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**ISOLATED COMMUNITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF INTEGRATION
WITHIN A UNIFIED GEORGIAN MULTILINGUAL AND
MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY**

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ABSTRACT: Despite Georgia's longstanding tradition of multiculturalism, socially and ethnolinguistically isolated communities continue to persist within its polycultural space, raising fundamental questions about the mechanisms that hinder their civic integration. This study aims to identify, classify, and analyse the sociocultural, linguistic, and psychosocial factors that sustain community isolation in contemporary Georgia, and to propose a preliminary typology of such communities. Employing an interdisciplinary qualitative methodology that combines ethnographic field observation, semi-structured interviews, sociolinguistic analysis, and comparative-historical research, the study examines five community types: Ajarian rural settlements in Guria, Armenian communities in Javakheti, Azerbaijani villages in Shida Kartli, Russian Doukhobors and Old Believers in Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Georgian diaspora communities across borders. The findings suggest that community isolation is sustained by a convergence of ethnolinguistic distance, religious distinctiveness, territorial concentration, limited access to Georgian-language education, and deeply rooted collective memory. Three principal isolation profiles are identified: historically-displaced religious minorities, ethnolinguistic border communities, and trans-boundary diaspora groups. The study concludes that an effective integration policy must address linguistic inclusion, intercultural education, and minority media access without erasing distinct cultural identities. The results contribute to broader theoretical debates on acculturation (Berry, 1997), boundary-making (Barth, 1969), and multicultural citizenship (Kymlicka, 1995) in post-Soviet societies.

KEYWORDS: isolated communities, multilingualism, multiculturalism, ethnolinguistic minorities, integration

Introduction

In an era of increasing globalization, the issue of identity – of who belongs and who is seen as an outsider – continues to shape multicultural societies. This dynamic often fuels a variety of interethnic conflicts.

Georgia's rich historical and cultural landscape is shaped by its diverse population, where various ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups coexist within a unified multilingual and multicultural society. While many communities integrate seamlessly into this broader framework, others remain distinctly isolated due to historical, sociopolitical, and cultural factors. These relatively isolated communities, often concentrated in rural areas, maintain unique traditions and lifestyles that set them apart from the broader Georgian sociocultural environment.

The persistence of isolation within these communities can be attributed to a range of influences, including historical migration patterns, religious distinctions, linguistic barriers, and deeply rooted social structures. Groups such as Ajarian communities in Guria, Armenian settlements in Javakheti, Azerbaijani villages in Shida Kartli, and Russian Doukhobors and Old Believers have retained distinct identities within Georgia's multicultural space. Their experiences highlight the challenges of integration while also demonstrating the resilience of cultural heritage.

The research problem of this study lies in the following paradox: despite Georgia's centuries-long tradition of multiculturalism and the constitutional guarantees afforded to minority groups, a number of communities remain in conditions of sustained social, linguistic, and cultural isolation that impede their civic participation and integration into Georgian society. Existing scholarship on Georgian minority communities has tended to focus on political and historical dimensions (Dundua, 2016; Amirejibi & Gabunia, 2021), while the sociocultural, linguistic, and psychosocial mechanisms of isolation have received comparatively little systematic attention. This study, therefore, addresses the following research question: What are the principal sociocultural, linguistic, and psychosocial factors that sustain community isolation among selected minority and diaspora groups in Georgia, and how can these communities be systematically classified according to their degree and type of isolation? By identifying integration barriers and proposing a preliminary typology, this research aims to contribute to the formation of a more coherent framework for intercultural dialogue and minority integration policy within the Georgian state.

Methodology

The present research is designed in an interdisciplinary methodological framework that combines ethnographic observation, sociolinguistic analysis, and comparative-historical research. Its purpose is to trace and interpret the main sociocultural, linguistic, and psychosocial mechanisms that underpin the perpetuation of isolated groups within the wider multicultural context of Georgia. The study is theoretically grounded in several complementary frameworks:

Berry's (1997, 2005) acculturation model, which conceptualises integration as a dynamic between cultural maintenance and intergroup contact; Barth's (1969) theory of ethnic boundary-making, which foregrounds the processes by which communities construct and maintain group distinctions; Kymlicka's (1995) liberal theory of multicultural citizenship, which addresses the tension between minority rights and civic integration; and Fishman's (1991) framework of language shift and reversibility, relevant to understanding the linguistic vitality of minority communities. These frameworks are complemented by Tishkov's (1997) analysis of ethnicity and nationalism in post-Soviet contexts, and by Beissinger's (2002) account of nationalist mobilisation and state collapse, both of which provide the necessary historical and political grounding for the Georgian case.

