



The study of Georgians' attitudes towards Azerbaijanis

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Introduction

Georgia is rich with multiethnic population. Taking into account the latest National Census, (unfortunately conducted almost 11 years ago, in 2002), ethnic minorities constitute 16,2 % of its inhabitants, among them Azerbaijanis and Armenians taken together make up over 12% (National Census of Georgia, 2002)

Based on 2002 National Census, Azerbaijanis make Georgia's largest ethnic minority group with 6.5% of the overall population. Azerbaijanis live in Tbilisi, Shida Kartli and Kakheti regions of Georgia but the largest amount of them compactly reside in Kvemo Kartli region, more precisely in Marneuli, Dmanisi, Bolnisi, Gardabani, Tsalka, Tetrtskaro and Rustavi. In these regions integration problems are quite apparent. Political underrepresentation and inability to speak Georgian language are one of the significant reasons of the problem (სტრედი, 2012). According to Crisis Group report (Crisis Group, 2006) some Azeris believe they are treated like "second-class citizens" and encouraged to leave Georgia.

Quantitative data about what Georgians in fact think of Azerbaijanis can be found in Caucasus Barometer data base. According to the data collected in 2012, 73% of ethnic Georgians approve doing business with Azerbaijanis, while 22% disapprove. Survey questionnaire differentiates between Azerbaijanis generally and Azerbaijanis of Georgia. Bit more Georgians (76%) approve and 19% disapprove doing business together with Azeris who live in Georgia. Approval of social relations is no less than approval of financial ones. Based on CB data collected in 2009 (unfortunately data collected later does not include this question any more), 80% of Georgians approve being friends with Azerbaijanis. Although while being each other's friends is perceived positively being each other's spouses does not seem as attractive. Georgians keep much more distance when the mixed marriage is being discussed. According to data collected in 2009, only 21% approves Georgian woman marrying Azerbaijani. Data of 2012 is similar. Only 20% of ethnic Georgians approve Georgian woman marrying Azeri and 22% approve Georgian woman marrying Azeri who lives in Georgia.

These numbers reveal very interesting information, although general disadvantage of quantitative data is that it forces respondents into ready-made answers and leaves no chance to reveal original opinions, ideas and explanations. In such situation listening to what people say has crucial meaning for understanding the meanings behind the statistics.

The issue deserves our interest as on one hand Azerbaijanis constitute largest ethnic minority in Georgia and on the other hand Azerbaijan is Georgia's bordering neighbor. In this context gaining richer data about ethnic Georgians' attitudes towards Azeris can provide more information and understanding of existing problems, sentiments and perceptions.

Accordingly the aim of the present research was to gain the in-depth knowledge about ethnic Georgians' perspective and attitudes towards Azerbaijanis, in more details: **to understand what kind of thoughts and feelings they have about these people generally when it comes to financial, social, cultural,**

political, symbolic spheres and why they feel/think in this particular way; to find out how the attitudes differ among Marneuli municipality inhabitants where Azerbaijanis constitute majority of the population and Tbilisi inhabitants who do not have as much contact with them; to find out whether there is any difference between younger and older age groups; and finally to understand if there is any difference between attitudes towards Azerbaijanis and Armenians, two significant minority groups of Georgia.

Method

For better understanding of participant's feelings and opinions qualitative method of focus groups was used. An advantage of this method is that it gives an opportunity to take into account what individuals say and how they express themselves, to look at the ways group wholly discusses the issue. We have the possibility to look at the issues as participants look at it, however on the other hand qualitative method also has its limitation – unlike quantitative methods it is hard to generalize the results on the population. However as the present study aims to catch meanings behind already existing statistical data, this limitation can be tolerated.

Participants

Focus groups were held in Tbilisi where Azerbaijanis make up only 1% of the local population and in Marneuli, where Azerbaijanis make up 83.1% of population, while Georgians - 8%. The data of conducting focus-groups was 19-20 January 2013 for Tbilisi and 25-26 January 2013 for Marneuli. In both regions eight focus-groups were conducted altogether, four groups in Tbilisi and four ones in Marneuli. One half of these groups included younger participants, in the age range of 18-35, another half – in the age range of 36 – 65. In each region, in Marneuli as well as in Tbilisi, two focus-groups were conducted with younger participants and two focus-groups with older ones. All groups contained 6 ethnic Georgian participants (with one exception of 5-member group in Tbilisi when the participant did not appear at the last moment) and was mixed in terms of gender and the level of education. Tbilisi participants were with higher or incomplete higher education, while in Marneuli region groups were even more mixed including higher, incomplete higher, secondary and incomplete secondary education. However in later discussion I will not distinguish participants according their educational level as no visible difference between attitudes was associated with higher or lower education.

Another specificity of Marneuli groups was the variety of participant's living place in Marneuli municipality. While all the Tbilisi participants actually lived in the Tbilisi city, it was not the case among Marneuli participants - some of them lived in the city of Marneuli, others were from nearby villages. We can talk about several types of villages in Marneuli municipality: Azeri villages, where mostly (or only) Azeris live; Georgian villages, where mostly (or only) Georgians live and mixed villages. Mixed villages also differ whether inhabitants live altogether or are divided by districts (Azeri district, Georgian district, etc.).

Among 24 participants (young as well as older groups) five following places of residence were distinguished:

- **Marneuli** city (where the population is mixed)
- Village **Saimerlo** (Georgian village with only Georgian population)
- Village **Tsereteli** (Georgian village with Azeris and Armenians as well. Different ethnic groups live in different districts of the village)
- Village **Tamarisi** (More mixed Georgian village with Georgians, Azeris, Armenians, Greeks, Russians, Kurds, etc. There are no districts that divide these groups)
- **Svan settlement** of village Tamarisi (inhabited only by ethnic Georgians /Svans/)

It is notable that at the beginning of the village Tamarisi there is a special settlement for eco-migrant Svans (Georgian sub-ethnic group from high mountainous region) who were settled here recently, in 2000s. This settlement is isolated from multiethnic Tamarisi and only includes Svans. Svans have the image of being quite tough among all the inhabitants (Azeris as well as Georgians) although this quality is perceived either positively or negatively by some participants in this situation.

“I think establishing Svan settlements created very good atmosphere here. When I arrived here more than 30 years ago, there were Azerbaijanis with papakhas¹, they could speak neither Georgian, nor Russian. Now there are many Georgians, you hear Georgian talking. Now it is more Georgian environment than then. Everything was changed after Svans’ arrival here. Georgians were invisible and silent before. I have the impression that Svans revealed their character – this is who we are and this is who you are. My son-in-law is Svan and when Azeris heard about it, they were very scared.” (N42, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: village Tsereteli)

“Svans started to oppress them (Azerbaijanis).” (N47, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: village Tsereteli)

“When Svans arrived, they created chaos in the school and in the village, they ruined all the gardens and Azeris were blamed for it” (N43, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: village Tamarisi)

“There is one village, Jandara, when you pass Rustavi, which is also inhabited by Svans. This was done on purpose, they wanted that the territories with Azeri majority that are close to borders were inhabited by Georgians so that they could not request autonomy. (...) I am Svan and I heard Svans were settled here because they are especially tough people. Let the God save us from autonomy request, otherwise we will do everything what will be necessary.” (N26, male, younger group, Marneuli Municipality: Svan settlement)

To be able to distinguish between participants and at the same time keep anonymity each of them was given a unique number in the process of working with collected data. This number is used every time when quoting them. Apart from the identification numbers, participants are distinguished by age group, gender and the place of residence. In case of Tbilisi participants the place of residence is always “Tbilisi”, while Marneuli participants are distinguished by their specific living place in the municipality as well, whether it will be the city of Marneuli itself or one of the surrounding villages.

¹ Tall Caucasian hat usually of sheepskin

Discussion plan for the focus group

Discussion plan was the same for Tbilisi as well as Marneuli participants. It was loosely based on different types of capitals suggested by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu,1986), such as economic (material, financial facilities), cultural (education, knowledge), social (daily interactions), and symbolic (prestige and status). Political capital was also added to the list and all of these aspects together were used for structuring the discussion questions as well as for the later analysis of the gained data.

The final version of the discussion plan consisted of seven sub-topics: **introduction part; economic capital; social capital; cultural capital; political capital; symbolic capital** and **general comparison of Azerbaijanis and Armenians**.

- **Introduction part** was basically aimed at opening participants up for the further discussion and collecting information at the same time. Group members were asked if they ever visited Azerbaijan and about their impressions; apart from that - to name their associations connected with Azerbaijanis; to name differences and similarities between Azerbaijanis and Georgians; also their impression of Azerbaijanis' attitudes towards Georgians.
- The sub-topic of **economic capital** included questions about the willingness of having financial relations with Azeri person, as well as attitudes towards Azeri seller at the Market.
- While discussing about **social capital** participants were asked to express thoughts regarding the number of local Azeri population as well as imagined hypothetical situation of Georgia without Azerbaijanis. They were also asked to share own opinions about neighborhood, friendship and marriage with Azeri person.
- The sub-topic of **cultural capital** dealt with participants' perceptions of Azerbaijani culture, education and intelligence and the language problem.
- Within the notion of **political capital** we discussed participants' attitudes towards local Azerbaijanis inclusion in Georgian politics and if they think Azeri voters are influenced by Azerbaijani government.
- The sub-topic of **symbolic capital** included question about prestige of Azerbaijanis in Georgian society.
- Finally focus group members were asked about their opinion regarding **Armenians**. Comparison between Azerbaijanis and Armenians aimed to find out if there is any difference in the way these groups are perceived by ethnic Georgians.

Data analysis and findings

The most common way of treating with collected focus-group data is providing the descriptive narrative of it. (Steward & Shamdasani, 2007). I will follow the same pattern. In addition I will compare the perspectives of Tbilisi and Marneuli inhabitants, as well as younger and older groups. Data will be provided according to thematic sub-topics distinguished in the focus-group guide: introduction part; economic capital; social capital; cultural capital; political capital; symbolic capital and general comparison of Azerbaijanis and Armenians.

Introduction part

As I already mentioned while reviewing the discussion plan, introduction part aims to open up participants and includes more general questions. I will discuss each of them separately.

1. Visiting Azerbaijan

Question concerning visiting Azerbaijan and following impressions was the introductory one for Tbilisi groups. However as the context was absolutely different in Marneuli (local Azerbaijanis constitute majority of the population, so there was no use of starting with visiting Azerbaijan to get closer to the topic), this question was asked close to the end of our discussion.

Most of the participants, who had been in Azerbaijan, visited Baku. Basically the answers come from older groups rather than younger ones, who are less familiar.

Impression of Tbilisi older participants are mostly related with **Azerbaijan's beautiful nature, Georgian heritage on the territory of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani's pleasant and sociable character, intelligence of Baku's inhabitants** and the **beauty of Baku**. The participant from younger group who has been in Baku also agrees that "Baku is cool."

"Baku was very special city even during Communist times. Very intelligent people live there, very different and advanced people." (N18, male, older group, Tbilisi)

"I've been in Baku. It was cool. Now it should be even cooler. One of Azerbaijanis showed me the video how they are rebuilding Baku. It was great!" (N4, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

On the other hand older participants from Marneuli, those who visited Baku, state that by the time of their visit it was even **more modern than Tbilisi** in terms of personal freedom, very **multicultural, rich and hospitable**. However others found Baku **not as attractive, people not very hospitable**, another participant who visited other part of Azerbaijan said it was quite **polluted**.

"I visited Baku in 1973. During this period in Tbilisi if you entered the restaurant even with own wife everyone would judge you and question the woman. On the other hand in Baku you had to enter the restaurant if you wanted to meet a girl." (N38, male, older group, Marneuli municipality, Marneuli city)

Compared to Tbilisi, in Marneuli the perceived difference between local Azerbaijanis and Baku inhabitants was more underlined. Participants stated than in Baku **people marry others rather than own relatives as Marneuli Azerbaijanis do**, also **they are more different and beautiful than the local ones**. In Tbilisi older group similar view was also mentioned, but rather slightly, regarding **Baku inhabitants more intelligence than the ones living in regions, including Azerbaijanis of Georgia**.

"I have been in Baku. There are more mixed people while here they basically marry own relatives. However I have to admit that Yerevan impressed me much more than Baku. In Azerbaijan they made us, Georgians, pay twice as much as it really costed. Architecture was not impressive either and the sea was full of oil. I vaguely remember this trip while Yerevan I remember well. It was beautiful city with musical fountains. They hosted us very well compared to Baku." (N42, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: village Tsereteli)

“In Baku there are very intelligent and advanced people, they are very different from the local Azerbaijanis we are in touch.” (N18, male, older group, Tbilisi)

The participants of Marneuli younger group have not visited Azerbaijan although they also emphasized perceived **differences between Azerbaijanis of Marneuli and Baku when it comes to appearance and women’s personal freedom**. It was also noted that these differences exist due to Marneuli being region and Baku – the capital.

“They say there are beautiful girls in Baku, less dark and more modern. They are not forced to wear chadors and they walk in skirts. Although there also will be difference between Baku and other regions like in Georgia.” (N26, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Svan settlement)

Apart from noting this kind of differences, some Marneuli participants in younger as well as older groups state that **Azerbaijanis of Georgia and Azerbaijanis of Azerbaijan are two absolutely unrelated people**.

“Has anybody ever researched these people? (means Azerbaijanis of marneuli. I.O.) I know that they are nomadic tribes more of Tatar-Mongolian origins rather than Azeri. They will get it as an insult, I do not have any proof of it anyway. It should be proven scientifically.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“Borchalis of Marneuli were relocated here in 1773, by Shah Abbas. They were the wild tribe and when he found it very hard to control them he relocated this tribe on Georgian’s territory. They are people of Turkish origins who are absolutely not related to Azeris, aka Albanians. Our neighbor Azerbaijan has been historically Christian nation. They were called “Azerbaijanis” by Communists. Otherwise they would stay as Albanians. Therefore the difference between these and those Azeris equals to differences between Georgians and Armenians for instance. Connecting Borchalis of Marneuli to Azeris derived from the Soviet policy. Special ‘bombs’ were placed in Georgia as Abkhazia, Ossetia, Adjara, Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti because Georgians could not be controlled otherwise. As far as I remember Marneuli was known as Borchali till 1947. (...) these Azeris of Marneuli are small ethnic group smashed between Georgians and Azeris who are both aliens for them and they have to choose one way or another.” (N37, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

In Marneuli younger group it was mentioned that **local Azerbaijanis are proud of Azerbaijanis of Azerbaijan who, on the other hand, dislike them and do not perceive as own-group members**.

“I think Azeris of Azerbaijan do not like our Azeris very much. Azeris of Marneuli are very proud of them but they do not consider these as their part. After August war the rumor was spread that these Azeris wanted to go to Azerbaijan but they did not let them.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

The opposite was stated in the older group where participants note that **the local Azerbaijanis do not like Azeris of Azerbaijan and feel they are different from them**, however they still embrace them because **they get financial sources from there**.

“They (local Azerbaijanis) do not like Azeris of Azerbaijan but they have economic interests there” (N39, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“However these Azeris say that they are different from Azeris of Azerbaijan. They say those are so bad people, they can never live next to them. They said that neighbors there are not as open to each other and they too learned this from Georgians. They have many customs learned from Georgians.” (N41, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

Some participants in older groups stated they feel closer to local Azerbaijanis:

“Those who live here are more associated with Georgians. It feels like they are Georgians.” (N44, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

Most participants, in Tbilisi as well as in Marneuli, who have never been to Azerbaijan, expressed the wish to visit it. The basic motivation is that one should see the neighbor country and it is good to see any place. Visiting the Georgian cultural heritage on Azeri and Armenian territories was also mentioned. Some are more enthusiastic about seeing modernized and beautiful Baku while others would rather prefer visiting ancient European or Asian countries if given a choice. There was only one participant in older group of Marneuli who was not interested in visiting Azerbaijan categorically, as according to him even local Azeris dislike its inhabitants.

“Local Azeris do not like Azeris of Azerbaijan and I do not have any interest to go there and see something.” (N40, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

2. Associations

At this point participants asked to talk about their associations about Azerbaijanis, the things that came into their minds when they thought of them.

In **young groups of Tbilisi** following associations were named:

- **Taking away Georgian territories (David Gareja border dispute),**
- **Neighbor country,**
- **Bad relations with Armenians,**
- **Less educated (apart from Baku inhabitants),**
- **Focused on trading,**
- **Hardworking unlike Georgians**
- **Rich/Huge financial capital entering from Azerbaijan to Georgia**

“What associations I have? That they are taking away our territories and if you can make them listen to this record I could also add one or two swear words” (N4, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“If we don’t consider Baku inhabitants, they are less educated. I saw Azerbaijanis wearing home slippers while crossing the Georgia-Azerbaijan border. Why would you do this? Are you going to your next-door neighbor?” (N8, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“They are oriented on trading and they are hard-working unlike Georgians” (N9, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

“I associate huge finances with them and that serious amount of money is entering here from Azerbaijan”
(N5, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

In **older groups of Tbilisi** following associations were named:

- **Friendly**
- **Trustworthy**
- **Positive / Positive towards Georgians**
- **Hardworking**
- **Law obedient**
- **Honest**

“They are capable of a very good friendship. When they see you as a friend disloyalty is excluded. My father worked with them and he used to say this.” (N21, female, older group, Tbilisi)

“I don’t know about associations but I think of my neighbor in Abastumani. He was from Baku, a doctor, very positive person. He had an Armenian wife and when situation in Azerbaijan became tense his sister betrayed them so they had to run away for save his wife.(...) They love Georgians very much. He always invited me in Baku.” (N20, female, older group, Tbilisi)

In **younger groups of Marneuli** following associations were named:

- **Tea**
- **Focused on trading/selling products in the market**
- **Good at calculating**
- **Hardworking**
- **Cohesive (support each other)**
- **Guest, living temporarily in Georgia (hard to perceive as Georgia’s citizens)**
- **Different religion/culture/traditions**
- **Good/ordinary people (not as Georgians imagine them)**

“I will start with tea, with samovar of course. Otherwise it is not that tasty” (N24, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tsereteli)

“They support each other very much. If you do harm to one of them, you have to run away from there because something terrible may happen to you” (N28, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

“I cannot perceive them as citizens of my country, as Georgians. There are lots of reasons we will talk about later. I have the feeling that they are guests, citizens of another country, who are settled here temporarily.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“I was brought up here. I am Georgian but I can also speak Azeri. They are not the kind of people as we imagine them. I think they are very good people, they are ordinary people.” (N30, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

In **older groups of Marneuli** following associations were named:

- **Muslim religion**
- **1989 year and 800 000 Azerbaijanis against Georgians²**
- **Friendly**
- **Respect Georgians**
- **Trustworthy**
- **Hospitable**
- **Neat**
- **Tasty dishes**

“1989 year comes into my mind. Summer. 800 000 people against us. This is what comes into my mind although I have many Azeri friends and we are quite close with families.” (N37, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“I have been working with Azeri sector for quite long. It is already 30 years I live here and I am in touch with them. The characteristics of these people are following: they respect Georgians; if they trust you, they will never betray; they are very friendly; hospitable; they cook very tasty dishes and they are very neat.” (N42, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tsereteli)

“I have many Azeri friends. We used to study together in the university. Before the university we were neighbors and we grew up together since kindergarten, we used to go to school together. They have graduated Georgian school and have been brought up in a Georgian way. They have their traditions. We have our own and we invite each other.” (N44, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

As we can see some associations are common for several categories of participants. For instance **“hardworking”** was named in both age groups of Tbilisi and younger group of Marneuli; **“focused on trading/selling in the market”** was named in younger groups of both Tbilisi and Marneuli; **“friendly”**, **“respectful/positive towards Georgians”** and **“trustworthy”** were named in older groups of both Tbilisi and Marneuli. Associations connected with **food** and drink (tea) was only mentioned in Marneuli groups (including both age groups).

