino Aivazishvili-Gehne http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9505-0243

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