This study is a qualitative one, characterized by descriptive features. It does not focus on finding statistical correlations but, on the contrary, seeks deeper insight into the social-mental, linguistic, and religious features of community isolation. A comparative approach allows the inclusion of various minority communities in the analysis: Ajarian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Russian Doukhobor, and Georgian diasporic communities, each examined in different contexts of integration and separation.

Data were collected through field observations and semi-structured interviews conducted in selected localities: Guria (Ajarian communities), Javakheti (Armenian and Doukhobor settlements), and Shida Kartli (Azerbaijani villages). A total of approximately 40 semi-structured interviews were conducted with community members, local educators, religious leaders, and clergy across these sites. Interviews were carried out primarily in Georgian. Respondents ranged in age from 25 to 78 years and included both men and women. Interviews focused on three thematic areas: language practices and proficiency in Georgian, perceptions of cultural identity and difference, and attitudes towards integration and participation in wider Georgian society. All interviews were recorded with participant consent, transcribed, and subjected to thematic coding. Representative excerpts are incorporated¹ in the analysis where they illuminate key patterns. It is acknowledged that access to some communities was limited by geographic remoteness and, in some cases, by participants' wariness toward outside researchers; these constraints are reflected in the analysis.

The analysis integrates three complementary perspectives. One of them is sociolinguistic analysis, which underlines the role of language use, bilingualism, and state language proficiency as an indicator of social inclusion or exclusion. The second perspective is ethno-psychological and cultural analysis, which examines how symbolic markers – religion, tradition, kinship, and collective memory – maintain internal cohesion and externally differentiate communities. Third, typological and systemic comparison categorizes the communities by degree of isolation, historical origin, and socio-economic characteristics. This comparative

¹ The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments.

model draws on earlier Georgian and international classifications of types of settlement and community (Avaliani & Putkaradze, 2010).

Given the sensitivity of the issues researched, such as ethnic identity and religious affiliation, data collection was done with informed consent, ensuring anonymity when requested. The research recognizes limitations emanating from restricted access to some rural or cross-border communities and linguistic barriers during fieldwork.

The overarching aim of this methodological approach is to outline patterns of isolation and integration in the polycultural landscape of Georgia. By relating linguistic vitality to communal self-perception and external interaction, the study attempts to develop a typology of isolated communities that will provide a conceptual basis for subsequent applied research in intercultural dialogue and integration policy within the Georgian state framework.

Multilingualism in Georgia

Historically, Georgia has always been a multiethnic country, and Georgian ethnic discourse has historically resisted transformation into aggressive ethno-nationalism. Understanding this historical background is essential for contextualising the phenomenon of community isolation: the very diversity that has characterised Georgian society since antiquity also creates the conditions under which distinct linguistic and cultural communities may, under certain sociohistorical pressures, withdraw into isolation rather than engage in integration. The survey of multilingualism that follows is therefore not merely a historical excursus but a necessary foundation for understanding why certain communities, despite centuries of coexistence, have retained such distinct linguistic and cultural boundaries. As Taylor (1992) has argued in his discussion of the politics of recognition, the survival of distinct cultural identities within a shared civic space requires active acknowledgement and institutional support – a principle directly relevant to the Georgian minority communities examined in this study. Similarly, Parekh (2000) emphasises that multicultural societies must develop shared frameworks of dialogue that neither assimilate minority cultures nor permit their complete disengagement from civic life.

According to the 11th-century Georgian historian Leonti Mroveli, as early as the 6th century BCE, people in Kartli spoke not only Georgian but also five other languages: Assyrian, Greek, Hebrew, Armenian, and Khazar. These languages were spoken both by the rulers of the Kingdom of Kartli and by its ordinary inhabitants. This multilingualism is itself a symbol of peace and harmony among the various minority groups living in the country, reflecting their peaceful coexistence in an environment where cultural diversity prevailed and was consistently respected.

