

STUDENT ATTITUDES
TOWARDS MINORITIES
AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA

TOLERANCE AND DIVERSITY INSTITUTE (TDI)



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INTRODUCTION

Various disciplines study social minority, the importance of which changes with time and historical context. For this reason, several variations of the term exist. In social sciences, in addition to a numeric characteristic, “minority” can also refer to persons or groups that are not members of a given society’s category of power or do not hold any social positions whatsoever.

Sociologist Louis Wirth (1945) defines minority groups as groups of people who because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live with differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination. Membership of a minority group is ascribed based on a person’s physical or behavioral characteristics. A member of a minority group who exhibits or repeats the group’s physical or behavioral characteristics will be accorded the status of the group and become subjected to the same treatment as the rest of the group. Therefore, perceptions existing about the group are ascribed to a specific individual and vice-versa – behavioral characteristics of one specific person are generalized to the entire group, which affects the perception of other members of the group and the formation of corresponding relationships among them.

In social sciences, the term minority¹ refers to groups of people that, based on cultural, ethnic, or other factors, are distinct and subordinate

¹ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. “Minority.” Encyclopædia Britannica. January 9, 2015. Accessed June 15, 2017. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/minority>.

to a dominant group. This subordinancy is what differentiates a minority from a majority, and is why “subordinate” is often used as a synonym for minority, while “dominant group” can be used to refer to a majority.

On December 10th, 2009, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay² stated that “Minorities in all the regions of the world continue to face serious threats, discrimination and racism, and are frequently excluded from taking part fully in the economic, political, social and cultural life available to the majorities in the countries or societies where they live”. This statement does not refer to the minorities’ numeric characteristic; instead, it touches on their limited access to resources.

Therefore, the term minority does not coincide with the population’s definition of it and, in some cases, members of a minority group can in fact have the numeric advantage compared to the number of members in the dominant group. For example, among widely known cases, apartheid in the second half of the 20th century in South Africa is often cited, and involves a majority black population that was subordinate to the white population. In contrast, a social majority refers to a group of persons who hold the power in a specific time and space, and can sometimes also represent the numeric majority.

According to Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris³ (1958), social minorities are distinguished by five main characteristics⁴: 1. Unequal treatment

² “United Nations Human Rights Day, 10 December 2009, Human Rights Day, Human Rights Day 2009, Universal Declaration Human Rights, Human Rights Day Events, Navi Pillay, Navi Pillay Human Rights Day, High Commissioner Human Rights Day, Secretary-General Human Rights Day, Ban Ki-moon Human Rights Day.” United Nations. December 10, 2009. Accessed June 15, 2017. http://www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsdays/2009/hc_statement.shtml.

³ Hay, Fred. “Race, culture, and history: Charles Wagley and the anthropology of the African Diaspora in the Americas.” Scielo.br. December 2014. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/bgoeldj/v9n3/10.pdf>.

⁴ “Racial, Ethnic, and Minority Groups.” [Http://cnx.org/](http://cnx.org/). Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://cnx.org/contents/Zb0wZRUI@3/Racial-Ethnic-and-Minority-Gro>.

and less power over their lives; 2. Distinguishing physical or cultural traits like skin color and language; 3. Involuntary membership of the group; 4. Awareness of subordination and 5. High rate of in-group marriage.

Social groups that are distinct from dominant groups because of their cultural or physical characteristics and are singled out from social life, or lack access to the benefits of social life, can be considered minorities. For any social group, its power, social status, place in society and role depend on the structure of the social system and the level of social mobility inside that system. Namely, the level of social mobility for a member of a minority group depends on the open or closed nature of the society. A closed society is one in which the role of an individual remains unchanged, even theoretically, and a person belongs to a specific social circle or status from birth until death, never being able to change it. While an open society is one where an individual's role and status can be changed according to their opportunities, goals and choices. As opposed to a closed society that promotes hierarchy between groups, the idea of an open society provides the ability to access and share resources, regardless of ethnic, religious, sexual or other identity. Therefore, an open society most values individuals and their access to resources, while a closed society is oriented onto the group and its collective goals.

