

Everyday life between borders. Mobility, translocal practices and neighbourhood in south-east Georgia

Migration usually involves a temporary or permanent change of residence. It is associated with a complete change of environment and language, leaving the home country and temporarily parting with the family. It also requires adapting to a completely different socio-cultural space. But what happens when crossing the border does not entail such perceptible experiences, and the area behind it seems to be an extension of the abandoned one? How to come closer to understanding the world of the respondents when leaving Georgia for Azerbaijan is not treated as an 'abroad trip', but as a 'meet the family trip'? In what situations does the border become noticeable? These issues are the subject of my research, in which I try to describe the phenomenon of mobility, translocal practices and relations between neighbours in Azerbaijani villages and towns in the region located in southeast Georgia.

District of Marneuli is located in the Kvemo Kartli region as a part of southeastern Georgia on the border with Azerbaijan and Armenia. The place stands the highest number of Azerbaijani communities compared to other regions. During the national census conducted in Georgia in 2014, almost 42% of the population of the Kvemo Kartli region declared Azerbaijani nationality. Only in the Marneuli region, was 86.4% (over 90,000 people), which puts this minority in the position of a local majority (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2014). At the same time, there has been a significant decline in the number of Azerbaijanis in Georgia as a whole over the past less than 20 years - from 284,761 in 2002 to 233,082 in 2014. My preliminary research has led me to the hypothesis that statistics, by only presenting data on migration and population decline, do not take into account permanent mobility. The constant movement of the Azerbaijani minority between Georgia and Azerbaijan is not a simple phenomenon to capture and requires in-depth field research, direct observation of residents' practices. I consider transnationalism to be a factor in the mobility of the Azerbaijani minority, which influences the frequent movement between these two republics and the transformation of social bonds. It is also connected to developed networks and kinship bonds between the Azerbaijanis of Georgia and Azerbaijan. On the other hand, translocal practices are all transnational activities taking place in two localities and two states. I will also consider the ways of communication between populations differing from each other in declared nationality, religion and often in place of birth. In doing so, I hope to come closer to understanding relations between neighbours and interethnic nodes, as well as those based on kinship and transnational bonds, represented by the Azerbaijani minority in Marneuli. The field of preliminary research allowed me to establish that the experiences and action strategies of mobile people, considered as migrants, require in-depth research.

The research material will be obtained during four monthly field surveys and additional interviews in the city of Marneuli and Tbilisi. Taking into account previous research trips, taking place since 2018, the total duration of the research will be at least 12 months. The basic method of collecting material will be classic ethnography based on field observation (participatory and non-participatory), in-depth interviews and field notes, based on empiric anthropology. The project will last two years, during which research based on long-term field ethnography will be carried out. I will follow my interlocutors and their daily movements. The research group will consist of the inhabitants of several villages in the Marneuli region, mainly settled by the Azerbaijani community. These will be Georgian citizens who travel to Azerbaijan several times a year and their family members. It will be at least thirty people, women and men of different generations and Azerbaijani born in Georgia, all of them with mobility experience. I will try to analyze how mobility strategies and translocal practices are constructed. I want to understand this by examining the residents' experiences related to these phenomena, relating, inter alia, to choices about where to live, work and travel. My proposed research adds to the body of knowledge in the field of studies on translocal practices, mobility and migration of residents of former Soviet republics. The project will also contribute to the initiation of research on the social differentiation of Georgian migrants of Azerbaijani origin within the framework of migration studies devoted to seasonal workers in Russia, Turkey, Germany and Poland, among others. The results will also develop the Kartvelological and borderland studies and enrich the research on the Caucasus.