While talking about associations **some older participants of Marneuli reminded their first unpleasant impressions of moving there**, saying they perceived the territory as different from the rest of Georgia.

“I lived in Kazbegi and when I moved here, at first I was scared. Everywhere there was Azeri talking. You could not hear Georgian language for 12 years.” (N36, female, older group, Marneuli Municipality: Village Tamarisi)

“My first impression was the territory that is torn away from Georgia and exists beyond the physical realm. This is expressed not only by their mentality, religion, behavior and many other visual factors.” (N39, male, older group, Marneuli Municipality: Marneuli city)

² In 1989, there were ethnic clashes between Georgians and Azeris in response to the demands of Azeris for autonomy in Borchali

3. Perceived Differences and similarities between Georgians and Azerbaijanis

Younger participants from Tbilisi distinguished following differences:

- **Ethnicity/religion/language/traditions**
- **Azerbaijani culture (language, religion) is more Asian/influenced by Turkey while Georgia is a crossroad of various cultures**
- **Azerbaijanis fall behind Georgians when it comes to humanism, relationships, culture/”misappropriators” of territories**
- **Azerbaijanis are land-workers/focused on agriculture**
- **Azerbaijanis are oriented towards gaining profit/ accumulating too much money**
- **Azerbaijanis are fond of gold/ building big house**
- **Azerbaijanis pay less attention to their clothes**
- **Azerbaijanis are more hardworking than Georgians**
- **Azerbaijanis of Georgia are more trustworthy (than other neighbor nations)**
- **Azerbaijanis reveal easy attitude towards women/Georgian women**

“I think they fall behind Georgians when it comes to humanism, relationships, culture. I think they are only good at cultivating the land. (...) I have never been in touch but I think they are “misappropriators”. Unlike Azerbaijanis Georgians never wanted to misappropriate someone else’s territories. They wanted to take David Gareja in exchange of some money” (N10, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“They want to gain profit from everything. Georgians are lazy and dreamy while Azeris are determined to gain money. Though I have no idea why would they need it when they accumulate all the money in the pillows and walk around in old torn clothes?” (N11, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

“They like gold very much. (...) I think the basic difference is difference in priorities. Here you can gain some status in the society with your profession, social activity, etc. while for them only thing that gives you status is the money (N7, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“I met Azeris when they visited Georgia and they behaved here exactly like Georgians in Russia, as if they saw a woman first time. We were sitting in the café and they sat with us and talked with my cousin. They said Georgians have more interesting appearance than Russians. (...) Also as soon as they meet the girl, they immediately say “I love you” to her.” (N11, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

On the other hand older participants from Tbilisi emphasized following differences:

- **Religion**
- **Different culture/traditions – Azerbaijanis marry their cousins**
- **Azerbaijanis live in more compact cohesive settlements**
- **Azerbaijanis are very hardworking**
- **Azerbaijanis are patriotic towards Azerbaijan than Georgians towards Georgia (they look after Baku, Azerbaijanis of Georgia look after Aliev statue in Georgia)**
- **Azerbaijanis are not very cultural people**
- **Azerbaijanis are more patriarchal than Georgians /Gender inequality is more apparent:**
 - **Polygyny (many wives)**

- **Girls' early/underage marriages**
- **Mostly women are working, rather than men**
- **Men are dominant/decision-makers**
- **They sell and buy girls (for marriage)**

“They have different culture. I am friends with an Azeri girl and she told me that cousins can marry and 13 year-old girl can marry as well. One Azeri guy was arrested here for marrying an underage girl and he could not understand what wrong he has done because it is ok for them.” (N18, male, older group, Tbilisi)

“I think they are much more patriotic than Georgians. They try more for their country than we. (...) They always take care of Aliev statue in Ortachala, there is always a bunch of flowers there.” (N22, female, older group, Tbilisi)

“They are very hardworking people but as far as I know women work mostly while men do not. (...) Also they still have polygyny. I knew one Azeri who had one wife in Lagodekhi and another, younger one, in Baku. And the first one is ok with that.” (N21, female, older group, Tbilisi)

Younger participants of Marneuli distinguished following differences between Georgians and Azerbaijanis:

- **Different culture/mentality/traditions**
- **Different Religion**
- **Azerbaijanis are less interested in education/being employed**
- **Azerbaijanis are focused on private business/trading/agriculture**
- **Azerbaijanis marrying own relatives**
- **Azerbaijanis respect elders very much**
- **Azerbaijanis are fond of gold/ car**
- **Azerbaijanis are bit less hospitable compared to Georgians**
- **Azerbaijanis do not dress tastefully**
- **Azerbaijanis are thieves**
- **Azerbaijanis are profit-oriented**
- **Azerbaijanis are more patriarchal than Georgians /Gender inequality is more apparent:**
 - **Having a son is a priority compared to having a daughter (daughter is not considered as their child)**
 - **Girls are not baptized/only boys can be baptized**
 - **Family pushes the girl to marry at a very young age/underage**
 - **Family chooses who will be the husband of their daughter**
 - **They do not consider education important for girls**
 - **Polygyny (many wives)**
 - **Mostly women are working compared to men**
 - **Women are not allowed to leave the home/go to balcony/answer the phone (young women)**
 - **Disrespectful attitude towards a bit openly dressed Georgian women**
 - **Azeri women are not allowed to eat/pray together with men**

“I do not like how Azeris treat the women. Maybe many years will be needed to change gender inequality among them. Women have very few rights, they are treated like slaves, for instance they do not consider daughter as their child while having a son is a matter of great importance. Of course not all families are like that, there are more modern families as well but I am talking about majority. (...) Most of them think that Azeri girls do not need education, that she is a girl and therefore she will marry – being educated and employed is not necessary.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“Georgian cannot imagine how it is possible to marry one’s own relative. They are not so bad people but they have very bad tradition when it comes to such marriage.” (N30, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: village Tamarisi)

“They think all girls should be married and they have many wives. Georgians have different opinion.” (N31, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

“The difference between Azeris and Georgians is that Azeris violate some of the women’s rights.(...) They are not permitted to go out. Probably they do not trust women. Women do not do anything, they have function of doll in the family. They cannot even go to the balcony. I have an Azeri coworker and she told me that her relative is forbidden even to go to the balcony without the presence of her husband. They are not even allowed to answer the telephone” (N28, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

“You cannot sit in the park, café, Internet-café. Not because I have any problem, but because Azeris look at you in a different way. They start whistling, whispering, staring, and shouting. If you wear a bit shorter skirt and a bit higher hills, they start whistling and shouting. I do not like it. Their women do not have the right to wear such things and whenever they see others, this is the reaction.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“They are interested in one thing. Do you know what it is? The car and the gold. House is not as important for them as gold and car. (...)We dress differently, they wear lot of trumpery” (N30, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

“We are more hospitable and different because we use what we got immediately, we will go together and have a feast.” (N31, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

“They may have 30 cattle and still go and steal from someone. My husband works as a policeman and I know from him that if it is Azeris who are mostly responsible for cattle stealing. I do not know if it is a useful information for you but they will do anything for gaining profit, even things Georgians do not dare either because of conscience or pride.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city).

Some participants in this category especially underline the influence of religion on culture and traditions and in this sense they **do not differ that much between Azerbaijanis and Georgian Muslims.**

“My cousin is married in Batumi³ and when I am looking at their religion and traditions, they have the same views as in Marneuli such as respecting elders, for instance. They have old grandmother and she

³ Part of Georgia where Georgian Muslims are religious majority

was respected so much that they hid the fact of baptizing children as Christians” (N35, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: city of Marneuli).

On the other hand older groups of Marneuli distinguished following differences:

- **Different traditions/religion**
- **Azerbaijanis as more fundamentalists**
- **Azerbaijanis do not dress tastefully/dress glittering, colorful things (more apparent in older generation)**
- **Azerbaijanis are fond of gold, golden teeth /car/house**
- **Azerbaijanis are fond of money/rich**
- **Azerbaijanis marry own relatives**
- **Azerbaijanis are cohesive/helping each other financially**
- **Azerbaijanis are organized/disciplined**
- **Azerbaijanis are more hardworking than Georgians**
- **Azerbaijanis are focused on agriculture while Georgians are more focused on jobs with salaries**
- **Azerbaijanis are more patriarchal than Georgians /Gender inequality is more apparent:**
 - **Women are not allowed do dress the way they want**
 - **Early/underage marriages**

„The first thing that is unacceptable for me is the marriage of very young girls. This is terrible. The child gets married and nobody thinks how she can bear a kid, what kind of relation she can have with husband, I mean talking, dialogues, sharing happiness and misfortune. Another thing is the marriage of cousins; that is ‘why should our good girl marry other? Let her stay with us.’ (...) Everyone I have been in touch loves jewels, glitter, gold. There is so big contrast between Georgian and Azeri when it comes to this – Georgians do not like glitter, they like it very much. They love colorful clothes. Nowadays Georgians started to wear colorful clothes too but Azeris always loved red-yellow colors. They are very fond of gold. If one has 2-3 golden teeth, it is a very good statement, probably of being rich. When I moved here, all the youth had golden teeth, now it is not as common.” (N42, female, older group, Marneuli Municipality: Village Tsereteli)

“From Azerbaijan they choose an Azeri here, who is more or less smart and good at trading, hire him for business and then give him lot of money. Then they say, give this money to this and this person to make him better off and it goes on like this. (...) They are very good at organization and discipline. Among Muslims this is very usual while for Georgians, Christians, not so much. (...) They have only one interest – money. They have too much money. Many of them do not show it, they are scared. Some of them started to show it. On Rustaveli Street everything built is theirs.” (N37, male, older group, Marneuli Municipality: Marneuli city)

“Their interest starts with money and ends with money. This is all. (...) They are very cohesive, help each other. Whole village, Agsakals⁴, some organizations help their youth. (...) Only one Armenian worked in

⁴ Local informal leader in the villages of Azeris

Holding Center, built by Azeris and this also happened because they could not find other good professional. And they always had conflicts. (...) They are fundamentalists.” (N39, male, older group, Marneuli Municipality: Marneuli city)

As in case of associations participants of all categories overlap each other in terms of the named differences. An opinion that **Azerbaijanis are more hard-working than Georgians** was named in all groups except young participants of Marneuli. However they mentioned this while talking about associations. **“Azerbaijanis marry own relatives”** were named in all groups except Tbilisi younger participants. **“Azerbaijanis are profit/financial capital oriented/rich”**, **“Azerbaijanis are focused on agriculture/landworking”** and **“Azerbaijanis are fond of gold/car/house”** were named by all Marneuli groups and younger participants of Tbilisi. All groups of Marneuli participants underlined that **Azeris do not dress tastefully** according to Georgians’ taste, while in younger group of Tbilisi it was emphasized that **Azerbaijanis do not care about clothes that much**. The opinion that **Azerbaijanis are more patriarchal and undermine women’s rights** was mentioned among Tbilisi older participants and among all Marneuli participants. Younger participants of Marneuli were the most sensitive towards the issue; they talked most of all about the gender inequality among Azerbaijanis. In younger group of Tbilisi it was slightly mentioned that **Azerbaijanis reveal somewhat easy attitude towards woman**.

When it comes to common things between Georgians and Azerbaijanis, all groups in Tbilisi as well as Marneuli young group emphasized that both people are **Caucasian**, in the latter it was mentioned that **some traditions** are common. All the groups stated that Azerbaijanis as well as Georgians are very **hospitable**, however in Marneuli older group Azerbaijani’s hospitality was regarded as learned, internalized from Georgians. In Marneuli younger and Tbilisi older groups it was said that both people are **friendly**. Marneuli as well as Tbilisi youth think attitude towards religion is common - **religion is sacred for Azeris as well as for Georgians**. Apart from these common opinions, in Tbilisi younger group it was mentioned that **both people are patriarchal**. Participants of Tbilisi older group stated that Azerbaijanis as well as Georgians are **helpful** and **trustworthy, they will never betray**. Among Marneuli older group it was mentioned that hospitality and neighborhood traditions were internalized by local Azerbaijanis, also **Azeris as well as Georgians are moving towards globalization** (Europe) and **both groups want peace**.

“They are pure Caucasian type of people who will never betray you. Georgians are also like this. Religion is the only difference between us. The rest is similar - such as character, helpfulness, and relations.” (N13, male, older group, Tbilisi)

“We are Caucasians. Caucasian mentality is different. If you look at it, it differs from European as well as from Asian.” (N4, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“They are ordinary people with ordinary problems. Like Georgians they are hospitable and friendly.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“Any ethnic group who lives on the territory of another nation will assimilate if they want it or not. They take the customs of the dominant nation. They learned hospitality from us.” (N39, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“They did not become similar to Georgians but we all live in 21-st century. Georgians changed themselves. We are looking towards Europe and they are following us. So we are all going towards one point- globalization. (...) Common interest is that everybody wants peace. No Azeri will tell that they want war.” (N37, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

4. Azerbaijanis’ attitudes towards Georgians

As younger participants in Tbilisi were least familiar with Azerbaijanis generally, they found it hardest to think of what Azerbaijanis might think about Georgians. Nevertheless several opinions were named:

- **They have normal attitude towards Georgians**
- **They may think Georgians are lazy/do not like doing physical work**
- **They may think Georgians are ambitious**
- **Some may think Georgians are easy to fool**
- **They may feel Georgians make them disadvantaged in Georgia**

“I think they are annoyed and have the feeling they are disadvantaged somehow in Georgia. Once someone called⁵ me from Marneuli and he said nepotism was taking place as everyone who won the car lottery was Georgian while so many Azeris live here” (N6, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

On the other hand, older participants who have been more familiar with Azerbaijanis, state that Azerbaijanis are **very positive towards Georgians and love them**.

“The cousin of my husband used to visit Baku frequently because of some trading business. And the family he had relations with loved him very much; they used to call him their son. Then this guy died and they showed serious respect towards his wife and children. They have very positive attitude towards Georgians.” (N23, female, older group, Tbilisi)

Opinions named in Marneuli groups were more similar to each other, although some ideas were mutually exclusive. In younger groups it was mentioned that Azeris are somewhat **distrustful towards Georgians**, they reveal **ironic attitude** and **they always doubt Georgians do not like them**. Some say that their attitudes are quite **friendly and respectful towards Georgians**; some say that it depends – in **distant villages they are mostly aggressive while in cities you can see some friendly Azeris**. It was also mentioned that **Azerbaijanis imitate Georgians** when it comes to dressing and behaviors.

“Because they think Georgians do not like them, they have strong defense mechanism and they try to defend themselves even when you are not attacking.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli Municipality: Marneuli city)

“I came across distrustfulness from them in the beginning our relations but when they see your friendly attitude, the ice melts and they become friendly too. I had such occasion in the spring. Grandmother brought her grandson and enlisted him in my group.⁶ When the mother found out that the teacher was

⁵ works in the call-center of Georgian cell-company

⁶ Works as a kindergarten teacher

Georgian, she was worried that I would oppress the child. So the first reaction was distrustfulness but today this kid is in my group.” (N28, female, younger group, Marneuli Municipality: Village Tamarisi)

Opinions were divided among older Marneuli participants as well. However they are not very different from younger participants of Marneuli. Some think that Azeris **feel inferior to Georgians** while Georgians consider themselves superior. Therefore **it is an honor for them to be friends with Georgian**. Others think that it is **Azeris who in fact feel superior in Marneuli** and **have negative attitudes towards Georgians**. Following ideas were identified:

- **Azerbaijanis imitate Georgians**
- **Azerbaijanis respect Georgians/ Being friends with Georgian in honor for them**
- **Azerbaijanis have latent negative attitude towards Georgians they do not reveal**
- **Azerbaijanis are openly aggressive towards Georgians**
- **Azerbaijanis feel inferior to Georgians in Marneuli**
- **Azerbaijanis feel superior to Georgians in Marneuli**

„They have terrible attitude towards Georgians. They can come out of the car and beat you just because you are Georgian. (...) They imitate Georgians because they are small ethnic group living next to other ethnic group and they have to fight for the survival. For this they have to take something from Georgians. Otherwise they will be isolated.“ (N37, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“They do not reveal but they have negative attitude. I had an occasion in the registration office. There was a queue made of Azeris . Here there are Azeris mostly. Wherever you go, everywhere you hear Azeri talking. I come from Sokhumi and although I have experienced being IDP, I am more surprised by Marneuli. I had kind of a conflict because they would let each other in the queue endlessly and I was standing there in vain. Do you know what they responded? They asked who I am at all. Firstly, they speak neither Georgian, nor Russian. They feel too superior to learn Georgian and shout as if you are nothing here. I told to my uncle that Abkhaz are joke compared to them.” (N41, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“My subjective opinion is that most Georgians think they are superior to Azeris and Azeris too somehow admit their mental superiority. We are equal, although it is an honor for them to be friends with Georgians. (...) They respect Georgians.” (N42, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tsereteli)

Economic Capital

Attitudes towards financial relations with Azerbaijanis

The sub-topic concerning economic capital aims to understand participants’ attitudes towards financial relations with Azerbaijanis. Participants were asked whether it is a smart decision to have financial relations with Azerbaijani person

Most participants among Tbilisi young groups found it hard to decide whether it is a smart decision to have the financial relations with somebody depending only on ethnicity. Others think such relation is quite profitable because **Azerbaijanis are trustworthy, good payers and they are financially well off**. Some participants emphasized that they imagine Azeri as an investor and themselves as business starters, one emphasized that Azeri will finance you easily than French for instance because he is less qualified. Negative opinion was also mentioned by one participant that **Azerbaijanis as cheaters**.