It has proven impossible to agree to a unified scientific term to refer to minority groups and the term "social minority" itself is controversial because of the wide usage of its numerical meaning. In literature, Historically Excluded Groups⁵ (HEG) has been used as an alternative term to refer to groups of people who, for long periods of time, have been excluded from social rights, privileges and opportunities in their society or organization.

⁵ "Historically Excluded Group." Diversity Officer Magazine. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://diversityofficermagazine.com/cultural-competence/diversitypedia/heg/>.

Social minorities can disappear through assimilation, once their traditions have been fully replaced by the traditions of the dominant culture, although complete assimilation very rarely occurs. The most common method is cultural assimilation, when two or more groups interchange cultural characteristics. A society inside which groups practice cultural assimilation creates new social norms, which promote the possibility of integrative, safe and tolerant coexistence within the society.

Throughout history, from one culture or era to another, for political or other reasons, people have ascribed specific values to various categories of minorities based on ethnic, gender, linguistic, sexual (LGBT community) and other characteristics. Therefore, it is important to define them to understand existing social dynamics.

Defining the terms of ethnic, gender or other sexual (LGBT community) minorities are difficult because these issues tend to change along with history, geography, political regimes and culture. Several disciplines study these terms and consequently, usage of a unified specific definition for all societies creates many inaccuracies because of the complexity of their meaning.

This research focuses on the following categories of minorities:

Ethnic identity is defined as a shared cultural heritage: religion, language, culture, traditions that unite a group of people. Racial and ethnic characteristics often overlap and are even used as synonyms, although the distinction between them is mainly made using physical characteristics, which differentiate people based on racial traits, while ethnic groups mainly share cultural characteristics.

Race – a socially significant category of specific persons for specific groups. The definition of race has changed across geography, culture

and eras. In the past, racial categories were more connected with geographic regions or distinctive physical characteristics. However, racial typology is not a biological characteristic, it is a social construct and for this reason, race is often even referred to as an “abstract concept” by anthropologists⁶. Therefore, “race” and/or “racial group” are not used as analytical categories in this study.

Religious minority – persons whose religious identity or practices differ from the religion widely spread in the surrounding society or culture.

LGBT community (sexual minorities) – a group of people whose sexual identity, orientation or practices differ from the widely accepted sexual identity for the majority of the surrounding society.

This research aims at defining the attitude of students from universities of six cities of Georgia towards ethnic and religious minorities, the LGBT community (sexual minorities) and people characterized based on physical traits, and determining existing forms of tolerance. The research focuses on minority issues taking into account the students’ social environment, socialization opportunities, information channels and access to education. Informal narrative by students about minority issues is included in the report part of the research.

⁶ Moore, John Hawrtwell . “Encyclopedia of Race and Racism.” I. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://webpages.uncc.edu/~jmarks/pubs/Enc%20race%20Sci%20Racism%20Hist.pdf>.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

MINORITY ISSUES

- Within the scope of this research, several forms of intolerance and lack of acceptance of others were revealed, the majority of which stemmed from incorrect or insufficient information and unavailability/lack of sources of corresponding education.
- Religious identity dominates other types of identities, which can probably be explained by repression of religious expression under the Soviet Union and subsequent growth of the social role and power of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate of Georgia.
- Concerning tolerance towards minorities and unfamiliar groups, contradictory attitudes were displayed, manifested in the dichotomy between a modern, human-rights based discourse and so called Georgian traditional values.
- Tolerance towards minority groups is hierarchical, the attitude towards some religious groups is more negative than towards others, which may be caused by having incorrect, unverified information.

MEDIA

- The issues of religious minorities are frequently covered in connection with crime, conflict or terrorism.

- Media coverage of the LGBT (sexual minorities) is more active in relation to legislative initiatives, elections and May 17th.
- While covering acts of crime and wrongdoing, media representatives accentuate the ethnic and religious identity of the suspect, in cases when it may not be relevant.
- The media itself often lacks sufficient information about different religious, ethnic or other groups, which increases the risk of potential discriminative coverage.
- There is a tendency of coverage of minorities benefitting a political party as opposed to exposing a public issue, namely, specific minority groups are attributed to political parties.
- Minority issues are subject to political manipulation. For example, opposition-leaning media uses minority issues to confront the governing political forces.
- Religious minority issues are mainly covered by media in case of conflicts or disputes.
- Xenophobia and hate speech is directed against minorities during their social, political or cultural activities.
- The media often requests commenting from interviewees who are characterized by strongly defined hate speech against minorities.