These languages developed freely and naturally, without any restrictions. Evidence of this can be found in ancient inscriptions preserved in Georgia, written in Aramaic, Armenian, and other languages. For example, the so-called “Armazi bilingual,” an epitaph for Seraphita written in Greek and Aramaic, dates back to

the 2nd century CE. A calendar carved in stone in Armenian dates to the 12th or 13th century.

Today, many European countries have ethnic groups that have traditionally lived within their borders and speak languages different from the majority population. Demographically, the size of these language communities varies widely – from a few hundred to many thousands. Yet, they share a common challenge: the future of these languages is uncertain, as many are at risk of disappearing.

To counter this threat, the Council of Europe adopted the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages² in 1992. Its purpose is to protect the languages of national minorities traditionally residing in European countries. The Charter, which remains the only international legal instrument aimed specifically at protecting this category of languages, entered into force in 1998.

The Charter treats minority languages as cultural heritage. Its goal is to support their preservation in the regions where they are traditionally spoken. It outlines various measures to promote the use of minority languages in public life, such as cultural events, education in schools, and media initiatives.

Finally, interestingly enough, the Charter has no influence on state languages, dialects, or migrant languages newly established in a state. The Charter covers languages which have been traditionally spoken by minority residents of a state, regardless of their ethnic origin (Article 1, letter “a”).

Upon joining the Council of Europe in 1999, Georgia committed to signing and ratifying the Charter. Once ratified, it will ensure the protection of minority languages traditionally spoken in Georgia. This will help Georgia meet relevant European standards and accelerate its integration into Europe.

Such an action is natural and progressive on the part of a European country with firmly established traditions of multiculturalism. Protection and preservation of minority languages do not exclude the necessity to learn Georgian, the state language. On the contrary, the Charter has a tendency to preserve minority languages and make Georgian more powerful, since in Georgia, among its priorities, there is a stimulation of national minorities to master the state language.

The acknowledgment of minority languages and the respect accorded to their speakers facilitate social cohesion and contribute to civic integration. A vital prerequisite for this process is the presence of media in minority languages through which these minorities obtain information about developments in Georgia in their native language.

Adoption of worldwide proven mechanisms of minority protection should enhance their sense of belonging to the country and restrict the chances for separatism. Yet it is precisely the gap between these normative commitments and their implementation in practice that creates conditions favourable to the persistence of isolated communities – a central concern of the present study.

² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages>

The pillars of homeland, language, and religion – championed by Ilia Chavchavadze, one of Georgia's most revered public intellectuals and writers – formed the foundation of the 19th-century Georgian national movement. These concise yet powerful ideas not only shaped the broader national awakening but also defined the essential traits of Georgian nationhood (Dundua, 2016).

For Chavchavadze and his generation, encouragement of education in Georgian was of supreme importance. Literacy and education in the national language were seen by them as crucial to the formation of a unified national consciousness and the strengthening of feelings of solidarity among Georgians. This campaign took on an additional urgency when the Russian imperial powers attempted to suppress the use of the very term “Georgia”, replacing in official publications mention of provinces Tbilisi and Kutaisi. In response, the Tergdaleulebi³, a group of Western-educated Georgian intellectuals, took decisive steps to preserve and promote national consciousness.