“They are cheaters. Once they wanted to buy my friend’s car and it happened I was there too. At first they started bargaining a lot and finally when they gave him the money, later we discovered that it lacked 100 \$.” (N11, female, young group, Tbilisi)

“Maybe you need to use recourses. You know how to manage and you need financial support from others. Azeri will be keener to finance you than French for instance; and do you know why? Because he is less qualified in his job but has money and you can use this for gaining profit. (...) They are more honest when it comes to paying. In the hospital⁷ Georgians always try not to pay, for instance one gave the bible to the doctor instead of paying the fee. Azeris always pay what they have to, also they talk more pleasantly.” (N2, female, young group, Tbilisi)

“I would trust Azeri more. Depends what kind of business we are talking about. There is a joke, one Jewish says to another, hire a Georgian as a watchman because he will never sleep counting your money.” (N4, male, young group, Tbilisi)

Older participants of Tbilisi were even more positive in this sense. It was also emphasized that Azerbaijanis are not only good at financial partnership, but also when it comes to informal relations between business partners. Following reasons for positive perception were distinguished overall:

- **Azerbaijanis are trustworthy/loyal (Most trustworthy between Georgia’s neighbors)**
- **Azerbaijanis are honest**
- **Azerbaijanis are helpful**
- **Azerbaijanis are law obedient**
- **Azerbaijanis are advanced in business (They have resources - oil/contacts; are capable to test/understand people; their partners are usually content)**
- **Azerbaijanis trust Georgians**
- **Connecting Azerbaijanis and Georgians financially is good for Georgia**
- **Azerbaijanis get on well with Georgians when it comes to informal relations apart from actual business**

“Azeris are advanced in business; there is no chance that they will betray you. And you are even keener to have financial relations with them than they want with you. Imagine they have oil and so many contacts. Also they trust Georgians. They have the capability to test the people and recognize who is who. Everyone who had any financial relations with Azeris, then continue to cooperate with them.” (N18, male, older group, Tbilisi)

⁷ Works as a junior doctor

“Apart from business there are some personal relations too. For instance European has concrete plans during the business visit here, so they do their job and then leave. Azerbaijani will also follow own schedule and then leave. But meanwhile they know that Georgians love having a feast, amusement. (...) From Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia, I trust and respect Azeris more than others.” (N17, male, older group, Tbilisi)

Younger participants of Marneuli note that **Azerbaijanis are very trustworthy when it comes to lending and borrowing money**. Apart from it all of them mentioned **Azeri’s special talent in business**. Most of them find such talent quite attractive when it comes to having financial relations with Azeri, while for some it looks threatening because Georgian can never fully win in such partnership. Some participants say that it is Azeri community who chooses not to include Georgians in business, rather than vice versa. They say that Azeris are more closed and they prefer to choose Azeri business partner because they trust each other more and also are aware of Georgians’ irresponsible attitude towards money. It is interesting that in this sense some participants revealed quite stereotypical view not only of Azeris but of Georgians as well. Following opinions were distinguished:

- **Personal trust is more important**
- **Mixed business will be profitable in such multiethnic municipality as Marneuli**
- **Azeris can make a good business partner for Georgian because: they have better experience/intuition/understanding of business; they are more profit-oriented; they are more organized/careful with money; they are trustworthy/responsible**
- **Azeris choose not to include Georgians in serious business because: are more cohesive/ trust each other more; they are more socially encouraged (prestige, chief/authority) to have financial relations with other Azeris; they do not trust Georgians when it comes to money**
- **Georgians may lose in such partnership because Azeris are more experienced in business.**

“I have a co-worker and if one of us needs money we can borrow from each other without any problem. (...) When it comes to serious business, they prefer not to include Georgians but when it comes to trading they get in touch with us. If we are talking about having share in particular business, this is not happening. Azeris prefer to relate to Azeris again. They trust each other more than others. (...) And even if we ignore the matter of trust, it can happen that they trust Georgian more, but it is more connected to prestige, and their chief might not like that they are dealing with Georgians. Georgians, on the other hand, avoid such partnership because Azeris are more experienced in business and Georgians may lose. (...) I have never heard that Georgian and Azeri had common business in Marneuli.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“I think it is better to have financial relations with Azeri because they are more organized when it comes to business and they are more careful with money. While we (Georgians) can spend everything just for something insignificant, for example the drink, and all the money we have been saving for so long is gone immediately.” (N31, male, younger group, Municipality municipaliy: Village Tamarisi)

“Among Azeris as well as among Georgians there would be people I trust and there would be people I do not trust. (...) If I equally trust Georgian and Azeri I would balance the situation. As I am ethnic Georgian in a multiethnic municipality I would count on environment and try to build the multiethnic

business group. In this way it will be easier to attract clients, deserve trust and sell the products.(...) Azeris are mentall oriented towards profit. They have the word “Kheir”. When you are offering them something, they ask “Kheir-var?”, that is “is it profitable?” And when you explain, they can understand it in a minute and they may say “Kheir iokhtur”, “there is nothing profitable here”. They understand business very well. Of course I will be happy if such person is my partner.” (N24, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tsereteli)

Older participants from Marneuli also note that Azeris are very **trustworthy** when it comes to financial relation. Compared to Georgians they are **good payers** and **deserve more trust and support from banks**. (However during the discussion it looked like some participants felt grievance as compared to Azerbaijanis they perceive themselves disadvantaged by banks). Participants are quite positive towards having financial relations with Azeris, although they also underlined necessity of **knowing the concrete person** well. On the other hand, they say for Azeris it may also be **profitable to have Georgian partner in Georgia**, also interethnic **financial relations reduce the threat of any insurgency**.

“They attract finances easily than Georgians. They are much supported. If I ask for a place for the office or the loan from bank, I would not get. Someone told me compared to them Georgians are very bad at returning. Why would not I return the bank loan?” (N36, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

“How can Azeri make money in Georgia, if Georgian will not be next to him? They are very trustworthy people when it comes to money. We are more mischievous, if honestly.” (N37, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“The deeper the economic relations are among two nations, the less the threat is. If the Ergneti market was not closed in 2005, we would not get the same result in 2008.” (N39, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

Attitudes towards Azerbaijani sellers in the market

In Tbilisi, among younger as well as older groups Azerbaijani sellers are seen quite positively. In all Tbilisi categories Azerbaijani sellers are seen as better than Georgians for identical reasons:

- **Azerbaijanis are more honest**
- **Azerbaijanis products are cheaper**
- **Bargaining is acceptable with Azerbaijanis /Azerbaijanis appreciate bargaining (they get pleasure from bargaining, have trading/bargaining is genetics)**
- **Azerbaijanis grow the products themselves.**
- **Azerbaijanis act in a pleasant way while selling.**

“Bargaining is like in their genetics, as trading was always popular in Asian countries. When the product actually costs 1 GEL, they would rather say 3 GEL to you at first, later they say - ok, you can take it only for 2 GEL, and finally they will give it to you just for 70 tetris.” (N8, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“Once I was buying potatoes from the Georgian. The price tag on it said 50 tetris per 1 kg. As soon as I looked down in my bag to take the money, the seller suddenly changed the tag and put “60 tetris” on potatoes. That’s the difference between Georgian and Azeri sellers” (N9, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

“They are nicer, bargaining is acceptable and then they give you cheaper. Probably it is because we are Georgians? I do not know. I will never forget - once I bought the cheese from the Azeri woman in the market and I forgot to take it with me. Next morning I returned to the market and that women gave the cheese back to me. I doubt Georgian seller would do the same.” (N21, female, older group, Tbilisi)

Only one participant in Tbilisi younger group disagreed with general opinion that Azeris are more honest sellers. According to him Azeris as well as Georgians cheat because there are such conditions in Georgia:

“How many times I have heard from my mom that instead of 1 bouquet of parsley he (Azeri seller) put something cheaper or unwanted in her bag. That means he lied to you. Everyone lies, Azeris as well as Georgians. (...) The seller always lies; this is the logic of trading in this country.” (N3, male, young group, Tbilisi)

In Marneuli participants were not so positive regarding the issue. Like in Tbilisi, older Marneuli participants also say that **Azerbaijanis find pleasure in bargaining** and **they reduce the price while bargaining**. However while younger as well as older groups agree that **compared to Georgians Azerbaijanis are naturally talented in trading** and they are **cheating in weight**, opinions of these categories do not match identically as in case of Tbilisi. Marneuli young participants say that trading is the main occupation for Azeris and it naturally comes with them. If more open socially, being successful in other spheres too was mentioned as well. However when asked if Georgians also cheat, they say that Georgians also cheat but are less successful in it. In Marneuli younger group following opinions were distinguished overall:

- **Azerbaijanis are less ambitious (Georgians find it harder to sell in the market because of their pride/ambition)**
- **Trading/selling is the only sphere for Azerbaijanis**
- **Azerbaijanis are naturally more talented in trading than Georgians**
- **Azerbaijanis are assertive while selling (will not let you go easily)**
- **Azerbaijanis are cheating (when it comes to quality and quantity of the product they sell)**
- **Azerbaijanis do not reduce the price (while bargaining) compared to Georgians**
- **Azerbaijanis act in a pleasant way while selling**

“They are perfect in the market. Muslims are naturally talented at trading. Even if it is one cent, they have to reduce the price for you. Basically there are elderly Azeri women in the market. They cannot sit home; they have to sit in the market because it is in their blood.” (N37, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“Such moments of cheating again derive from their orientation towards profit. He cannot give you the right amount of the product because it will not be profitable any more. That is why I am saying that from the birth they are surrounded with people who grow these skills in them. Trading is very important for

Azeris and if they do not have talent in, this they are criticized by others (Azeris) (...) and do you know how they are able to cheat? Because they smile to you, it is ordinary thing in business. They sell not only potatoes, but their behavior as well. Then you return home happy and fooled because he cheated in amount and you are angry on yourself that you were standing there and smiling in response.” (N24, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tsereteli)

“I cannot go and stand in the market. We are different kind of people with pride/ambitions. They may do the things I will never do. (...) I think if they are more socially open they can be successful in everything; now trading is their only sphere. ” (N31, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

“When you are buying apple and pick good ones, he (Azeri seller) takes them away and gives you rotten ones. Trading is something they are best at. They are able to cheat a bit when it comes to quality and quantity and this increases their income.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

Social Capital

Changing number of Azeri population in Georgia

At this point participants were asked to express thoughts regarding the number of local Azeri population, whether it increases or decreases in size and if this creates a problem for Georgia and Georgians. As the context is different for Tbilisi and Marneuli participants, Tbilisi groups were asked about the number of Azerbaijanis in whole Georgia, while the question for Marneuli groups included more concrete place, Marneuli municipality.

All the groups agree that number of Azerbaijanis is rising in Georgia (in Marneuli for Marneuli participants). Only some people in Tbilisi younger groups do not think that their number is increasing, and if it is, the increase is minimal. Azerbaijani's **high fertility rates** and **newly joined Azeris (mostly for financial reasons)** were named in Tbilisi as basic reasons of increased Azeri population. Participants think that higher fertility rates are caused by the fact that Azeri women are mostly housewives, while Georgian ones are employed (named in Tbilisi younger group); Azeri women marry early and they have up to 5 children while Georgians care whether conditions are good enough to have many children (named in Tbilisi older group); religion (named in Tbilisi older group).

“They are immigrating to Georgia. Another reason is that they have higher rates of fertility. Azeri woman's basic job is either selling vegetables or being a housewife. Georgian women especially in Tbilisi are mostly employed. Therefore Azeris are oriented on having more children compared to Georgians.” (N11, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

In Marneuli only **higher fertility** was named as the reason of increasing Azerbaijani's number. However it was also mentioned that it is more common in villages. Participants think higher fertility is caused by **being more hardworking (when it comes to agriculture) and therefore better off** compared to Georgians, also **religious believes** encourage them to have more children (named in Marneuli older

group). However participants of Marneuli older groups also note that the **number of Georgians is also raised** in Marneuli region.

“They are much more hardworking people compared to Georgians. They have to have lot of money. We are less interested in agriculture, we are mostly looking for a job with salaries and you cannot live on salaries. They work for some time, build green-houses and save the money. There are 10 weddings among Azeris while Georgians have only one wedding. Financial problems create obstacles for Georgians; they do not have enough money for weddings. Also they have religious belief that they should have many children.” (N45, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Saimerlo)

Opinions were divided in Tbilisi young groups whether increase is a problem or not. Most participants agree that it is not a problem if there are some regulations, such as **corresponding fertility rates of Georgians and Azeris** and **giving employment priority to ethnic Georgians**, while some regard it as a problem nevertheless because **other ethnic group is increasing more than Georgians** and **they get jobs while Georgians are poor**.

“There is not a problem. Just there should be some regulations, for instance regarding employment. (...) They should not be given many working places and Georgian should not be left unemployed (...) In case of similarly qualified candidates, priority should be given to ethnic Georgian.” (N4, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“I see a problem. Why should Azeri surname be the third wide-spread surname in Georgia? (...) When the huge oil company entered the Georgian market, they employed Azeri people. They have Georgians too, but they also have Azeris. I think Georgians are not so rich to give these jobs to foreigners” (N5, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

The same reasons (**other ethnic group is increasing more than Georgians** and **they get jobs while Georgians are poor/unemployed**) were named in older groups of Tbilisi as well. **Improvement of general economic conditions** and **giving privileges to ethnic Georgians** were seen as a solution by some participants.

“It is not about Azerbaijanis but it is not acceptable generally that number of any other nation in our country is increasing more than Georgians.” (N18, male, older group, Tbilisi)

“I think Azeris became more nationalistic lately. When Sokar, Azeri Petrol Company entered the market, they employed only Azeris. I wanted to buy the petrol and the man, Azeri one, could not speak neither Georgian, not even Russian. Our Georgian is unemployed and they hire such stupid people who know nothing but own native language because they are Azeris.” (N13, male, older group, Tbilisi)

Marneuli younger groups mentioned more various reasons why increasing the number of Azerbaijanis can be a problem, the fear that Azerbaijanis may request autonomy was very apparent. Following reasons were distinguished:

- **Azerbaijanis occupy more lands in Marneuli and it may be ended by requesting autonomy/the more they are the more the chance to request autonomy**
- **Georgians may feel disadvantaged in Marneuli**
- **Georgians may mix with people of different religion**

- **It is already bad that other ethnic groups inhabit Georgia more than Georgians**
- **Because of increasing the size of other ethnic groups, Georgian nation may disappear after several centuries.**
- **There are not enough recourses even for ethnic Georgians**

“In a similar way I am not happy with increased number of Chinese and Indians in my country. I call for Georgians to have more children. How long can Georgian nation bear this? We will disappear in several centuries and some other ethnic group will replace us. (...) Other ethnic groups can multiply in own countries. Georgians are running abroad and work as maids there because of hunger. (...) Most of all I’m afraid that Georgians may mix with people of different religion. This will be collapse.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“As Azeris increase in size they occupy more lands and this will cause troubles for Georgians. (...) If they increased 10-times and 20-times, then they will request autonomy. I heard that Georgian people were specially settled here to avoid turning it into autonomy, which was wanted by Azeris. I am Svan⁸ and I heard Svans were settled here because they are especially tough people. Let the God save us from autonomy request, otherwise we will do everything what will be necessary. Personally speaking, I can even take the gun and do everything that will be necessary.” (N26, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Svan settlement)

“The reason why Georgian people were settled in village Tsereteli or Saingilo was not to lose the Georgian soul in these places.” (N28, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

The topic of **“bringing Georgian soul”** in Marneuli was widely discussed among older Marneuli participants. They see situation less problematic in case of increasing the number of Georgian people there. Therefore **settling the eco-migrant Svans in Marneuli municipality is very positively evaluated** by some participants, as well as **newcomers from Tbilisi and other regions** because they are believed to be bolder with Azeris compared to locals. According to them Georgian new-comers, especially Svans, **created more Georgian environment** and showed “who is the chief here”.

“I think establishing Svan settlements created very good atmosphere here. When I arrived here more than 30 years ago, there were Azerbaijanis with papakhas⁹, they could speak neither Georgian, nor Russian. Now there are many Georgians, you hear Georgian talking. Now it is more Georgian environment than then. Everything was changed after Svans’ arrival here. Georgians were invisible and silent before. I have the impression that Svans revealed their character – this is who we are and this is who you are. My son-in-law is Svan and when Azeris heard about it, they were very scared.” (N42, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tsereteli)

“You had to swallow an insult from Azeris because they lived in your country. Now it is not like that. Probably newly arrived people from Tbilisi and other regions were braver than locals because they did not care for Azeris while locals were grown up with them and were used to make concessions.” (N36, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

⁸ Subethnic group of Georgians

⁹ tall Caucasian hat usually of sheepskin

Participants' opinion about hypothetical situation of Georgia without Azerbaijanis

In order to better clarify whether participants find the increase of Azerbaijanis' number problematic, they were suggested to imagine hypothetical situation where Azerbaijanis leave Georgia for Azerbaijan and they do not reside in this country any more. As in case of previous question for Marneuli group "Marneuli without Azerbaijanis" were suggested, while for Tbilisi group the question more was generally about Georgia.