⁷ International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. Small-scale demonstration was violently dispersed in 2013 in Tbilisi Cultural Research.” Ru.nl. February 2009. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://www.ru.nl/economie/onderzoek/nice-working-papers/>.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The media and mass communication means have a significant influence on people's lifestyles, their beliefs and opinions. Communication tools are developing quickly and studies about the media are in turn quickly outdated, although it is considered by some⁸ that the media influences even people who are not literate. Within the Georgian context, youth, including students, are most active in using communication means and the internet⁹ for educational or informational purposes.

This research has two objectives, the first, to show existing attitudes towards ethnic, religious minorities and the LGBT community (sexual minorities) among students of 6 state universities of Georgia, and the second – based on the available data, to review the existing general discourse concerning minorities in the media and the influence of the media on students' attitudes.

Based on the aims of the research, qualitative research methodology – focus group (group discussion), in-depth interview and desk research methods were used. Two main groups were surveyed using this methodology: students of universities from specific cities and media experts.

⁸ Maseland, Robbert, and Andre Van Hoorn. "Measuring Values for Cross-Cultural Research ." Ru.nl. February 2009. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://www.ru.nl/economie/onderzoek/nice-working-papers/>.

⁹ "A Man and a Woman in Georgia." Geostat.ge. 2015. Accessed June 15, 2017. http://www.geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/georgian/health/Qali%20da%20kaci_2015.pdf.

The primary target group of the research includes students from universities of cities selected in advance for the research, and the secondary group consists of media experts.

Available studies concerning media and minorities in the Georgian context were reviewed within the scope of this research.

The research was conducted from November 2016 to April 2017 at state universities of the following six Georgian cities: Telavi, Gori, Akhaltsikhe, Zugdidi, Batumi and Kutaisi.

Attitudes of students towards minorities:

- 12 group discussions/interviews took place in six universities of six Georgian cities;
- Focus group interviews were divided based on gender;
- A semi-structured questionnaire was created in advance;
- Each group had eight participants;
- Discussions lasted 1.5-2 hours on average;
- Age of the interviewees: 18-26 years old;
- Focus group discussions took place between: November 2016 – April 2017.

12 group discussions (focus groups) took place in total, at six universities within the scope of the research. The discussions were divided based on gender, therefore, in each city, out of two group discussions, one was conducted with female students and one with male students.

CITY	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
TELAVI	1 group (8 participants)	1 group (8 participants)	2 groups (16 participants)
GORI	1 group (8 participants)	1 group (8 participants)	2 groups (16 participants)
AKHALTSIKHE	1 group (8 participants)	1 group (8 participants)	2 groups (16 participants)
KUTAISI	1 group (8 participants)	1 group (8 participants)	2 groups (16 participants)
ZUGDIDI	1 group (8 participants)	1 group (8 participants)	2 groups (16 participants)
BATUMI	1 group (8 participants)	1 group (8 participants)	2 groups (16 participants)
TOTAL	6 groups (48 participants)	6 groups (48 participants)	12 groups (96 participants)

Review of discourse related to minorities in the media

- Five in-depth interviews were conducted with media experts¹⁰ who are actively monitoring; media and coverage of minority-related issues in the media;
- Interviews lasted 1–1.5 hours on average;
- A semi-structured questionnaire was created in advance;
- Available research on coverage of minority issues within the Georgian context was reviewed.

¹⁰ Transparency International Georgia; Media Development Fund; Member of the Board of Trustees of the Georgian Public Broadcaster; Independent media researcher

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This research overviews attitudes of students from universities of specific cities towards specific minorities and does not envisage generalization of the obtained results.

This research does not entail an overview of the interviewees' opinions about all possible minorities and is oriented onto the scope of work of the Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI).

A significant limitation of the research is the circumstance that data is unique from one city to another and does not provide grounds for comparison because of their difference in relevance, supplemented by different highlights of the data collected from groups with mixed ethnic, religious, linguistic or other characteristics.