In 2016, the Georgian script was included in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity⁴. It contributes to the outstanding value of Georgia's three writing systems – Asomtavruli, Nuskhuri, and Mkhedruli – that have evolved over the centuries and are still the foundation of Georgian identity, literature, and cultural continuity. The scripts are not only communication tools, but also national resilience, creativity, and pride symbols. There is a common supposition that the Georgian script existed during the early 5th century. Around this time, the Old Georgian language emerged – a liturgical language still used today in the services of the Georgian Orthodox Church. One of the earliest pieces of evidence for the existence of Georgian writing from that period is the literary work *The Martyrdom of Saint Queen Shushanik*. Remarkably, old Georgian demonstrates a notable degree of continuity with Modern Georgian, particularly in aspects of its phonological and grammatical structure. Although Georgian itself is a member of the Kartvelian language family, which is unique and outside of the Indo-European family, these coincidences point to historical contact, borrowing, or even substrate influences at a more fundamental level. Georgian exhibits a complex case system characterized by ergative alignment patterns rather than the nominative-accusative alignment typical of many Indo-European languages. Georgian also employs a vigesimal (base-20) system of numerals. For example, the number *seventy* is pronounced as *three times twenty and ten*. Another idiosyncrasy of Georgian verbs is their polypersonalism – a grammatical feature whereby the verb not only signifies the performer of the action but also the one to whom or for whom the action is being performed. Georgian has no fewer than 18 various dialects, each preserving unique morphological, syntactic, lexical, and phonological features. In Kazbegi, Khevsureti, and Tusheti, the mountain regions, for instance, locals use words and word forms that are rarely heard elsewhere in the country. The dialects are

³ See mere in Reisner, 2009.

⁴ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/living-culture-of-three-writing-systems-of-the-georgian-alphabet-01205#identification>

products of centuries of linguistic evolution shaped by topography, isolation, and tradition. More than just forms of communication, they are living depositories of Georgia's multifaceted regional identity.

This internal linguistic richness of the Georgian language – its dialects, its distinct script, its long literary tradition – is itself a reminder that Georgia's relationship with linguistic diversity is deeply embedded in national consciousness. Yet this very awareness of the power of language as a marker of identity also illuminates why minority communities that are unable or unwilling to adopt Georgian as their primary medium of participation may experience, or be perceived as experiencing, a form of cultural distance from the Georgian mainstream. It is this structural relationship between language, identity, and civic inclusion that underlies the isolation patterns examined in the following sections.

In contemporary Georgia, the limited knowledge of the state language among ethnic minorities, along with lower levels of education, remains a significant – though not the sole – challenge to civic integration. Despite this, a large majority of non-ethnic Georgians still politically consider Georgia to be their home country. The SIDA 2012 survey in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli questioned the interviewees whether they considered Georgia their home country and whether they envisioned their futures as being tied to it. Remarkably, 96% affirmed that they equated their personal and family incomes with Georgia's future over the next five years (see Dundua, 2016, p. 113).

This strong identification can probably be attributed to the effects of policies for education started during the last few years, among other determinants. Unfortunately, no similar data from previous periods are available, hindering the determination of temporal changes. It should be noted that the SIDA (2012) survey, while informative, is now over a decade old; more recent large-scale survey data on minority civic identification in Georgia remain limited, and the findings cited here should be interpreted with appropriate caution. Subsequent research would benefit from updated empirical data, ideally drawing on more recent national census materials or ethnographic survey work conducted after the significant political and policy shifts of the mid-2010s.

Taken together, the above survey of Georgian multilingualism demonstrates that linguistic diversity has historically been a source of cultural richness rather than division. Yet, it also reveals the structural conditions under which isolation can take root: when minority languages lack institutional support, when communities are geographically concentrated, and when access to Georgian-language education is constrained, the outcome is not harmonious diversity but persistent social separation. It is precisely this tension – between Georgia's longstanding multicultural heritage and the lived reality of isolated communities – that the following results section addresses directly.

Georgia has, in the last twenty years, experienced a succession of violent conflicts, fueled by long-standing, historical tensions. Successive, deeply established societal fissures – based on the heritage of modernized Bolshevik imperial policy – have, one after another, shattered stability and cultural cohesion.

In this context, it is crucial to examine the underlying reasons driving the fragmentation of society. Close examination of these issues has the potential to identify hotspots in intercultural relationships. In the focus of our attention lies the phenomenon of closed and isolationist communities, examining their integration within Georgia's multicultural and diverse society.

Before proceeding further, key definitions need to be set. Traditionally, the term “community” has encompassed a wide variety of social groupings like urban communes, rural communities, regional groupings, religious congregations, and occupational networks. In a more technical sense, however, a community is a constituted social organization based on natural kinship⁵.