In all categories positive as well as negative results were emphasized. In Tbilisi younger groups following effects were named as positive:

- **Azerbaijanis will live in their home country ("sweet home" principle)**
- **More work places will be available for Georgians**
- **Georgia is a small nation and it is dangerous that others held too much share**

On the other hand negative effects were also mentioned:

- **It's good for Georgia to be multiethnic and therefore less nationalist**
- **Multiethnic staff can provide various opinions at workplace.**
- **Cutting out an organ from Georgia's organism/general number of Georgia's population will be reduced.**
- **Lands will be left without cultivation.**
- **Trading (selling farm products) will be badly effected**
- **Azeri's investing in business in Georgia will be badly effected**
- **It is politically bad precedent when people of other ethnic group are leaving the country**
- **Spoiling relations with our oil-partner (Azerbaijan)**
- **Azeri who was born/grown up here is Georgian by mentality.**
- **Bad for people who have relations with Azerbaijanis and love them.**

"I think Caucasus generally consists of various ethnic and cultural groups and we can say the same about Georgia. Just it is that majority of population is Georgian and it is "Georgia", but you cannot imagine this country without Azerbaijanis, or Armenians." (N8, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

"We have to distinguish between Azeri who was born and grown up here and the Azerbaijan citizen, who works here for several years. Those who were born and raised in Georgia, are Georgians. They may be of different origin but they are Georgians. Origin differs from "Georgianity". This is Georgian mentality." (N4, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

In Tbilisi younger groups some **worries were expressed generally regarding ethnic minorities in Georgia, so that they do not have enough respect towards Georgia and by creating ethnic settlements they in fact create a threat:**

“Just I think that any ethnic group who lives here should be more interested in this land. They just use it a source of income. For them it does not matter this piece of land will be in Georgia, South Africa or Azerbaijan. They do not live by the principle that they are citizens of Georgia. I say whether it will be Armenians, Azeris or anyone else, let them live here but they have to respect the land where they live.” (N8, male)

“I welcome every ethnic group to live here but at all not together, they should be separately, away from each other, scattered; so that they were not able to create an ethnic settlement. Because then they cannot develop in such closed space and grow in number. Such ethnic groupings have caused us troubles so many times such as Javakheti, Abkhazia, Ossetia.” (N9, female)

More employment for Georgians was also named in Tbilisi older groups as the positive aspect of Azerbaijani’s departure. In addition they mentioned that in this case the **richer lands that are in Azerbaijani’s hands now will be left for Georgians**. On the other hand negative effects were mentioned too. Participants say that in this case **there will not be enough people for cultivating the lands; Azerbaijanis are nice and hardworking; and if not Azeris, someone else will come anyway Georgians are not familiar with**.

“It will be very bad if Azeris left Georgia. Historically they left twice but then King Erekle II brought them back because Georgians had lands but not enough people. We do not need to invent new history. If there will be no Azeri, there will be others and maybe so fools that would not know anything at all. At least Azeris are Georgia’s citizens.” (N18, male, older group, Tbilisi)

Some participants in older as well as younger groups of Tbilisi were quite indifferent to the particular issue stating that the problem is when Georgians leave Georgia, and about Azerbaijanis they do not care that much.

„I do not see any problem if they leave Georgia. If they want to go, let the God bless their way. Jewish people also left. We still ask them to return but we live all right without them and they are also fine wherever they are.(...) I only regret when Georgians are leaving Georgia.” (N14, female, older group, Tbilisi)

In Marneuli younger groups some participants looked quite happy while others think Marneuli will not be Marneuli without Azeris. As positive effects of Azerbaijani’s departure **“There will be Georgians in Marneuli”** and **“Georgians will be trading in Marneuli market (bazaar)”** were named, though some participants underlined that it is not only about Azeris but rather more general.

“If there will be all Georgians here I am happy with it, it is very good. But it concerns not only Azeris, but generally. But as it happens that we are not only Georgians here, I do not see any problem that Azeri, Armenian, Greek or another one lived here.” (N28, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: VillageTamarisi)

Following negative effects of Azeris’ departure were named:

- **Georgians would have to work harder/cultivate all the lands**
- **There will be no Marneuli Market (bazaar) any more**
- **Amount of harvest would be reduced/food crisis**

- **Marneuli would disappear because it's inhabitants are basically Azeri**
- **Everyday life would be changed**

Marneuli older groups are also happy to have only **Georgians in Marneuli** with **more and better lands** left for them that according to them are currently owned by Azeris. On the other hand they see danger that if Azerbaijanis are gone, **serious working power will disappear; Georgians would not be able to be as successful in agriculture** as Azeris because they (Georgians) are lazier, also lacking serious financial resources. So this may end in **vegetable crisis** and **increased prices** finally.

“On one hand because of our mentality it would be good because there would be only Georgians then. On the other hand, Georgian may own 10 lands and take care of only one. Even if someone gives me 10 lands now, I cannot take care of them. It's not that I am lazy I just cannot do it anymore on my own. You take a loan from the bank and when you are unlucky and unsuccessful, you are dead. Neither you are able to return the load, nor do you have the harvest. Another factor is that from Azerbaijan, Baku, helps our Azeris a lot, will it be relatives or government.” (N44, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

Perceived neighborhood with Azerbaijani person

The experience of having Azerbaijani neighbor is minor in Tbilisi. While in older group of Tbilisi, some participants have or had Azeri neighbors, younger groups are absolutely unfamiliar. Although one participant recalled her friends' experience, others found it hard to remember Azeris even in so called “Italian yards”¹⁰ as well. Even more, most of them do not have any Azeri acquaintance at all, saying that **Azerbaijanis live in their shell somehow and do not mix with people.**

“We do not have any neighborhood experience. They are compactly enclosed in their own shell somehow. (...) We know who are Azeris, they are our neighbors, they live on our land, but we know very few of them personally. Look, there are six of us here and nobody knows any Azeri person. (...) no one can say that About Armenians, everyone knows at least one Armenian, they are more sociable.” (N8, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“They should be somewhere here but basically we see Russians, Armenians, Jewish, Yezidis, Kurdish. Azeris are not very apparent in Tbilisi. If they were more mixed with people, it would not be a problem. They are closed, they have language barrier and do not want to leave their shell.” (N9, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

Although younger Tbilisi participants find it hard to talk about the unfamiliar issue, they say if given an opportunity to live next to Azeri person **they would have normal relations** and also it **depends on personality**. Nevertheless **Georgian neighbor is still a priority** because of being own-group member.

“I do not care he will be European, or Azeri. But it is different when we compare it to Georgian. Georgian is more “mine.” (N5, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

¹⁰ A type of Georgian common housing, well-known for its multi-ethnic inhabitants

In older group of Tbilisi there were some participants who experienced having Azeri neighbors. They expressed quite **positive attitudes about particular neighbors** saying that they were **nice and educated**. Several participants emphasized their **Azerbaijani neighbor is fluent in Georgian**.

“I have Azeri neighbors. They speak Georgian perfectly, without any problem. (...) Their children attend Georgian school although there is Azeri school as well. (...) I do not distinguish my Georgian neighbor from my Azeri neighbor.” (N13, male, older group, Tbilisi)

None of the participants expressed any negative view about an opportunity to have Azeri neighbors, saying that they would have **normal relations**.

The context is absolutely different in Marneuli municipality. As I mentioned in the introduction apart from Marneuli city where population is mixed, there are several types of villages here: Azeri villages, where mostly (or only) Azeris live; Georgian villages, where mostly (or only) Georgians live and mixed villages. Mixed villages also differ whether inhabitants live altogether or are divided by districts (Azeri district, Georgian district, etc.). In this case our participants come from Marneuli city, village Saimerlo (Georgian village), mixed villages Tsereteli and Tamarisi and the special settlement for eco-migrant Svans (in Tamarisi). In Tsereteli different ethnic groups live in different districts of the village, while in Tamarisi there are no such districts and population is mixed. Unlike them Svan settlement is inhabited only by Svans (ethnic Georgians) and is more isolated. Therefore experience is different for the group members and some of them do not have Azerbaijani neighbor at all. **Those who have, say that they enjoy very good relations and they can normally interact with them**, for instance ask for salt if they need some, etc. On the other hand it was also mentioned that **some Georgians get irritated when hearing loud Azeri music coming from the neighbor**. One participant also expressed that **getting too close to Azeri may finally end in marriage that is quite problematic**. It appeared that Azeris mostly avoid living in Svan settlement. **Svans are not very happy with the possibility of having Azeri neighbors either**.

“I cannot remind any conflicts except one period of my childhood, when we were evacuated from the village and our fathers were defending our district. Since that I hardly remind any conflict. We have newly arrived Azeri neighbors in our district and some people protest because they had parties and they listened to Azeri music loudly, and it was a problem for some (Georgian inhabitants) but for me it is not a problem at all. They are ordinary citizens like I am and they have the right to listen own music, watch Azeri TV channels. This should not be a problem and they should not be limited.” (N28, female, younger group, Marneuli Municipality: Village Tamarisi)

“There are occasions when Georgian and Azeri live in shared apartment, sharing room and they live normally. I have never heard of any conflicts.” (N33, female, younger group, Marneuli Municipality: Marneuli city)

“I do not have any Azeri neighbors. I live in Svan settlement and I doubt any Azeri will come there. (...) Of course we will let him but poor one who sold the house to him. (...) Probably they also prefer to live where they can better adapt. It will be complicated for them to live with us. (...) At least I have never seen any Azeri who had expressed such wish.” (N26, male, younger group, Marneuli Municipality: Svan settlement)

Azeri neighbors were very positively evaluated by older Marneuli group as well. According to participants, **Azerbaijanis are perfect neighbors, who will never spoil relations with own neighbor and they learned being good and open neighbors from Georgians** that distinguishes them from Azerbaijan's Azeris.

“Azeris of Marneuli said that neighbors in Azerbaijan are not as open to each other and they too learned this from Georgians. They have many customs learned from Georgians.” (N41, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

Perceived friendship with Azerbaijani person

Participants from Tbilisi younger group, who are mostly unfamiliar with Azeris, do not express negative attitude towards close friendship with Azeri person, although **they name some obstacles such as Azerbaijani's inability of speaking Georgian, different cultural and religious customs**; also for some of them approach towards such friendship seems to be more reactive (if Azerbaijani initiates such friendship), rather than initiating themselves.

“If I do not know the person and have not been in touch for long, how can we be friends? Apart from that inability of speaking Georgian is very big obstacle. We need to have absolute understanding of each other in order to make friends. Most of them do not even speak Russian. It is not that I am excluding the possibility of friendship. I am just saying there are some barriers. (...) Even when you are friends (says later, while discussing marriage) it is hard to get used to different cultural and religious customs” (N9, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

“Let's say friends are together, drinking or something and one guy feels alien. If he initiates the friendship himself and if I see he is a good person, why would I refuse? It does not matter whether he is Azeri or from Singapore.” (N10, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

Older participants from Tbilisi are much more positive, noting that **Azerbaijanis are capable of very good friendship**. Some of them remind own experiences or the ones they have heard from others. As in case of neighborhood some participants emphasized their Azeri friends' ability to speak Georgian.

“I have an Azeri neighbor. We are not very close friends but there are other Azeris I am very close with. I have four friends from Baku. I call them once in 2-3 months to ask how they are. They speak perfect Georgian because they were born and brought up in Georgia, they left for Baku later.” (N13, male, older group, Tbilisi).

In Marneuli young group it appears that **some participants really have very close Azeri friends**, while others do not. Here too the **language difference** was mentioned as an obstacle.

“During this summer it happened that I got in touch with Azeris a lot because of election preparatory period and I made lot of friends but I cannot call them very close friends. Maybe it can happen if you make friends in childhood but I have never had such relations with them when I could talk about everything. We are just friends. (...) The obstacles are differences. I speak Georgian, they speak Azeri. I

have never met Azeri who speaks Georgian, at least good Georgian.” (N26, male, younger group, Marneuli Municipality: Svan settlement)

“I have an Azeri close friend. He lives in the village that is mostly inhabited by Georgians. He speaks perfect Georgian, maybe better than I do. Once I was involved in the fight against Azeris in Marneuli market. The roads were closed, almost 200 people were beating me and this Azeri guy was next to me, he got involved because of me and was fighting on my side. He could act as a mediator but he fought for me because they are very good friends and I love these people generally. The ones I am friends with are very cool people. (...) He is a very close friend of mine, he is like my brother. I trust him very much and he trusts me in a similar way.” (N31, male, younger group, Marneuli Municipality: Village Tamarisi)

However while none of the participants expressed any negative attitude towards being friends with Azeri person, they agree that for instance at school informal groups consist of Azeri children and Georgians children separately, Azeris make friends with Azeris and Georgians make friends with Georgians. According to participants it happens because: firstly, **it is natural to be closer to similar people** and on the other hand, **Georgians are not very keen to be friends with Azeris and even are laughing at them sometimes**. Others disagree that Georgians do not make friends with Azeris on purpose.

“(...) Even at school it is also like this - Azeris are more prone to make friends with other Azeris than with Georgians. However there is no special resistance for not making friends only because one is Georgian. And Georgians do not have special resistance either if they are not very snobbish. I cannot say that Georgians and Azeris do not make friends with each other but when you look at informal groups finally, they are separately.” (N33, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“Separate informal groups are created because Azeris feel that Georgians do not make friends with them. Although I had very humane classmates, I could see how they ignored Azeris. When you ignore someone once, twice, then they will not try any more. I have an Azeri friend and do you know what she told me once? Personally I am the type of person who never laughs at others and once she told me that this was the reason she could talk to me rather than to other girls. There were only 5 girls in our class and she had normal relations with everyone. But she could not talk openly with them because they were laughing at her. They were laughing at everything she said. This is not normal.” (N35, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

Just like in the younger focus-groups, in older Marneuli groups it was noted that **at schools Azeris make friends with Azeris, while Georgians make friends with Georgians**. This was explained by **specific traditions that forbade boys interacting with Azeri girls** often causing conflicts between Azeri and Georgian boys. Others disagree that such intentional separation really exists.

“There were 45 students in the class and as soon as the lesson was finished, Georgians, as well as Azeris used to hang out together in separate groups. Their customs forbade boys to go close to girls and even touch them, while Georgian kids contact with each other, joke etc. If Georgian boy talks to Azeri girl or touches her hair, it may turn into conflict. At least that was the case at Tamarisi school.” (N43, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

Otherwise all participants are quite positive towards friendship with Azeri person as they regard them as **trustworthy, devoted friends**.

“There is no slyness among Azeris. If they are friends with you, they will never betray and always try to do good for you. I can tell a concrete example. I was working as a reporter and it was very common to be accepted as a member of the party. Georgians as well as Azeris named me as a candidate but then because of corruption other one was accepted. I did not say a word but whole Azeri sector went on strike. They are very trustworthy people.” (N42, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tsereteli)

Marrying Azerbaijani person

To understand participants’ attitudes towards marrying Azerbaijani person they were asked about their opinion about their daughter/son’s decision to marry Azeri. Later they were asked if their feeling differs in case of son and daughter.

Most participants among all groups are not happy with the possibility and the most common reason named in religious difference.

In younger group of Tbilisi **religion** is the most common reason as well. Participants also name **cultural differences, Azeri tradition of marring relatives, and common children’s fate mostly because of religious confusion.**

“I cannot interfere in my child’s decisions but I would rather avoid it because of the religious difference. (...) Apart from that we have cultural differences. There are different customs in our blood already. (...) My friend had the neighbor, whose mother was Georgian and father was Azeri. She said she could never forgive her mother that she married Azeri. She was brought up by Georgian mom and some customs were totally unacceptable. It was not acceptable for her to have romantic relations with own cousins.” (N9, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

“For those who believe in God, state marriage is not legitimate, only religious marriage is important. Without it nothing has any power. (...) I would say the same about non-Orthodox Georgian. We consider Orthodoxy as normal; therefore I want my child to live in a right way.” (N3, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“It is like genetically predisposed. (...) For instance my friend, or my brother tells me he is marrying an Azeri girl. My first reaction will be the red light until he explains the situation and personality so that my reaction changed into yellow and then green lights.” (N8, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

However few participants, most of whom do not identify as very religious, say **they do not care as much as personality is more important and you may fall in love with anyone.**

Interestingly, in older groups of Tbilisi the attitude was not worse than in younger groups. Although most participants are not very happy with the situation here as well, some are very strict basically emphasizing **religious difference** while others seem **more loyal, saying that love does not know borders, also they may change turn into Orthodox Christianity and at least they are Caucasians.** It was also noted that **in Azerbaijani culture women are required to be obedient** and in case of marriage Georgian woman

should also follow this. Many participants emphasized that **Azeri families do not approve such marriages either as they mostly marry own relatives.**

“One Azeri guy loved my friend. They met at the resort and fall in love with each other very much. However both families went against it because they had different nationality. (...) Love is such a thing that is does not have any borders. (...) If you marry someone educated and having good profession than it is ok.” (N20, female, older group, Tbilisi)

“We want ours and they want theirs. This tendency can even be noticed within Georgians regions, they prefer to marry someone from the same region. (...) Such marriages happen very seldom. It is not that only Georgians are against. Azeris are not very happy with it as well. (...) I am not very happy if my child decides to marry Azeri but I would not lose him/her because of it. ” (N18, male, older group, Tbilisi)

According to all Marenuli participants mixed marriages are not frequent in the region. Among Marneuli young groups most participants are also against mixed marriage, only for two ones it appeared acceptable. It was also mentioned **that Georgian as well as Azeri families are against such marriage.** Following reasons were named why participants are not happy with this:

- **Religious difference**
- **Different traditions/outdated traditions of Azeri (ex. showing away the bed sheet after the first night of newly married couple)**
- **Georgian and Azeri blood should not mix**
- **Women are disadvantaged among Azeris**
- **Fate of common children/ their identity confusion/not accepted entirely neither mother’s non father’s relatives)**

“For me it is not acceptable. There are many obstacles such as religion, traditions... Even if they change religion and become Christians, it is still unacceptable – Georgian and Azeri blood should not mix. Maybe it is still possible with Christians, such as Russians and Armenians, but not in this case. I can look at beautiful Azeri girl but I cannot imagine her as my wife, even if she looks like an angel.” (N26, male, younger group: Marneuli Municipality: Svan settlement)

“I think love is very important. The basic thing should be whether you want to live next to this particular person or not. But as for me, it is very difficult to make choice because of religion and different points of view various ethnic groups have. Apart from that I have heard how children of mixed families talk about own experiences, when mother is Georgian and father is Azeri. This girl was baptized as Christian and relatives look at her with disgust. She said she never wished anyone to be in her situation because neither mother’s relatives, nor father’s relatives could accept her entirely.” (N24, female, younger group: Marneuli Municipality: Village Tsereteli)

“I am very much against. I will kill my children if they marry Azeri. (...) They are showing the bed-sheet from the first night to all the relatives. That is their tradition.” (N32, female, younger group: Marneuli Municipality: Marneuli city)

Unlike the rest groups among Marneuli older participants everyone without exclusion was against mixed marriages. Here too was mentioned **that Georgian as well as Azeri families are against such marriage.**

Apart from that it was noted that **mixed marriages were bit more common during Soviet times**. For this category general reasons why such marriage is unacceptable include:

- **Religious difference (that also includes Georgian Muslims at some point)**
- **Ethnic difference (perceived as merged with religion)**
- **Different traditions**
- **Women are disadvantaged among Azeris (ex. Woman is not able to wear what she wants; Azeris buy their wives)**
- **Resistance of Georgian as well as Azeri families**

“Mixed marriages were more common during the Soviet period, not now. Somehow it is unacceptable. It is like implanting unfamiliar substance. This may be followed by serious scandals and disagreements in the family, this may be followed by inability to get used to each other. Traditions and family model do not give you the moral right to this, on the other hand there is no wish to live in such environment. (...) The basic factor is religion. Even if you take catholic for instance, his consciousness is shaped by Catholicism. They are Christians but they have different religion.” (N39, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“I prefer being friends. I do not want to become relatives. Neither my religion allows this, nor do I wish to do so. It is in our blood somehow, even talking about mixed marriage is inconvenient. And it is not only Georgians who are against, but Azeris do not want it as well. The only thing that may convince Georgians is economic condition. Azeris are far better off than Georgians. There are few exclusions when Georgian girls married Azeris. ” (N36, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

“Basic reason is religion. On the other hand, person may be Christian, Armenian for instance, but for me it is a huge tragedy that my child married ethnically different person. Anyway religion and ethnicity is one whole thing for me. For instance some Adjarians¹¹ wanted to marry my daughter but I went mad.” (N47, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tsereteli)

“I remember my classmate introduced her traditions to us. She said Azeri boy buys his wife. I think when you pay money in your fiancée then you can exploit her the way you want.” (N46, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tsereteli)

As we can see from the quotes, some participants note that if such marriages happen, **it is more common for Georgian girl to marry Azeri boy, than vice versa**. In older group of Marneuli **economic reason** was also mentioned considering Azeris as far better off than Georgians. Apart from that it was noted that at **school they place girls and boys of different ethnicity together** and “you cannot blame the girl if she falls in love” with Azeri kids who are very beautiful, perfectly speaking Georgian. Opinion, that Georgian girls marry Azeri more often than vice versa, was also mentioned in younger group of Marneuli. Despite that when it comes to the least acceptable option – daughter’s or son’s marriage with Azeri person - among all the groups opinions were divided between participants who say Georgian girl’s marriage with Azeri is worse and the ones who think both is equally unacceptable. Nobody appeared especially sensitive towards the son marrying Azeri.

¹¹ Muslim Georgians

In Tbilisi younger groups it was mentioned that **Georgian man and Azeri woman will at least reproduce children with Georgian surnames (Georgians)**, also that **Men are dominating the sexual intercourse** (Participant N10 <male, younger group, Tbilisi> told this later, in private conversation after the focus group. During the group he just said he could not say this publicly.) Apart from this it was mentioned that generally **men are more independent when taking decisions (in this case regarding marriage) while girls listen to their family more than to themselves.**

No specific preference was distinguished among older Tbilisi participants even by those who were more negative towards it. However as we can see in above mentioned quote, if they regard Azeri man so patriarchal, daughter's marriage with Azeri may still be less attractive option for them.

In Marneuli younger groups **women being disadvantaged among Azeris and father's domination of the generation line (children will be Georgians)** were identified as basic reasons of being more sensitive towards girl's marriage. Older Marneuli participants also note that **father dominates the generation line (children will be Georgians)**, in addition they say that **it is easier to change daughter-in-law's religion than the one of the son-in-law. Women being disadvantaged among Azeris** was not directly mentioned at this point however older Marneuli participants talked about it while discussing the mixed marriage. Therefore we can assume that this particular reason can also be seen as an obstacle.

“Generation depends on father's line. Probably all of us have the women of other nationality as an ancestor, Ukrainian or German, etc., but we still consider ourselves as pure Georgians. In reality it might not be so. We keep this line and it dominated in us.” (N24, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tsereteli)

“It is more unacceptable for the girl. If it is your daughter-in-law, you may baptize and Christianize her. God save me from my daughter marrying Azeri! However it is political will as well; at school they always try to place Georgian and Azeri girls and boys at one desk. They try that we were mixed and you cannot blame a girl if she falls in love with Azeri boy, they are very beautiful kids, perfectly speaking Georgian.” (N36, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

“You cannot distinguish Georgians from Azeris sometimes but it is not pleasant for me when Georgian women are having relationships with Azeri men.” (N41, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

Cultural Capital

The sub-topic of cultural capital intended to understand participants' perceptions of Azerbaijani culture, education and intelligence and the language problem.

Azerbaijani culture

Younger group of Tbilisi appears to be least familiar with Azerbaijani culture. It was also mentioned that it happens because Azerbaijanis do not integrate with Georgian society and do not expose their culture.

“We do not know their culture and maybe it is their fault too. They are small ethnos and they should establish themselves in our society. (...) They are closed and do not integrate with this society and the country they are living in. They should expose their culture, dances, songs, cuisine, knitting. (N9, female)

Nevertheless most participants think that **Azerbaijani culture is more Asian**. Participants also mentioned that **Azerbaijanis are extremely patriarchal**; apart from that they are very **hospitable**. When it comes to cuisine, popularity of **tea** and **lamb** was mentioned.

Most participants generally agree that Georgian and Azeri culture have common Caucasian background but at the same time they acknowledge differences due to:

- **Georgia’s more rapid development**
- **Georgia’s aspiration towards West /influence of Western culture**
- **Georgia has always been culturally special country in Caucasus/different cultures cross each other in Georgia**
- **Soviet Union distinguished the counties culturally**
- **Influence of religion on Azerbaijan**
- **Influence of Asian culture/Iran on Azerbaijan**
- **Azerbaijanis are more closed**
- **Azerbaijan is not as old country as Georgia/there was Albania before**

“You say women have fewer rights in Azerbaijan. Remember our past; it was the same with us – women could not sit next to men during the dinner. But then we went through modernization and development, while Azerbaijanis did not, they remained there. (...)Their religion makes them more closed that our religion does to us.” (N9, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

“Our direction is western while their direction did not change. (...) We want to be Europeans. Georgia is not situated on the continent of Europe but we want to be there anyway. They are neutral because of religion or other issues. Their position is if there is Georgia, we want to be there too. Otherwise Armenia and Azerbaijan is not Europe at all. (...) Once I had Azeri guests and they were amazed because of cultural similarity but they also said themselves that Georgian culture is much more developed. One of them is the millionaire in Azerbaijan, owns the small oil-company and as soon as he arrived here, went directly to Lilo market¹² to buy the jackets for his children. He said you cannot find them in Azerbaijan, even though they are the worst jackets in Lilo.” (N7, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

However one of the participants noted that there is no big difference; Azerbaijan and Georgia are neither Asian, nor European. They are both Caucasian countries with special mentality and while people keep traditions in Azerbaijan, unlucky Georgians are confused regarding identity.

“Compared to Turkish, Azeris are much more hospitable and cool people. I think those countries that were in Soviet Union, are similar when it comes to mentality. (...) We are Caucasians, we have our own mentality. We are not Asians, nor we are Europeans; and we never become them because we are Caucasians. We have our mentality, our blood. In Azerbaijan there are traditional people and in Georgia nobody knows what they want, unlucky ones...” (N4, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

¹² The cheapest and the least prestigious market in the suburbs of Tbilisi

Older group of Tbilisi appeared to be more familiar with Azeri culture. As in younger group, **patriarchy, Turkish/Islamic culture, popularity of tea and lamb and hospitality** was also mentioned here. However some think they learned hospitality from Georgians. Participants said that **Azerbaijani culture is not as advanced as Georgian because it is less ancient; as Muslims, Azeris are more interested in survival/reproducing rather than values; and their culture is less diverse – following only Islamic pattern.** Participants reminded **traditional 3 day long Azeri weddings, Ashug tradition of music and Azerbaijani singer Muslim Magomaev.** It was also mentioned that **books/education is respected in Baku and they have special book museums there.** Participants noted that **Azerbaijanis usually have very neat homes and they love sweets** very much.

“If you look at Baku it is really interesting and beautiful but I prefer Tbilisi. Not because I come from Tbilisi but because of all the ancient buildings and ancient culture. Therefore I think Georgian culture is much more advanced than Azeri one. Azeris are Muslims and they always had this survival instinct. They are more interested in survival, land-working, reproducing. This is why they have many wives. They have one basic principle – survive and reproduce. Values are less important for them. (...) Hospitality is generally characteristic for Caucasus except Armenia. (...) Azeris learned hospitality from Georgians. They see what is happening in Georgia and learn. They know when Georgian visits them, they have to host well.” (N17, male, older group, Tbilisi)

“They have Islamic culture and there is no difference between Turkish and Azeri culture. Only during Soviet times they learned new cultures, opened their eyes and added new elements to their culture. These Azeris are not ethnic Azeris as you may know. Ethnic Azeris were invaded by Turks and Turkish people were settled there. Ethnic Azerbaijanis either disappeared or assimilated. Therefore it is absolutely Turkish culture now while in Georgia we have heritage of any style, will it be Asian or European, church or mosque. (...) You cannot even compare. They have very low and poor culture.” (N13, male, older group, Tbilisi)

In older, as well as younger groups participants expressed the wish to know more about Azerbaijani culture but it is rather moderate compared to their interest towards other, for instance ancient European or Asian cultures. In younger group it was also mentioned that TV programs about Azeri culture will be helpful.

When it comes to Marneuli, younger as well as older groups have almost the same perception of Azeri culture. As in Tbilisi, the lamb, tea and patriarchy were named here too.

In younger Marneuli groups participants note that Azeris have tasty meals and **Azeri dumplings, halva, tea and lamb** is very popular among them. They distinguish between religious and not so religious Azeris who even eat pork. Participants also talked about special **unpleasant smell of Azeris** caused by lamb and boiled butter they use for cooking. **Very patriarchal female-discriminating feast traditions** were named too, such as woman cannot host a man, she has to cover head and hide while men are eating etc. There are some **religious traditions that seem weird and disturbing for Georgian** participants as well, such as loud morning prayers of Mullah, parade for Bayram¹³ and another ritual of getting free from sins. When it comes to folk songs and **dances, participants say that compared to Georgian it is very dull.** Apart from this they think that **Azeris like Georgian dances very much** and also blame them **to steal**

¹³Religious holiday celebrated by Muslims

some Georgian folk dance movements and incorporate it in Azeri folk dances. Only one participant had very vague idea of Azeri culture generally.

“Only those who walk in chadors do not eat pork. My coworker is getting ready for putting the chador on, so she stopped eating the pork and drinking alcohol. She says there are lots of dishes they are forbidden to eat. (...) They have some parade during Bayram, calmer one, playing some weird music; and also they have chain tradition for getting free from sins. They walk all in blood. I swear I was scared when I saw it. (...) If you look at Azeri music you may catch Georgian sounds and even dance movements. Even Sukhishvilis¹⁴ were talking about it.” (N28, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

Perception of older Marneuli participants is not that different. According to them, Azeris have tasty and fat meals. **Lamb, butter and tea** is very popular among them. **Unpleasant smell of Azeris** caused by lamb and butter was mentioned here as well. **Female-discriminating traditions** such as **women hiding from the guests and public generally; women working basically** while men are being idle, **restrictions on women’s clothes** were named too. Participants say that although some Azeris do not eat pork, drink alcohol or grow garlic at home because of religious faith, these **restrictions are getting weaker in younger generation**. Moreover younger generation is changing some traditions that seem weird for Georgians, such as wedding rituals, marrying relatives, etc. However, **respect towards elderly** is very important for them. According to participants, **Azeris like Georgian culture very much, will it be meals or dances, and they internalized some of the Georgian customs**. Additionally they **respect Christianity** very much; some of them even changing faith or secretly wearing cross.

“You have seen Georgian weddings, haven’t you? They are having the same type of weddings as well. And they say they learned it from us. Once they cooked Ghomi¹⁵ for the wedding, I was amazed. When you visit their families, you understand that you are visiting something Georgian. Although there may be the unpleasant smell of lamb or woman may be hidden, the way they meet and host you is Georgian. (...) Recently they started to put fiancé and fiancée together. Before they were absent and people did not even know whom they were drinking for. Now even the youth changed. I’ve been observing their development for 8 years and I notice changes. They used to marry cousins. Now they realized that they are spoiling own genes that way and began to marry others. Youth began to change some of the wedding rituals too.” (N37, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“However sometimes they go to Christian churches as well and secretly wear the Christian cross too. I think they are afraid of Orthodox Christianity. Somebody told me that they believe in witchcraft and Muslim cannot neutralize the spell made by Christian, while Christian can neutralize the spell made by Muslim.” (N36, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

It is interesting that in young groups of Tbilisi as well as Marneuli it was mentioned that that the culture of Azerbaijanis is more outdated than Georgian because of the **influence of religion on Azeris, Georgia’s aspiration towards West /influence of Western culture and forgetting own traditions while Azeris keep theirs; and that Azerbaijanis are more closed**. The grievance that Georgians are forgetting traditions was noticeable in some as in case of Tbilisi young group, while others do not agree.

¹⁴ Famous Georgian folk dance group

¹⁵ Georgian traditional meal

“We strive towards the west and probably it was easier for Georgian to learn this than for Azeri. European way of thinking was more easily accepted by Georgians than by Azeris. Georgians are like “Europe, Europe!” while Azeris keep their traditions compared to Georgians. (...) This is already forgetting own traditions. Now Georgian women only cover their heads when they enter the church.” (N26, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Svan settlement)

“Georgians also follow traditions but I do not agree that I should cover my head. Azeris are more closed but it is not that apparent. They are dressed in European way although I also notice young girls with chadors.” (N28, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Tamarisi)

Perceived intelligence and education of Azerbaijani people

Most participants in all groups are not of a high opinion about Azerbaijanis intelligence/education level. The most common reasons named among all groups includes that this is **general problem of regions versus capital/big cities; Azerbaijanis are not interested/ are less interested in education** (except older Marneuli group) and **Azerbaijanis are less talented/smart compared to Georgians** (except younger Marneuli group).

I will take a more detailed look at each category of participants. In younger Tbilisi groups mostly participants say that it is a problem for regions generally. Some participants say because of corruption there is education problem in Azerbaijan too when compared to Georgia. Generally, responses included Azerbaijanis of Georgia, as well as Azerbaijanis of Azerbaijan. Following opinions were distinguished overall:

- **Azerbaijanis’ inability to speak Georgian language and get access to education (regarding Azeris of Georgia)**
- **Communication problem then of education (regarding Azeris of Georgia)**
- **Problem of education in regions generally compared to the capital.**
- **Problem of education in Azerbaijan (regarding Azeris of Azerbaijan)**
- **Azerbaijanis are less interested in education (generally)**
- **Azerbaijanis are less talented (generally)**

“I think it is not only about ethnic minorities but generally about regions. Level of education is quite low in our regions. Moreover, these minorities cannot speak Georgian. Therefore it is very hard for them to integrate and get proper education. So they mostly do not enter the universities and are not as developed as Georgians in Tbilisi, or even in other regions. (...) I think this problem of regions persists everywhere in Caucasus countries. So in Baku there will be educated people like in Tbilisi but in regions they will have problems. (...) Compared to Georgia they do have educational problems in Azerbaijan because of huge corruption.” (N3, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“In Azerbaijan they have money but not education. If they had education it would be a really cool country. Let’s talk about medical sphere. They can afford very expensive medical equipment but they do not have doctors to can make diagnosis according to these machines. Therefore they are coming here” (N4, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“There is another thing as well. Have you ever heard of Azeri inventor? A scientist? I am not very familiar with literature but I do not remind anything that is translated as well. We can talk based on this. If there is famous Chinese, Indian, Iranian, why there is no Azeri?” (N5, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

Older participants of Tbilisi named almost the same reasons:

- **General problem of regions**
- **Azerbaijanis are less talented than Georgians (therefore less ambitious)**
- **Azerbaijanis are not interested in education (more interested in land-working, money)**
- **Azerbaijanis do not perceive education as compulsory for everyone (they care more for quality than quantity of educated people)**

“I knew some Azeris in the army. Even they said that there is only Baku where you have everything. Other cities are not very special. Baku is quite advanced and I cannot say that they are worse than our intellectuals. On the other hand, Azerbaijanis of Georgia do not get education because they are mostly oriented towards land-working and they are right. We have very few educated Azeri in Georgia. Armenians were always regarded as more advanced in this sense than Azeris. (...)“They prefer to have few but well-educated people. Apart from that we are more talented and therefore we have more ambitions.” (N18, male, older group, Tbilisi)

“I worked in ID registration office earlier. Azeris would come for an ID card only if they definitely needed it suddenly, after they were already married and had a child. We were always surprised. They had not even graduated the school. Their only interest is land-working.” (N14, female, older group, Tbilisi)

However, some participants think that the level of education has seriously increased in Azerbaijan recently and it is linked with rapid economical development.