In the earliest stages of social evolution, the communities had a universal role, being self-contained entities with control over every area of life – economic, family, and religious. But as societies evolved – driven by productive force developments, increasing division of labour, and mounting social contradictions – the general role of the communities started to recede. They were integral but localized components of a developed social organism.

Research indicates that traditional communities as a system of social structure remain prevalent, particularly in the Third World. In the 1960s, the proponents of “Afro-Asian socialism” initiated community-oriented movements in 32 nations in Asia and Africa. These movements, however, ultimately failed. Traditional communities, similar to other tribal and patriarchal organizations, were found to be obstacles to economic growth, contributing to political stagnation and the entrenchment of social inequalities.

The longstanding tension between narrow communal interests and broader societal concerns has been widely acknowledged, not only in Georgian academic discourse but also in global literature and art. This struggle is depicted in Aleksandre Kazbegi's novella *Elguja*, the poetry of Vazha-Pshavela, and Tengiz Abuladze's film *The Tree of Desire*.

Over time, the conceptual understanding of “community” and “communal life” has increasingly absorbed notions such as patriarchy, insularity, self-isolation, and resistance to change.

In light of modern globalization – a powerful and far-reaching force reshaping societies worldwide – what types of communities should be examined today? The discussion is further complicated by the underdeveloped state of community typology, making categorization a significant challenge⁶.

Rather than focusing solely on communities as static entities, our objective is to identify the factors driving certain societies – particularly in rural areas – toward various degrees of isolation. Key among these factors is the presence of

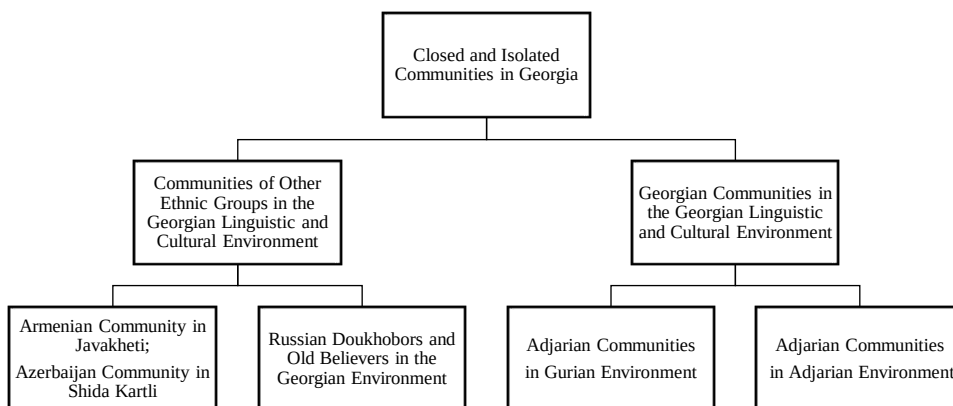
⁵ The sociological concept of community as a kinship-based social organization is discussed in depth in Tönnies (1887).

⁶ The underdeveloped state of community typology in Georgian and post-Soviet contexts is discussed in Авалиани & Путкарадзе/Avaliani & Putkaradze (2010). For a broader international framework, see Barth, F. (1969) and Skutnabb-Kangas et al. (Eds.) (2000).

distinct socio- or ethno-mental characteristics that serve as barriers to integration within a unified multicultural society.

For analysis, we primarily examine neighborhood- and territory-based communities, though patriarchal, kinship-based, and clan-based communities are also relevant. Characteristics of such societies can be observed in regions such as Upper Svaneti and Khevsureti.

The concept of “foreign culture” applies not only to individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds but also to members of the same nationality with varying levels of cultural competence or language proficiency (Арошидзе/Аroshidze, 2009).