“Recently Azerbaijan seriously developed economically. This requires scientific knowledge and more professionalism. Probably they want to learn new technologies and when they are in touch with other developed countries they want to be developed too. Because of economical increase, families have more opportunity to give education to their children.” (N21, female, older group, Tbilisi)

“Azerbaijani state is very helpful towards own citizens. Whoever wants to study, they send them in Europe for free. Problem is that very few wants actually because it is rich country and there are other ways to gain money. However Azerbaijan already has an ambition to be a developed country in this sense. (...) Georgia was always ahead when it comes to educational institutions but now there is a tendency that the level of education is higher there. During soviet times it was not like this.” (N18, male, older group, Tbilisi)

On the other hand in Marneuli younger groups participants distinguish Azeri’s level of education by their place of residence, considering Azeris of Azerbaijan, or in certain villages (Georgian villages) more educated. In general they emphasized following factors as the roots of educational problem they say exists:

- **Azerbaijanis are not interested in education (more interested in trading)**
- **Azerbaijanis are less talented than Georgians**
- **Azerbaijanis are less ambitious**

- **Azerbaijanis of city Marneuli are more closed/oriented only on market (compared to Azeris of Georgian villages and Azeris of Azerbaijan)**
- **Getting easy access to Georgian-language programs of universities while they are unable to speak Georgian language**

“Mostly Azeris want their child to learn calculating so that they could work in the market later. They do not care about the rest. So after 6-7-8th grade, when they learn calculating they take them out of schools to work in the market. This is majority but there are some exceptions too, for instance my Azeri classmate failed to get access to the university last year, this year he wants to try again. (...) Azeris who can barely speak Georgian study in the universities where it is quite hard to study. There are books to read (in Georgian) and you should understand it. I know several girls who cannot understand any Georgian and study in the university.” (N35, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“I live in Tamarisi and Azeris live there too. They are very different from Marneuli inhabitant Azeris. We studied together, they have education and everything, they think like I do and we are friends. It depends where the person is raised, in what kind of circle. If he is raised in Azeri village among uneducated people, he will also be uneducated but if he sees lot of people, he will do better. Otherwise they only know home-market, home-market and that is all.” (N31, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

Older participants of Marneuli also think that those who live close to Georgians do not have as much problems, stressing the absence of kindergarten and secondary school in Azeri villages. Generally several reasons were identified here as explanation of Azerbaijani’s educational problems.

- **General problem of education among regions (villages) versus big cities**
- **Azerbaijanis have many children and this makes harder to give them education**
- **Educational problem exists for those who live separately and do not interact with Georgians**
- **Teachers do not pay enough attention to Azeri kids**
- **Absence of kindergarten/secondary school in Azeri villages**
- **Azerbaijanis are naturally less smart/talented**

“Their level of education is much lesser than of Georgians. But also we have to differentiate. On one hand there is a city and on the other hand there are regions. I met a person near the village. He was older than 60 probably and was selling the eggs; 5 ones for 1 lari. I took 15 eggs and gave him 3 laris. He could not understand. He did not know anything but Azerbaijani language. Finally I was so angry that I divided eggs in three separate groups of 5 ones and on each group I put one lari. And only then he said it was right, otherwise he could not understand. That is why I am saying that city is different. It is not only about Azeris, but about Georgians or others as well. In the cities there is different rhythm of life, more information.” (N39, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“I used to work in Russian school for a while. For instance in Russian classes there are Georgian, Azeri and Armenian kids. Armenian and Georgian kids are more advanced than Azeris. They are the less advanced kids when it comes to development, erudition, and horizon. At least it was true for my school.” (N42, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tsereteli)

“Child’s development is based on kindergarten. While they are separate; while they do not have kindergarten and do not have contact with Georgians, Azeris cannot get the basics. They do not have conditions. If they had kindergarten, Georgian teacher would be involved too and prepare them for school. Just it is that when one Georgian teacher goes to border villages, he is not used to Azeris and this is bit hard but I do not think there will be problem of teaching and being in touch with students.” (N43, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

Language problem

In all groups participants agree that there is a problem connected to learning Georgian language by local Azerbaijanis. Participants from the younger group of Tbilisi think that there are several solutions for solving this issue:

- **State should take care of the problem**
- **More NGOs should interfere**
- **Educational interference and country-wide exchange programs should be provided for Marneuli children**
- **Creating practical need of studying Georgian language for Azeri people**
- **Azeri people are obliged to learn Georgian/ should have moral understanding of the necessity**

“More NGOs should interfere. Interference of politicians can make everything more political, they may feel someone is forcing them to study Georgian. There should be some exchange programs for Marneuli children to Tbilisi and throughout the country. (...) I welcome Azeris if they respect our country and talk to us in our language. State and NGOs should help them in this, Probably teacher of Georgian could prepare them for Georgian language during their final kindergarten year.” (N9, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

“How can you force them to learn Georgian? You cannot. You have to make them interested in something else so that they needed Georgian language for this. (...) As soon as they are educated enough to have a job and only problem will be the language, they will have no other way but to learn. (N7, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“I think it is not a state’s problem that they do not want to learn Georgian. (...) I think it is people’s fault. (...) They should have the moral understanding that one should learn the language of the country they are living in.” (N11, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

In older group of Tbilisi opinions were divided whether the language problem is Georgians’ fault itself because they do not ask Azerbaijanis to speak in Georgian and the state does not interfere, or it is Azeris’ fault because they are obliged to learn Georgian when they live on Georgia’s territory. There were several views how the problem should be solved:

- **Local Azeris are obliged to learn Georgian**
- **Nobody should be granted citizenship without any knowledge of Georgian language.**

- **Educational interference (Georgian language should be taught at schools; Georgian courses for free)**

“They cannot speak Georgian, they speak Russian. I was in touch with them and they say it is not their fault, it is Georgians’ fault. Georgians do not ask them to speak Georgian. Russian became their communication language. They say – “I am Azeri, I do not like Russian and why should I speak Russian?” (N18, male, older group, Tbilisi)

“So if I lived in Azerbaijan, I do not have to learn Azeri? It would be offensive towards the country I live in, wouldn’t it? So they could not learn even elementary Georgian during 20 years? I was in Dedoplistskaro last year, I went to the bazaar, wanted to buy something and the sellers were Azeri women. We were totally unable to communicate. I do not speak Azerbaijani and tell me, why should I speak one in my country? (...) Not everyone should be given citizenship. Apart from “citizen”, there is second status in constitution – a person without citizenship. They have the right to reside in Georgia but without citizenship. Give this status to these people.” (N13, male, older group, Tbilisi)

Marneuli participants say that although there are Azeris who speak perfect Georgian, majority still relies on Russian, or they only speak Azeri. Generally similar reasons of the problem were named in groups of both age categories. According to younger participants this happens because of following reasons: on one hand **nobody demands from them to learn Georgian** and Azeris **do not feel the need to learn Georgian because they are mostly self-employed**, especially when it comes to Azeri inhabited villages. On the other hand, they feel that **they are majority in the municipality** and they do not have to learn Georgian, they **do not respect Georgian language**. Almost the same reasons were named in older group of Marneuli: **absence of specific demand from government about the necessity of studying Georgian, less interest towards paid jobs, general lack of interest and motivation, feeling too superior to learn Georgian and attending Azeri or Russian schools.**

“We have a language problem here and it will last for long. Because according to economical principles when there is no demand, there is no supply, there is no reaction. Nobody had asked them before to learn Georgian at least to be employed. On the other hand they do not need your job and office here. They are self-employed, they have farms, they sell own products. They do not need the language. Especially in remote Azeri-inhabited villages where they have own tea houses. Their name, surname and the country of residence in written with Latin letters in their passport and they can read it if they can read or write at all.” (N24, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: village Tsereteli)

“They demand that Georgians should learn Azeri and they do not consider it appropriate to learn Georgian. They do not think it is their duty. You should learn the language of the country you are the citizen of. There is not a communication problem, we may talk in Russian, just their ambitions and demands that Georgians learned Azeri language are apparent.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli)

All Marneuli groups mentioned that the **language problem is much more apparent among older people while younger Azerbaijanis started to become more interested. Younger participants say that Georgian language is emphasized at Azeri schools now** and the number of Azeris **interested in learning Georgian language has also increased.** In addition older participants note that **young people**

started attending Georgian schools. Older participants explain it by Azeris' **increased interest towards paid jobs and political involvement** that requires knowledge of Georgian. Term **“forced voluntarism”** was used to offer the solution of the problem that is creating the need so that one cannot be successful without Georgian language. On the other hand in younger groups it was mentioned that as Azeri parents started to bring their kids to Georgian schools new kind of problem emerged - **because of language difference school education seems less effective for both – Azeri, as well as Georgian kids.**

“There are many Azeris who want their kids to learn Georgian and they bring them into Georgian schools. But when 6 year-old kid goes to 1st grade there without any knowledge of Georgian, s/he cannot think in Georgian. Kid cannot speak Georgian and the teacher cannot speak Azeri on the other hand. Therefore Azeri kids are mostly falling behind. Some of them may be talented but they all fall behind compared to Georgian children. Then teacher focuses on Azeri kids and Georgian ones are left without attention. In our school the problem is not that severe, Azeri kids arrived recently. Two children of mine attend the classes there and one has 2, another has 5 Azeri classmates. But in regional school there are mostly Azeri children and Georgian kids cannot realize themselves. When you have unsuccessful children in the class, you do not teach more complicated things and Georgians are disadvantaged this way.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“I think the fact that now Azeris are more interested in Georgian language is caused by more developed life. Knowledge of Georgian language became necessary for getting job, especially in state institutions. Although Azeris are majority, without Georgian language they cannot work, they cannot prepare documents etc.” (N44, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: village Tamarisi)

“They analyzed the situation, started to want a place in municipality’s executive body and this forced them to learn Georgian. Therefore they began to bring own children to Georgian schools. There is a term for it called “forced voluntarism.” You should lead the kind of policy that they understood they have to learn Georgian. “Coercion” means that you close everything that is Azeri and leave no alternative rather than Georgian. On the other hand “forced voluntarism” means that they have both but see that they cannot be successful without attending Georgian kindergarten and school.” (N37, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

Georgians learning Azerbaijani language in Azerbaijani-inhabited areas of Georgia

Participants in all groups were asked about their opinion regarding Georgians learning Azerbaijani language in Azerbaijani-inhabited areas (again in case of Marneuli participants, the question focused on Marneuli region).

Opinions differed among groups. Part of younger participants from Tbilisi **reacted negatively emphasizing that Azerbaijanis live in Georgia, while others think there should be no obligation but if someone wants to learn they can.**

“It is unimaginable because we live in our country. How many languages we have to learn? Here are Armenians too, now Indians are also coming and Georgian is always local. Therefore I think we have to help them to learn Georgian.” (N6, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

“Georgian child can learn Azeri if one wants, like other languages English, French etc. (...) When you live there, probably you naturally learn something because of contact but it does not mean you are obliged to learn as this is Georgian territory. If I lived there I would learn some things to communicate or some things in neutral language we would both understand” (N2, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

In older groups of Tbilisi participants do not agree that Georgians should learn Azerbaijani noting that **then the other minorities would also require the same treatment; It is Georgian territory; and Azeris are not doing the same for Georgians of Azerbaijan.**

“You should learn the language of the country you are living in. And you should not be surprised when no one will talk to you in your native language. (...) In Saingilo Georgians speak Azerbaijani language better than Georgian.” (N18, male, older group, Tbilisi)

Marneuli participants say that in fact **lot of Georgians can speak Azeri mostly because they learn it from the interaction.** In both age categories there were participants who think there is nothing bad in learning Azeri language as well as those who are very against learning it. Among participants there were persons who can speak Azeri language themselves and **they learned it either simply by living next, or because of better interactions.**

“Neighborhood is very important for learning the language and as Azeri and Georgian population is mixed in Marneuli, they learn Azeri. It is more frequent for Georgians to speak Azeri in Georgia than vice versa. This is what irritates me. If I lived with them in the neighborhood for long, I would at least learn the language accidentally. Probably we are more talented (...) I cannot speak Azeri and I am not going to learn. If I move to Azerbaijan I will learn but not in Georgia.” (N26, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Svan settlement)

“I used to teach little Azeri kids. Their young mothers, who are even prohibited to go to balconies and only come to school because it is a safe place, ask about own children and you want to say something good about them and you cannot. They speak neither Georgian, nor Russian. Then I said to myself, it does not matter that I am Georgian, living in Georgia, teaching in Georgian school. I want the mother to be happy because she has such a successful kid, and if she is happy she will come more frequently and escape from her routine, having communication with the teacher. Then she will return home and say that she has a great kid. This is why I learned Azeri language.” (N24, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: village Tsereteli)

“If a person has interest and wish to learn Azeri, why shouldn't they learn? (...)I asked my coworkers to teach me Azeri so that I could interact with them. Some of my young coworkers cannot speak good Russian. Older ones of age 50-60 can because they held important posts during Communist time. When I asked my coworkers to teach me Azeri, they offered that instead of using Russian I could speak in Georgian with them and they would translate it in Azeri for me, so that we could both learn each other's languages.” (N44, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: village Tamarisi)

Languages of public services in Azerbaijani-inhabited areas of Georgia

Various opinions were expressed regarding the language of public services in Azerbaijani-inhabited areas of Georgia.

In younger group of Tbilisi **some participants think that it will be good if public services were provided in Azerbaijani as it will be helpful for local Azerbaijanis to feel themselves as citizens of Georgia.** Others think **Azeri language can be used only if the service is provided by private company** and it is in its interest. Some say that the **language of public services should be only Georgian** in any case, while others say **using Russian will be good as it is neutral language.**

Older participants from Tbilisi think that Georgian should be the only language of public services in Azeri inhabited areas. The arguments for this are the same as in case of Georgians learning Azeri: **other minorities would also require the same treatment; it is Georgian territory; and Azeris are not doing the same for Georgians of Azerbaijan).**

“We are the only country with so multiethnic society, up to 20% I think. Then you have to allow everyone to speak their languages in hospitals, etc. This is absurd. Tell me just one Georgian school, or Georgian-speaking hospital in Azerbaijan. You will not find one. In Georgia foreigner talks in Russian and you immediately answer in Russian too. Nowadays it changed into English. This is very bad.” (M17, male, older group, Tbilisi)

Marneuli participants say that mostly Russian is used for interaction when it comes to police, public hospital etc. According to younger participants language of **public services should be only Georgian** while others think that **Georgian as well as Azeri languages should be taken into consideration.** Opinions were divided among older participants of Marneuli. Three opinions were distinguished: **only Georgian should be used for public services; Georgian and Azeri together** and **Georgian and Russian together** as older generation is more used to Russian. On the other hand some younger participants perceive it as a **problem for Georgians that many service providers do not employ people without knowledge of Azeri of Russian.**

„It is not easy to get a job in public service sphere without knowledge of Russian or Azeri languages in Marneuli. That is why Azeris feel comfortable with this and they do not need to learn Georgian. If it was not possible for them to understand, they would be forced to learn. Now wherever they go, everybody talks with them either in Russian or in Azeri.” (N33, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“There are many banks where you cannot get any job without knowledge of Russian or at least Azeri, because although it is Georgia, Azeris live here. It should not be like that. This is Georgia, they should learn Georgian.” (N33, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

Political capital

Generally all groups agree that **local Azerbaijanis should be involved in Georgian politics** at local, as well as national level **but they should not hold decisive post or have decisive number of representatives.**

In younger groups from Tbilisi opinions were divided between some participants whether Azeris are well-represented in parliament or not. **Some think that 1-2 representatives in parliament is enough, while others say they are not well-represented and people who represent them are usually passive unless any Azeri is abused.** It was also mentioned that **Azerbaijanis should be equally represented in municipality as “they are majority there and they have to voice their problems to the state.”**

“Generations of Azerbaijanis live here already. For them Georgia is a home country. (...) These Azerbaijanis can have more love towards Georgia than some Georgians. So to say that Azeris should not hold any posts will not be right. Nevertheless, decisive posts such as ministers, prime-minister and president should be held by Georgians. (...) If we want integration it should be political as well as cultural.” (N3, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

Older participants from Tbilisi also admit that at some point there is a necessary to include Azerbaijanis in politics with the limits in regards of number of representatives and power of positions. Two basic reasons were identified why Azeris should be included in politics: on one hand **they live in Georgia** and on the other hand at the municipality level ethnic Azeri would have more common with the majority of Marneuli population (ethnic Azeris) than Georgian and **would know how to interact with them.** Therefore he would be able to serve as **intermediary between Georgians and Azeris** to ensure Georgians’ interests even when it comes to limiting Azeris’ religious activities, for instance.

“If Christian goes to Azeri directly and asks not to pray at this particular place for instance, he will be very angry at you, that is why it is necessary to have an intermediary but he should not have more ambitions than this (position).” (N17, male, older group, Tbilisi)

However although older participants agree that Azeris who are Georgia’s citizens should be involved in Georgian politics, it seems **many of them are pretty scared that more involvement in local government would result in autonomy request.** While some participants feel more positive regarding Azeris’ inclusion, **others are less enthusiastic** as they consider them generally **more rigid people, less intelligent, ambitious, nationalistic and different from Georgians.** However it is also visible that in this sense the problem are not Azeris particularly, but rather not-Georgian people because as participants say Georgia should be led by Georgians.