With this system, Georgia has numerous isolated settlements, and they can be put into the following categories:

Ajarian rural communities (Guria)

Ajarian rural settlements in Guria, particularly the villages of Gorjomi and Mtisubani, illustrate a form of isolation rooted primarily in religious and social distinctiveness rather than linguistic difference. These communities share the Georgian language with the majority population but maintain autonomous subcultures organised around Islamic institutions, patriarchal kinship networks, and a strong collective memory of historical marginalization. Field observation revealed that community life in these villages is structured around the mosque and the extended family unit; interactions with the broader Georgian Orthodox social environment are limited and often experienced as potentially threatening to communal identity. Interview data from these communities illuminate this dynamic clearly. A male elder from Gorjomi (age 67) stated: “We speak Georgian, we are Georgian – but our way of life, our prayers, our family rules are different. We do not feel that the state has ever truly understood this.” A younger respondent (female, age 31) from Mtisubani similarly noted: “When I went to the city school, I felt like a stranger. The teachers did not know anything about our traditions. I

stopped going after two years.” These responses reflect the pattern identified by Berry (1997) as “separation” within his acculturation framework – a preference for cultural maintenance combined with minimal contact with the dominant society – driven here not by linguistic barriers but by the perceived incompatibility of religious and social norms. The pattern also corresponds to Barth’s (1969) concept of boundary-making: the community actively maintains symbolic distinctions that mark its difference and regulate access across the group boundary.

Ethno-religious communities: Russian Old Believers (Grigoleti) and Doukhobors (Javakheti)

The Russian Old Believers of Grigoleti and the Doukhobor communities of Javakheti represent the most deeply entrenched form of ethno-religious isolation in Georgia’s multicultural landscape. Both groups arrived in Georgia as exiles from the Russian Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries and have maintained distinct identities sustained by endogamy, communal worship, and very limited Georgian-language proficiency across generations. Field observation in Gorelovka (Javakheti) found that Georgian is spoken only at a functional level by younger residents; older community members communicate almost exclusively in Russian. Community life is self-contained, with religious practice, education, and social welfare organized internally. The isolation of these communities is reinforced by their geographic remoteness and by a deliberate cultural strategy of self-preservation. An Old Believer respondent (male, age 58) from Grigoleti observed: “My grandfather came here to live apart. We keep our faith by keeping to ourselves. If we mix, we lose who we are.” A Doukhobor community elder (female, age 72) from Gorelovka similarly stated: “We have our own schools, our own ways. Georgian is for the market, not for the home.” These accounts illustrate the link between religious distinctiveness, endogamous social structure, and language boundaries as mutually reinforcing mechanisms of isolation – a configuration consistent with Skutnabb-Kangas et al.’s (2000) analysis of linguistic communities that resist assimilation as a means of cultural survival. Religiously defined communities tend to resist integration more durably than ethnically defined ones, even when the surrounding political environment is broadly tolerant.

Armenian communities (Javakheti)

Armenian communities in Javakheti – concentrated primarily in the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts – represent one of the most demographically significant and structurally persistent cases of ethnolinguistic isolation in Georgia. The majority of Armenians in this region descend from communities that settled during the 19th century, many fleeing persecution in the Ottoman Empire. Despite this long presence, integration into Georgian civic and linguistic life has remained limited. Field observation in villages in the Akhalkalaki district revealed that Georgian is rarely used in everyday community

life; Armenian serves as the primary language of family, commerce, religious practice, and informal education. Access to quality Georgian-language schooling remains constrained, and younger residents consistently reported that their competence in Georgian is insufficient for participation in the national labour market or higher education system. Older community members expressed strong attachment to the Armenian language as a marker of cultural continuity, while simultaneously acknowledging Georgia as their homeland – a pattern of dual identification that does not readily translate into civic integration. These observations are consistent with Kymlicka's (1995) analysis of the structural preconditions for minority integration: access to education in the dominant language is not merely a policy preference but a prerequisite for meaningful civic participation. The persistence of Armenian-language dominance in Javakheti is not simply a matter of cultural preference but reflects a systemic deficit in the institutional infrastructure of inclusion, as documented in Amirejibi and Gabunia (2021). The pattern also corresponds to Heller's (2007) account of bilingualism as a socially structured phenomenon: language choice in this community is not freely made but constrained by the available resources and the symbolic economy of the local context.

Azerbaijani communities (Shida Kartli)

Azerbaijani villages in Shida Kartli present a form of isolation rooted in the intersection of linguistic distance, territorial concentration, and strong cross-border cultural ties with Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanis constitute the largest ethnic minority in Georgia, and while their communities are most densely concentrated in Kvemo Kartli, the villages of Shida Kartli also contain significant Azerbaijani populations whose integration into Georgian social and institutional life remains partial. Field observation in several villages in the Gori and Kareli municipalities found that Azerbaijani is the dominant language of domestic and community life; Georgian is used instrumentally – at administrative offices, markets, and checkpoints – but rarely as a medium of social interaction. Religious distinctiveness (Islam) and endogamous marriage patterns reinforce community boundaries in ways that parallel the dynamic observed in the Ajarian communities of Guria, though here linguistic distance is a more decisive barrier. Community members across age groups expressed a pattern of ambivalent belonging – identification with Georgia as a homeland combined with a felt sense of exclusion from its dominant institutions, particularly in administrative and educational contexts where Georgian-language proficiency is required. This dynamic is consistent with what Berry (1997) describes as a “marginalisation” outcome: communities that lack both sufficient Georgian-language competence for full civic participation and adequate institutional support for mother-tongue maintenance find themselves positioned at the margins of both the dominant culture and their own linguistic community's formal structures. Barth's (1969) framework is again instructive: the persistence of ethnic boundaries in these villages is sustained not by hostile ethnocentrism but by the cumulative effect of

institutional neglect and geographic concentration, which together reproduce the conditions of separation across generations.

Georgian diaspora communities (Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan)

Georgian diaspora communities in Turkey, Iran, and Azerbaijan present a third and analytically distinct form of isolation: trans-boundary cultural maintenance under conditions of sustained assimilatory pressure. Unlike the communities discussed above, these groups exist outside Georgia's territorial and institutional reach, yet maintain a Georgian cultural identity through language retention, religious practice, and ties of kinship and collective memory. Field-based interviews with returnees and with community representatives provided insight into the mechanisms sustaining this identity at a distance. A respondent of Georgian origin from the Adjara-Turkey border region (male, age 44) described his situation thus: "I speak Georgian at home with my mother. Outside – Turkish. My children understand Georgian but answer in Turkish. In one generation, maybe it is gone." A female respondent (age 38) originally from the Iranian-Georgian community of Fereydan noted: "We know we are Georgian. We have our songs, our church days. But the young people are marrying locally. The language is going slowly." These testimonies are consistent with Fishman's (1991) framework of language shift: once intergenerational transmission weakens, reversing the process requires active institutional intervention. The absence of Georgian-language education and minority-language media in these border regions significantly accelerates assimilation. Beissinger's (2002) analysis of nationalist mobilization in post-Soviet contexts is also relevant here: the collapse of Soviet-era administrative structures removed certain forms of cultural protection for transboundary minorities, leaving diaspora communities more vulnerable to rapid assimilation.

An awareness of what drives these communities is essential to facilitating effective integration so that diversity enhances social cohesion rather than deepening divisions⁷.

⁷ The history of the Armenian population in Javakheti, a region in southern Georgia, is complex and multifaceted. Armenians are demographically predominant there, particularly in the **Akhalkalaki** and **Ninotsminda** districts. The majority of the Armenians moved into the area during the 19th century to flee persecution within the Ottoman Empire. Despite their long presence there, there are problems with integration. Linguistic distinction, lack of access to Georgian-language schools, and economic difficulties have been among the contributing factors to a sense of isolation. There have also been periodic political tensions surrounding Armenian identity and relations with Georgia.

The Azerbaijani minority within **Shida Kartli** is symptomatic of Georgia's broader Azerbaijani minority, which is the largest ethnic minority in the country. While Azerbaijanis are more concentrated in **Kvemo Kartli**, Kakheti, and Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Shida Kartli also contains Azerbaijani communities. Azerbaijani presence in Georgia dates back centuries and is the result of migration based on political instability and economic opportunity. Azerbaijani identity in Georgia has been maintained culturally and linguistically in the face of integration into Georgian society.