“I will tell you an example. In Rustavi prisons the guards are mostly Azeris. I asked there why Azeris and not Georgians and they told me because Azeri will directly shot the runaway, because they have an objective they follow, excuse me for this expression but like a horse can only look forwards and cannot examine right and left views. They only know what they have to do and that’s all, they do not look at any side or backwards.” (N17, male, older group, Tbilisi)

Older participants’ opinions differ whether Azeris are well-represented in politics or not. Some say that Azeris are absolutely well represented and it is enough, while others do not agree at least at central level

and find it hard to remind any Azeri politician in Georgia. An explanation provided for not being well-represented is that probably Azeris are **less interested in politics**.

Marneuli participants of both age categories underlined that when we are talking about Azeri's inclusion in politics, we are talking about Azeri men's inclusion in politics because of tremendous **gender inequality that distances Azeri women from this sphere**.

In younger group it was mentioned that inclusion is necessary because **Azerbaijanis need specific care and someone to be more interested in their problems**, so Georgian may not be as attentive towards them as Azeri would be. However participants say that at local level **Georgians make majority and it should be like that because otherwise Azerbaijanis may request autonomy**. They also say that on the other hand Azeris are not few either.

“There are three Azeris in parliament, two from Georgian Dream and one from National Movement. (...) Azeris are involved in decision making at the local level and they should be involved because they are citizens of Georgia who consist majority here. But they should not exceed the number of Georgians so that they were unable to decide requesting autonomy. Because of that it is better to have Georgians mostly but that does not mean that Azeris should not be represented.” (N26, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Svan settlement)

When it comes to older group, here some participants think that **Azerbaijanis should hold the equal number at local government as Georgians**, while another opinion is that **they should be restricted from being equally or more represented than Georgian to be able to have a control**. This is true for higher posts as well. Apart from this, some participants say that **Azeris are more interested in market rather than politics**. Others think that **Azeris are involved in politics if someone calls them, they do not take initiative themselves**. Another opinion is that **Azeris are very interested in politics not to be disadvantaged by Georgians; also they do their best to be better informed compared to the latter**. It was also mentioned that certain **hierarchical mechanism exists through which Agsakals, informal leaders of Azeri villages influence Azeri representatives**.

“They are more interested in market than in politics. There is a joke about Azeri who was asked if he wished to fly to space and he answered, if only there is a market. Nevertheless they are active in politics. They do not want Marneuli to be all Georgian, they are active so that Georgians could not suppress them.” (N45, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: village Saimerlo)

“They are very active when it comes to politics, also they are very informed. The day prior Russia bombed us, in the market they already know it would happen. (...) My acquaintance Azeri once said that they pay lot of money to get information firsthand rather than Georgians.” (N37, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“Azeris have their stages. They have youth union and ‘agsakals’ in the village. This is very serious. They sit together and agree on something. After analyzing the situation they provide their requests for the presented candidate that he has to do certain things at any point. They have built hierarchical structure that works perfectly.” (N39, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

If Azerbaijanis were more actively included in politics

To clarify attitudes regarding Azerbaijani's involvement in Georgian politics participants were asked additional question whether in case of active inclusion Azerbaijanis would be oriented towards Georgia's/Georgian's interests or they would be more focused on themselves.

Responses were more diverse in Tbilisi than in Marneuli.

In younger groups of Tbilisi some say there really is such **threat as Azerbaijanis have different ethnicity, different religion, and they might limit Georgian Orthodox church**, while the rest of participants do not see any danger because **Azeris are not problematic ethnic group; they are less interested in politics; and this is rather personal than ethnical issue, as some Georgians can only be oriented on own profit while people think they have national values.**

“There is still more chance that Azeri will serve the interests of Azerbaijan than Georgian. (...) Also they may not share the respect towards the Orthodox Christian church and limit it, Muslims will do something about it.” (N5, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“I do not think their interests differ very much from Georgia's interests. They are not problematic ethnic group and I do not think they will cause any conflict. The State will do everything so that this small ethnic group was not against it.” (N9, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

In older groups of Tbilisi some participants think that in case being actively included in Georgian politics, Azeris will be more **oriented on their own, rather than Georgia's interest as it is natural for every nation, also because of being nationalistic**. Others think that they **will be more less focused on own interests in case they are limited and if they enjoy good social and economic conditions in Georgia**. Some say that compared to Armenians Azeris are not bothering Georgians as much and they are more modest when it comes to ambitions.

“They will be oriented towards own interests of course. It is characteristic for every nation. In any country they will try to act according to own interests. Let's just take Marneuli example. There are many shops in Marneuli owned either by ethnic Azeris or ethnic Georgians. No Azeri will enter the Georgian's shop while Georgian enters Azeris shop as well as Georgian's shop.” (N13, male, older group, Tbilisi)

“Correct policy, supremacy of law, being happy with living in this country, having a job, good conditions will make them supportive towards Georgians.” (N19, male, older group, Tbilisi)

In Marneuli people are more sensitive towards the possibility of autonomy request, and in general they are less optimistic compared to some participants from Tbilisi groups.

In younger group of Marneuli they do not think Azeris will be oriented towards Georgians' or Georgia's interests because on one hand **Azerbaijanis do not have real responsibility towards Georgia**; on the other hand they are not very devoted as **they do not even want to learn the Georgian language**. Apart from this **they are prone to request autonomy and the rights of Christian Georgians are violated in Azerbaijan**.

“They will be oriented more towards interests of Azeri people. I do not think they will be focused on the state interests. They are minority in Georgia and they should be represented in the government so that they were not disadvantaged here somehow. I do not think they are really responsible for Georgia. Azeri in self-government will help to other Azeri to make a business, he will help the village, he will do everything for them but not for Georgians. When it comes to Georgia, they do not even want to know Georgian language, for them it is insulting when you ask them to learn the language.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“Yes, there is a threat and it will always be if the number of Georgians is not raised here. There is a threat that they will take away our territories and request autonomy. This is what makes me sad, now they are arguing about David Gareja territories. On the other hand in Georgia nobody restricts their religious rights while in Zakatala they were given during Soviet times, Christian churches are locked and they do not let local Georgians to pray there.” (N26, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Svan settlement)

Older participants of Marneuli were most sensitive towards autonomy issue. They discussed it for long. Although it was also mentioned that if Azerbaijanis feel good in Georgia they will be concerned about it, most participants do not think Azeris will be oriented towards Georgia’s or Georgians interests. It was said that although there are some who love Georgia, **separatist feelings are apparent among most Azeris**, who need to be in control while friendly ones – encouraged. Apart from that they have **survival instinct** as they are small ethnic group. Even though some participants are scared that Marneuli may follow the way of Abkhazia and South Ossetia it was also mentioned that there is no real threat - because of economic and political interests Azerbaijan will not spoil relations with Georgia. Necessity of certain restrictions and kind of assimilation politics was also mentioned. Generally I had an impression that participants feel they are being somewhat disadvantaged as they perceive Georgian government as well as banks support Azeris more than they support Georgians in Marneuli.

“I have heard many times that Azeris who were grown up here, visited Baku and said that Georgia is paradise, their home-country and even water is tastier here. Many of them love Georgia but on the other hand I will never forget how they were walking with flags, shouting “Borchali, Borchali!” There was the tendency towards separatism and there still is such. They have separatist newspaper here. Also here is Baku financed youth organization, that was funded with 6000 Euros. We need those people who love Georgia and not the ones who shout “Borchali!” They tried to have own radio but they were not allowed as they wanted it for separatist reasons. Those who want it for integration should be encouraged. There are two poles – one should be encouraged, other one- controlled.” (N42, female, older group, Marneuli Municipality: Village Tsereteli)

Once I was taking Taxi from Marneuli to home and Azeri driver told me that this is their territory and Borchali is not Georgia. In another occasion my daughter worked in the shop and she could not understand when Azeri client talked with him in Azeri. So this men turned to the shop owner and asked why do people without the knowledge of Azeri work here.” (N46, female, older group, Marneuli Municipality: Village Tsereteli)

“They will not be concerned with Georgia’s interests unless it derives from their interests. (...) Separatism became very apparent during the last years, plus religion. Islamic restlessness of the world also finds its basis here in Marneuli. They have built so many mosques and the youth became very

religious. Separatism is mostly apparent in youth. It is not only today but they have such attitude generally. For instance, once when Saakashvili and Aliev were visiting us, head of education department of Marneuli told to some Georgian teachers “your and our presidents are coming”. I was sitting there as well. Then he changed the words immediately into “our president will meet Aliev”, but what slipped suddenly in speaking “your and our presidents” can tell a lot. (...) We should lead the same policy as Turks did with Laz and Chan people that they are not Georgians any more, the same Azerbaijan does to Hereti¹⁶ people. Georgian schools became Georgian-Azeri schools.” (N37, male, older group, Marneuli Municipality: Village Marneuli city)

“If they feel good in Georgia they are offered, then they will be concerned with Georgia. (...) My Azeri friend perceived the request of autonomy exactly as Georgians. There are some exceptions among them who disagree with what happened. (...) Recently the state itself was on their side. Once in registration office an Azeri insulted me somehow and policemen threatened him by arresting. I was surprised because nobody could insult Azeris earlier. You had to swallow insult because they lived in your country. Now it is not like that. Probably newly arrived people from Tbilisi and other regions were braver than locals because they did not care for Azeris while locals were grown up with them and were used to make concessions.” (N36, female, older group, Marneuli Municipality: Village Tamarisi)

Influencing local Azerbaijani’s voting

To understand participant’s perspective towards Azeri voters they were asked whether Azeris of Georgia are somehow influenced from Azerbaijani government for whom to vote. In all groups it was mentioned that local Azerbaijanis are easy to influence but impact of Georgian government was more often emphasized than impact of Azerbaijan.

According to Tbilisi younger participants Azeri **group can be easily manipulated as they are closed, not well-educated and do not speak language, though not as much by Azerbaijani government but by Georgian government that may act in agreement with Azeri government.** It was also mentioned that National Movement’s winning could have been caused by some signals from Azerbaijan. However **most participants cannot remind direct influence of Azerbaijani side but some think there is a theoretical chance** of such because people are more interested in opinions of their kind of people.

“I think they are so closed and not well-educated that they are very easy to manipulate. They cannot understand things such as history of the country, etc. They cannot understand various orientations of various political parties; therefore they cannot understand what is better for Georgia’s political interests.” (N11, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

“Yes, there is an influence and it is publicly quite well-known. When there is a talk about electoral fraud, it always refers to the regions mostly where ethnic Azeris having Georgian citizenship live. There is activity but if there are five candidates they always choose the same one. It never happened that someone has any different opinion. (...) The influence comes from Georgian government which is in agreement

¹⁶ was a kingdom in the medieval Caucasus on the Georgian-Albanian frontier. Nowadays it roughly corresponds to the southeastern corner of Georgia's Kakheti region and a portion of Azerbaijan's northwestern districts.

with Azerbaijan because they have good relations and always have some kind of agreements. (...) The government is using the people who are silent and do not speak Georgian.” (N8, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“I think there were actually some signals from Azerbaijan about what would be better and it can be reflected on the election results. While the National Movement lost in all other regions, they won there.” (N5, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

Older participants from Tbilisi also agree that during elections Azeri group is always manipulated because **they are not interested in politics, are less educated and there are many of them (many votes)**, though not by Azerbaijani government but by **Georgian government** using threat and pressure; also they are influenced by **local Azeri religious or informal leaders**. Some participants say that it may happen that Azeri government supports concrete candidate, so influence is hypothetically possible, though they are not sure in it, while others refuse that such is likely because they cannot decide who will vote for whom inside Georgia.

“80% of village inhabitant Azeris vote according to what mufti tells them. Mufti is like the priest for us. And 20% decide for themselves” (N13, male, older group, Tbilisi)

“I know some families where 3 members were arrested (means by government I.O.) and the rest 3 voted (for government I.O.) only to save themselves. (...) Azeri government thinks how to have good political and profitable relations in Georgia. They cannot decide who will vote for whom inside. It depends on Georgians who wins.” (N18, male, older group, Tbilisi)

“Azeris do not even have ID cards and they are given to them prior to elections so that they voted for government.” (N14, female, older group, Tbilisi)

Marneuli younger participants also say that Azeris are easily influenced while voting and they usually ask another Azeri they trust rather than decide themselves for whom to vote. Opinions were divided whether it is **Azeri government** who influences the local Azeri voters, **“agsakals”¹⁷** or **religious leaders**.

“They are programmed people. I have been on elections and I have seen, they come and ask someone they trust who they have to vote for. They believe that Azeri will not lie to them and tell the truth. They are not interested in politics. Harvest is more important for them.” (N31, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: village Tamarisi)

“They do not trust Azeri government. Rather they have “agsakals” who tell them what to do. They are local authoritative figures - old wise men that are respected by people. Azeris do not have own opinion usually, they do whatever these “agsakals” say. For instance, during the election campaign Gachechiladze had feast with Azeri voters to attract their votes. And during the feast these Azeris started to shout “Misha! Misha!” just because they could not understand that Gachechiladze was from another party. When Ivanishvili participated in the elections, they even did not know his name. They knew there was a guy who has good relations with Russia and some of them decided that trading with Russia would be possible again.” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

¹⁷ Local informal leaders, “wise men” of the village

“Of course Azeri government can influence the local Azeri voters. I was involved in Georgian Dream campaign during the elections and I remember Azeris would say that the president of Azerbaijan expressed his position about supporting Bidzina Ivanishvili although probably he was not clear enough in his statement as Georgian Dream did not win here.” (N26, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Svan settlement)

In Marneuli older group opinions were divided whether voting of local Azeris are **influenced by Azerbaijani government, Georgian government or own informal leaders (agsakals)**. It was also mentioned that Azeris usually tend to vote for those who are in government.

„There is serious influence from there (Azerbaijan). If they are told to vote for Ivanishvili they will do it because they import lot of money from Azerbaijan.” (N37, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“I remember being at electoral district and there was one Azeri bringing people by mini-van. It was his job. These people did not have any idea what was going, they knew that they should circle “five” but were ignorant of who was number 5.” (N47, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: village Tsereteli)

“Marneuli has always been a region that voted for government. At first they adored Shevardnadze, and then they adored Misha. They were scared of Gamsakhurdia because of his “Georgia only for Georgians” views. However ‘Georgian Dream’ worked quite well here. Closing the opportunity of trading with Russia was a real misfortune for people. ” (N42, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: village Tsereteli)

When talking about general political relation and orientations of Georgia and Azerbaijan, in all groups it was mentioned that relations are good as it is based on political and economic interests. Generally, according to Tbilisi young participants, Georgia is much more oriented towards European values than Azerbaijan. In older group some participants supported the idea of more cohesive Caucasus like Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), but it does not exclude the feeling of threat participants generally experience towards other nations, including Azerbaijanis, noting that everyone tries to misappropriate Georgian territories. A problem over David Gareja monastery and disadvantaging Georgians’ on Azerbaijani territory was also mentioned in almost all groups.

“We are the only road to Europe for Azerbaijan. They do not have good relations with Russia either. Even if we hated each other, we are forced to love one another.” (N37, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“We want to be Europeans. Georgia is not situated on the continent of Europe but we want to be there anyway. They are neutral because of religion or other issues. Their position is if there is Georgia, we want to be there too. Otherwise Armenia and Azerbaijan is not Europe at all.” (N7, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“Georgian state prioritizes Azeris here. I am not sure that the same is happening with Georgians of Azerbaijan.” (N33, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“The relations are somewhat friendly but where is friendship when they are arguing about several meters of David Gareja? This is more about business-interests than about friendship. They have business-interests in Georgia.” (N26, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Svan settlement)

“Azerbaijan and Georgian need one another. We talked about Sokar and financial interests. We are getting natural gas from them and we have our interests. They have their own interests as we link them to Turkey, their kind of people.” (N17, male, older group, Tbilisi)

“Of course good neighborhood is more profitable for them but sometimes they still try to misappropriate things. Like David Gareja monastery case that happened recently. They should not dare that much.” (N21, female, older group, Tbilisi)

Symbolic capital

The topic of symbolic capital deals with understanding perceived prestige of Azerbaijanis in Georgian society. In all groups, regardless the category, most participants think that when compared to European, a relation with Azerbaijanis is considered less prestigious. Tbilisi young participants say that this happens because Azerbaijanis are associated with less development. According to Marneuli younger participants it is caused by Azerbaijani's less culture and education compared to Europeans. Generally in Marneuli it was mentioned that it is not for Georgians that Azerbaijanis are considered prestigious, rather than vice versa: for Azerbaijanis it is prestigious to have relations with Georgians. However, overall, some find it hard to talk about prestige, saying that for them it does not matter. Some say they prefer having relations with Azerbaijanis anyway as they will understand Georgians better while others prefer being related with Europeans.

“It is not prestigious. Because we perceive Azeris as people of lower development and for instance German and generally Europeans as more developed. Marrying the hobo German is more prestigious than marrying the millionaire Azeri.” (N11, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

“Imagine German as an i-phone, made in China and Azeri as a Nokia torch mobile, made in Finland. It is much prestigious to have an i-phone though Nokia may work better.” (N10, younger group, Tbilisi)

“European is considered more prestigious because they are more developed civilized, (...) more cultural, more educated. (...) I would rather prefer Caucasian, they will understand me better.” (N17, male, older group, Tbilisi)

“No, you can be with Azeri but it will not make you a cool guy. Maybe it is vice versa, it is cooler for Azeri person to have relations with Georgian. I would rather prefer to get in touch with German, Spanish, British... It is more prestigious. I'd rather have something in common with German girl rather than with Azeri one.” (N26, male, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Svan settlement)

“Traditions, education, culture are much more advanced in Europe than in Azerbaijan. Of course priority is given to Europe.” (N35, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“On the opposite, it is for Azeris prestigious to have relations with Georgians, being friends.” (N36, female, older group, Marneuli municipality: Village Tamarisi)

Armenians

The final question gives opportunity to see how participants perceive Armenians, another significant ethnic minority in Georgia, as well as Georgia’s neighbor country, and whether there is any difference between Georgia’s perspectives towards Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

According to the data the difference really exists: participants are much more negative towards Armenians, so that compared to them attitudes towards Azeris seems extremely positive. Their opinions are based on perceived social and political relations. Interestingly in most cases the same is true also for Marneuli although it is Azerbaijanis who are ethnic majority in this region, not Armenians and additionally we have seen that at some point Azerbaijanis are seen as threatening here more than in Tbilisi.