Conclusion

This study set out to identify and classify the principal sociocultural, linguistic, and psychosocial mechanisms that sustain community isolation within Georgia's polycultural space, and to propose a preliminary typology of isolated communities. The analysis confirms that community isolation in Georgia is a structurally complex phenomenon rooted in the convergence of ethnolinguistic distance, religious distinctiveness, historical displacement, territorial concentration, and limited access to Georgian-language education. These factors operate not in isolation but in mutually reinforcing configurations that vary significantly across community types. The present study addressed three principal analytical dimensions. The sociocultural dimension was examined through community histories, settlement patterns, and cultural traditions; the linguistic dimension through the role of bilingualism, language shift, and Georgian-language proficiency as markers of inclusion or exclusion; and the psychosocial dimension through the lens of collective memory, identity boundaries, and perceived belonging. While the first two dimensions are substantiated by robust field data, the psychosocial dimension remains an area for further empirical development – future research would benefit from structured psychological instruments capable of measuring identity barriers and integration attitudes more systematically.

The practice of closed groups in the integrated multilingual and multicultural community of Georgia reveals the complexity of integration. While Georgia's richness of diversity gives rise to a rich cultural life, particular ethnolinguistic as well as socio-religious factors are accountable for the persistence of isolated communities. These groups, marked through settlement

The **Doukhobors** and **Old Believers** are Russian religious minorities who have long lived in Georgia, primarily in the **Samtskhe-Javakheti** region.

•**Doukhobors:** A Christian pacifist sect that started in Russia in the 18th century and was exiled to Georgia in the 19th century for refusing to join the Orthodox Church and renounce military service. They established themselves in villages such as **Gorelovka** and **Orlovka**, where they maintained their traditions, including communal worship without icons or priests. Most of the Doukhobors emigrated eventually, particularly to Canada, with assistance from **Leo Tolstoy**, who was impressed by their philosophy of non-violence. Now, there are not many of them left in Georgia and struggling to maintain their heritage in the face of modernization and migration pressures.

•**Old Believers:** The Orthodox sect broke away from the Russian Orthodox Church in the 17th century because of doctrinal differences. In Georgia, Old Believers established themselves in villages such as Gorelovka, where they stood out with their colorful homes and unique religious traditions compared to the wider society. Their devotion to tradition, such as gender equality and non-violence, has preserved their identity in the face of external pressures. Both communities have experienced difficulties during the past decades, such as the decline of populations and cultural assimilation. They continue to exist in Georgia as an interesting reflection of religious and ethnic diversity in the country.

patterns in time, religious beliefs, or linguistic distinctions, fail to balance cultural retention with integration into an extended society.

The examples of Ajarian communities in Guria, Armenian settlements in Javakheti, Azerbaijani villages in Shida Kartli, and Russian Doukhobors and Old Believers in Samtskhe-Javakheti illustrate the diverse ways in which ethnic and linguistic minorities maintain their identities within the Georgian cultural sphere. Historically-migrated and socio-politically motivated communities, as such, embody the dual challenge of isolation and adaptation.

The analysis reveals that isolation is not a uniform phenomenon but takes distinct forms depending on the interplay of historical origins, religious distinctiveness, linguistic distance, and territorial concentration. Three principal isolation profiles emerge from the communities examined: (1) historically-displaced religious minorities (Doukhobors and Old Believers), whose isolation is maintained primarily through endogamy, communal worship, and limited state-language proficiency; (2) ethnolinguistic border communities (Armenian settlements in Javakheti, Azerbaijani villages in Shida Kartli), whose integration is constrained by geographic concentration, limited access to Georgian-language schooling, and strong cross-border cultural ties; and (3) trans-boundary diaspora communities (Georgian communities in Turkey, Iran, and Azerbaijan), whose cultural identity is sustained under conditions of territorial separation and assimilatory pressure. Addressing these diverse isolation trajectories requires differentiated policy responses: expanding Georgian-language education while preserving minority-language rights, supporting minority-language media, and investing in structured intercultural exchange programmes at a community level. These measures align with the integration frameworks proposed by Berry (1997) and the minority rights principles articulated by Kymlicka (1995).

Lastly, integration into a shared Georgian multicultural space must not mean the erasure of particular identities but rather the fostering of conditions in which diversity unites societal cohesion. A subsequent study of these communities on the levels of typological and systemic analysis is necessary to develop pragmatic recommendations for coexistence in an era of accelerating globalization.

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