In case of Tbilisi younger group it appeared that generally they are much more familiar with Armenians than with Azeris.

Following characteristics are associated with Armenians:

- **Very cohesive nation**
- **Nationalistic (do not accept other people, hate Azeris)**
- **Able to live without own home-country**
- **More integrated in Georgia/ more sociable**
- **Misappropriators**
- **Gain-oriented**
- **Traitors**
- **Sly**
- **Smart**
- **Miser**

“I would not want Armenian even as a citizen of my country. (...) They are misappropriators. They say even “The man in the Panther’s skin” (the most famous Georgian poem) is Armenian; they say Tbilisi is built by Armenians and everything... Haven’t you heard that “ You Armenian” is an insult phrase? (...) We remember much more bad things from Armenians than from Azeris. Azeri will come to Georgia and will not bother you, Armenians bother us, when you smile to them they ask for more.” (N10, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

“Armenians are very sociable and they are well able to begin interactions. (...) They are extremely smart. (...) They can think of something that can never comes to Azerbaijani’s mind. Therefore Armenians are more prone to extortion as they are smarter and stronger nation than Azerbaijanis.” (N9, female, younger group, Tbilisi)

“They do not respect Georgia at all. They act as if they do but then they start complaining that their Leninakan is better than Georgia. Go away there if you want to! They are very traitor nation if we look at Georgian history. As soon as we gained independence in the beginning of 20-th century, they attacked us, in Abkhazia war they were also against us; they killed 3000 Georgians there immediately. If you look at the map you will see that Armenia was more in South. Bit by bit they were moving upper on Georgia’s territories, Armenia turning larger and Georgia smaller.(...) They could not retain even their genes. Real Armenians live only by the border of Armenia and Georgia. (...) There is a joke that God created Armenian so that Georgian was always careful.” (N7, male, younger group, Tbilisi)

Almost the same characteristics are associated with Armenians for older participants of Tbilisi. Here too very few participants were not aggressive towards Armenians.

- **Very cohesive nation**
- **Nationalistic (do not accept other people)**
- **Misappropriators**
- **Traitors/not loyal**
- **Sly**
- **Smart (in political sense)**
- **Miser**
- **Having more ambitions (claims) towards Georgia than Azeris**
- **More related nation to Georgians (in terms of kinship, similarity)**
- **Scattered around the world**
- **Gain-oriented**
- **Not very hospitable compared to other Caucasian countries**

“Azeris are better than Armenians 10 times, 100 times, 1000 times. (...) In Dumas’ “Caucasus” it is written that if Armenian agrees on something, you should bring eyewitnesses because he may not stay loyal to what he says. (...) it happened to me that I helped an Armenian man, almost shared my own food with him and then he betrayed. You should never trust them. (...) Azeris and Armenians both have lived in my country for centuries. Armenians arrived in Akhalsikhe, Akhalkalaki 200 years ago. Do you know the reason why Turks started Armenian slaughter? Because they requested autonomy. Armenia did not accept them back. Griboedov told the Russian king that they could settle them here and that is the way it happened. Now they say it is their territory and if we don’t give autonomy, they will join Armenia.” (N13, male, older group, Tbilisi)

Opinions are also negative in Marneuli. Among younger participants it was mentioned that compared to Azeris Armenians are more **sly** and **liars** but on the other hand Georgians feel closer with Armenians because they are **Christians**, more **sociable**, **adaptive** and **do not bore you with own traditions**. However older participants¹⁸ reveal even more negative attitude towards Armenians, considering them as **sly**, **misappropriator**, **traitor**, **historical enemy of Georgia** and **most threatening for Georgia**. It was

¹⁸ Was asked in one group only as one participant of the second group appeared to be related with Armenians and I avoided the question.

also mentioned that Armenians are basically **merchants, rather than farmers** like Azeris and they are **patriots** of their country. However in all Marneuli groups it was noted that Azeris and Armenians have quite friendly relations with each other in Marneuli.

“Georgians do not love Armenians generally, although there is not as big distance towards them as it is towards Azeris. They will not bore you with own traditions. You may be friends with them and you will never feel this while Azeris emphasize their traditions as if you are nothing compared to it. Armenians are freer and more sociable people. We are more avoidant with them than they are with us ” (N32, female, younger group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“Yesterday I was in the upper zone. I remember our old borders and I see that bit by bit they are removed to our side. For instance the toilet of one inhabitant of Georgia suddenly appeared to be on Armenian territory. Georgian church that was built in 4-th century is on Armenian territory now and they claim it as theirs.” (N38, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

“At the beginning of 90-s when people could not even buy a bread for themselves Armenians used to eat caviar and salmon as they were all merchants. Now their village is mostly empty, in fact among every seven houses only one is inhabited. According to my observations, Armenians are much more dangerous than Azeris. I collect the phrases of Armenians about themselves and about us. Armenians stated that the patriarch closed churches in Javakheti so that they could not get in. After 2008 August war Armenian prime-minister stated that Armenians are silent and do not request anything at the moment. When political figure publicly says this, it is quite serious issue. Nowadays Armenians are the most threatening for Georgia. Even when it comes to relations they are the least trustworthy. You can trust Azeri without worrying rather than Armenian. I read the quote of Chinggis khan. He said he committed two mistakes in his life- one when he started the genocide of Armenians and other that he did not finish it. ” (N39, male, older group, Marneuli municipality: Marneuli city)

Summary and Conclusion

Present study was conducted in order to demonstrate ethnic Georgians attitudes and perspectives towards Azerbaijanis. Focus groups were conducted in Tbilisi, where number of Azerbaijanis make up only 1% and Marneuli, where Azerbaijanis are 83.1%. Apart from the residence place participants' age was also taken into account, and groups were divided into younger (18-35) and older ones (36-65) in each region.

As our main topic of discussion was not limited by ethnic minority but participants were offered to discuss about Azerbaijanis generally, perception was bit different in Tbilisi and in Marneuli. Naturally, Marneuli inhabitants were more focused on local Azeris rather than Azerbaijan population, while in Tbilisi people Azerbaijan's as well as Georgia's Azeris were emphasized.

Among all categories Tbilisi younger group appeared to be the least familiar with Azerbaijanis, so they found more difficult to talk about their culture, neighborhood, friendship, Azerbaijanis' attitudes towards Georgians etc. Older group of Tbilisi was more experienced in this sense remembering own life stories regarding Azerbaijanis. Of course, Marneuli inhabitants were most familiar as they get in touch with the local Azerbaijanis every day.

Several basic sub-topics can be distinguished that were discussed with participants: introduction/general; financial capital, social capital, cultural capital, political capital and symbolic capital (prestige of Azerbaijanis in Georgian society), and opinions about Armenians, another significant minority group in Georgia.

General part of the discussion included questions about visiting Azerbaijan/ impressions; apart from that - associations connected with Azerbaijanis; differences and similarities between Azerbaijanis and Georgians; and impression of Azerbaijanis' attitudes towards Georgians.

Most participants, regardless the group, distinguish Baku inhabitants from Azerbaijanis of Georgia, considering Baku population more intelligent and emancipated. Mostly it was explained by difference between capital and regions. However unlike Tbilisi some Marneuli younger as well as older participants, say Azerbaijanis of Georgia and Azerbaijanis of Azerbaijan are two different, unrelated people.

General associations about Azerbaijanis that are more or less common among all categories include "hardworking", "focused on trading/selling in the market", "friendly", "respectful/positive towards Georgians", "trustworthy". As differences, participants say that unlike Georgians Azerbaijanis are more hardworking, they marry own relatives, are profit-oriented/rich, focused on agriculture/land working, fond of gold/car/house, do not dress tastefully/do not care about clothes very much, are more patriarchal and undermine women's rights. Younger participants of Marneuli were most sensitive towards the issue - they talked most of all about the gender inequality among Azerbaijanis. On the other hand most commonly named similar features of Georgians and Azerbaijanis include Caucasian, hospitable, friendly, having sacred attitude towards one's own religion.

As Tbilisi younger participants are least familiar with Azerbaijanis they found it quite hard to name what Azerbaijanis might think about Georgians. According to them probably Azerbaijanis think Georgians are lazy, ambitious, easy to fool and Georgians make them feel disadvantaged in Georgia. On the other hand older participants from Tbilisi think Azerbaijanis are very positive towards Georgians and love them. On contrary Marneuli participants say Azeris are somewhat distrustful towards Georgians, they feel inferior and doubt that Georgians do not like them. Some say they are openly aggressive towards Georgians, while others note their aggression is more latent. It was also mentioned that Azerbaijanis imitate Georgians when it comes to dressing and behavior. However it was noted that there are friendly Azerbaijanis as well.

Speaking generally, participants are quite positive towards Azerbaijanis when it comes to financial and social capitals except marriage. The data is relevant to the quantitative data from Caucasus barometer. According to CB 2012 73% of ethnic Georgians approve doing business with Azerbaijanis and 76% approve doing business with Azerbaijanis of Georgia. Most participants of the present research disregarding age and residence place say that Azerbaijanis are trustworthy, advanced in business and financially well off, so they see it profitable to have financial relations with them. Participants were also

asked about their opinion of Azerbaijani seller in the market. Tbilisi groups were very positive stating that Azerbaijani sellers are more honest than Georgians, their product is cheaper and bargaining acceptable. However opinions of Marneuli participants is bit different at this point – they say that Azerbaijanis are cheating in quality and quantity of the product. Younger and older groups also agree that Azerbaijanis are much more talented in trading than Georgians. In Tbilisi, Marneuli older participants think that Azerbaijanis reduce the prices while bargaining.

According to CB 2009 (unfortunately later data does not include this question any more) 80% of Georgians approve being friends with Azerbaijanis. In current study participants think that Azerbaijanis are capable of very good friendship, they are trustworthy and devoted. However mostly it was underlined that knowledge of Georgian language is the key for being friends. As I already noted the least familiar group with Azerbaijanis is Tbilisi younger group, while in older group participants are more experienced in this sense. In Marneuli some participants have close Azeri friends while others do not but nobody has expressed any negative opinion regarding this issue. However some participants also mentioned that for instance at schools after lessons or during the break children anyway tend to hang out with kids of own ethnic group.

Participants were also asked about neighborhood and here too Tbilisi younger group found it very hard to imagine the situation, stating that they would have normal relations with them. In Tbilisi older group, as well as in Marneuli, participants say that Azerbaijanis are very good neighbors. It is worth to mention that apart from Marneuli city, participants come from either mixed, divided by districts or only Georgian nearby villages/settlements. However in younger group of Marneuli it was mentioned that some Georgians in Georgian mixed villages get irritated when they hear loud Azerbaijani music or party sounds coming from Azeri families. Also it appears that Azeris mostly avoid living in Svan settlement, settlement inhabited only by ethnic Georgians, Georgian sub-ethnic group that has a reputation of being very tough. Svans do not seem to be very happy with the possibility of having Azeri neighbors either.

Most participants in all groups are less enthusiastic when it comes to mixed marriage. The most common reason is religious difference. In both younger groups common children's fate was mentioned as an obstacle, while Marneuli participants emphasize gender inequality among Azeris more than Tbilisi participants. However this issue was also emphasized by Tbilisi older participants. Generally participants are more sensitive towards Georgian women marrying Azeri man than vice versa. Most common reason is that father dominates the generation line and such marriage will still reproduce ethnic Georgian children. This data can explain CB 2012 data, according to which, only 20% of ethnic Georgians approve Georgian women marrying Azeri and 22% approve Georgian women marrying Azeri residing in Georgia.

Generally most participants in all groups agree that the number of Azeris is increasing in Georgia. While Tbilisi participants think it is caused by higher fertility rates and newly joined Azerbaijanis, Marneuli participants only mention higher fertility rates. In Tbilisi it was noted that increase can be problematic as Azeris may get jobs while Georgians are unemployed and generally it is not good when other ethnic group is increasing more than Georgians. On the other hand in Marneuli it was emphasized that Georgians may feel disadvantaged in Marneuli. In younger group it was also mentioned that the more they are, the more chance to request autonomy. However it seems the problem is not in Azerbaijanis particularly but rather in groups of other ethnicity, as in both places participants mention that they think the same way regarding other ethnic groups. According to Tbilisi participants if Azerbaijanis left Georgia,

there will be more employment available for ethnic Georgians but on the other hand, lands will be left without cultivation and selling farm products (vegetables) will be badly affected. Marneuli participants name the same negative effects caused by hypothetical leaving of Azerbaijanis, nevertheless most of them seem to be happy with having only Georgians in Marneuli.

While participants do not reveal any negative attitude towards Azerbaijanis when it comes to financial and social capitals and at some points, they are quite positive, the same is not true with cultural and symbolic capitals.

Although participants of different categories reveal various degree of familiarity with Azerbaijani culture (People of Marneuli are more familiar, young group of Tbilisi – least), in Tbilisi, as well as in Marneuli younger group it was mentioned that Azerbaijani culture is less advanced than Georgian. According to participants Azerbaijani culture is influenced by religion and Georgia has pro-western orientation. In Tbilisi it was emphasized that unlike Azerbaijan, Georgia has always been a crossroad for various cultures. However in all groups participants state that Azerbaijanis are very hospitable.

When it comes to education, everyone agrees that lack of education is apparent among Azerbaijanis. Most common reasons includes that this is general problem of regions versus capital/big cities; Azerbaijanis are not interested/ are less interested in education (except older Marneuli group) and Azerbaijanis are less talented/smart compared to Georgians (except younger Marneuli group).

All participants are emotional regarding the language problem (Azerbaijanis' inability of speaking Georgian). Some blame the state in it, others - Azerbaijanis disrespect. However in Marneuli it was mentioned that recently Azerbaijanis became more active in learning Georgian language and attending Georgian schools as their interest towards paid jobs and political involvement increased. In Marneuli it appeared that some Georgians learn and speak Azeri well, while others are against learning it as they live on Georgian territory. In Tbilisi younger groups some participants think Georgians should not learn Azeri in this case, while others say it is the choice of the person. Older Tbilisi participants are against it as other minorities would also require the same treatment; it is Georgian territory; and Azeris are not doing the same for Georgians of Azerbaijan. The same reasons were named when Tbilisi older participants stated that the language of public services in ethnic minority inhabited area should be only Georgian. Younger participants provided various opinions such as: it will be good that such services were provided in Azeri to help local inhabitants, it should be in Georgian and it should be in Russian. In Marneuli younger participants think public services should be provided in Georgian and Azeri languages together; and only in Georgian. Older participants have following ideas: only Georgian should be used; Georgian and Azeri together; and Georgian and Russian together.

Most participants, regardless the group, say that Azerbaijanis are not considered very prestigious (symbolic capital) in Georgian society as they are associated with less development and education (as an example, they were compared to Europeans in this sense). Marneuli participants state that it is on the other way around – it is more prestigious for Azeris to be friends with Georgians (except marriage, participants stated that mixed marriages are opposed by Georgians, as well as Azerbaijanis), while for Georgians such relations do not seem very prestigious.

Apart from the social, financial, cultural and symbolic capitals, political capital was also discussed. Generally all groups agree that local Azerbaijanis should be involved in Georgian politics at local, as well as national level but they should not hold decisive post or have decisive number of representatives. Although some participants from Tbilisi older group mentioned the risk of requesting autonomy, it appeared much more sensitive topic in Marneuli, especially among older participants. It is worth to mention that perceived threat of requesting autonomy is emotionally associated with separatism and cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Also unlike Tbilisi participants, in Marneuli it was emphasized that only Azeri men are involved in politics, not women. In all groups it was mentioned that Azeri voters are easily influenced while elections. Azeri government, Georgian government and local religious or informal leaders were named as sources of influence.

In order to understand whether there is any difference between ethnic Georgians' perspectives towards Armenians and Azerbaijanis, finally participants were asked to share their opinions about Armenians. Regardless the group-category, most participants appeared to be very negative towards Armenians, so that compared to them attitudes towards Azerbaijanis are very positive. In all groups it was mentioned that unlike Azerbaijanis Armenians are sly and do not deserve trust. Even in Marneuli where participants seem to be afraid that Azerbaijanis may request autonomy, it was mentioned (in older group) that Armenians are much more threatening for Georgia. On the other hand in younger groups of both regions, Marneuli as well as Tbilisi, participants say that Armenians are much more sociable than Azerbaijanis. It was also noted that Armenians are more similar to Georgians than Azerbaijanis.

As a conclusion, generally participants have much better impression of Azerbaijanis than Armenians. Most of them characterize Azerbaijanis positively when it comes to social and financial relations, considering them as trustworthy and devoted. However participants have low opinion regarding cultural capital and prestige of Azerbaijanis in Georgian society as they do not think Azerbaijanis are very educated and advanced. Groups agree that local Azerbaijanis should be involved in Georgian politics at local, as well as national level but without holding decisive post or having decisive number of representatives.

There are no apparent differences between younger and older age groups apart from the fact that unlike Marneuli, younger groups of Tbilisi are less familiar with Azerbaijanis than older ones. On the other hand although participants of Marneuli come from different residence places of the municipality (city, Georgian villages, and mixed villages) there are no notable differences between people of these categories as well, other than eco-migrant Svans, who are bit harsher towards Azerbaijanis (as noted by other participants too). Generally, when comparing Tbilisi and Marneuli groups, certain varieties can be distinguished, for instance unlike Tbilisi participants, some Marneuli inhabitants perceive Azerbaijanis of Georgia and Azerbaijanis of Azerbaijan as two different people. Marneuli inhabitants mostly emphasize that local Azerbaijanis feel somewhat distrustful towards Georgians, while Tbilisi participants (old group) mostly reveal positive impressions regarding Azerbaijanis' attitudes towards Georgians. Compared to Tbilisi, in Marneuli worries that Azerbaijanis might request autonomy is more apparent, also gender inequality among local Azerbaijanis is more underlined.

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