UNOFFICIAL STUDENT NARRATIVE ABOUT MINORITIES

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

Ethnic and religious composition is variable in connection to various historical and political factors. From 1989 until today, Georgia's ethnic-religious composition has been undergoing significant changes. According to the 1989 official census, ethnic minorities composed 30% of the population of Georgia, while according to the census conducted in 2002, the share of ethnic minorities had shrunk to 16%, with the exception of data for Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region.¹¹

Since 1991, there is a consistent tendency of increase in emigration for ethnic Georgians and ethnic minorities. A worsening of the economic, social and political situation in the country, as well as changes caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the transition to new political, economic and social regime are the main factors causing increased emigration and subsequent decrease in population of ethnic minorities in Georgia. In addition, the narrative of politicians who came to power after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, was based on nationalistic and patriotic sentiments. At the time, "Georgia for Georgians" became a popular slogan, that significantly reflects the attitudes existing then towards ethnic and religious minorities. In 1992, a new government came to power, led by Eduard Shevardnadze, whose rhetoric was different from that of his predecessor, although a de-

¹¹ Komakhia, Mamuka. "The Formation of Georgian Ethnic Map." Diversity.ge. 2008. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://www.diversity.ge/geo/resources.php?coi=0%7C13%7C13>.

clining economic environment became the reason for an increase in emigration tendencies, now including ethnically Georgian population as well. To this day, according to official data, one of the most popular emigration destinations remains the Russian Federation, most probably because of linguistic reasons and its geographical proximity. Political approaches to distinct ethnic and civil identities caused various types of identities, including ethnic, nationalist, religious and gender-based ones, that affect the daily life of minority groups.

The strengthening of ethnic immigration in Georgia during the 19th century and its continuation in the 20th century is connected to the internal politics and warfare in its neighboring countries. During this period, many ethnic groups found asylum in Georgia and most of them settled there. After some time, this type of coexistence gives rise to a culturally diverse environment, which is reflected by the diversity of everyday life habits, such as particularities of commercial and economic interactions, and blending funeral and religious rituals into practices of daily life.

Georgia is considered to be a diverse country in terms of ethnicities and religions, as supported by official statistical data on the ethnic and religious composition of the population. According to the 2014 census¹², the ethnic population of Georgia is composed of 86.8% Georgians, 6.3% Azerbaijanis and 4.5% Armenians, the remaining comprise ethnic Russians 0.7%, Ossetians 0.4%, Yazidis 0.3%, Ukrainians 0.2%, Kists 0.2%, Greeks 0.1%, and Assyrians 0.1% (other 0.4%). This opinion is considered a historically given and from it comes the widespread view that “the Georgian people are a tolerant nation”, since different ethnic and religious groups have coexisted on their territory for a long period of time.

¹² Shavishvili, Paata. “The Main Results of the 2014 Population Census.” Geostat.ge. April 28, 2016. Accessed June 15, 2017. http://census.ge/files/results/Census%20Release_GEO.pdf.

Obtaining information about Georgia's religious composition often proves difficult, although according to official data of the 2014 census on religious identity, 83.4% of the Georgian population is Orthodox Christian, 10.7% is Muslim and 2.9% is Armenian Apostolic. The remaining population is divided into much smaller groups of followers of various other religions¹³: Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Yezidis, Protestants and Jews. According to the official data, this number also comprises of people who do not identify with any religion.

In popular speech, to support the view that Georgia is a tolerant country, the example of King David the Builder is often used, seeing as he is known to have prayed in both a mosque and in a Christian church. Another example of historically developed tolerance in Georgia is the coexistence of places of worship of different religions side by side in the capital city of Tbilisi. These views have inspired many works in literature and music by various writers, poets and musicians throughout time, folk poetry also attests to this. Despite many such examples from the past, nowadays we are often faced with problems related to religious and ethnic issues which either turn into legal disputes, or become the subject of public concern, dissatisfaction and frequent confrontation.

This research carefully presents an overview of these issues with student groups, the study of their attitudes, opinions and a consolidated analysis. Student narratives about minorities are difficult to analyze and are often contradictory, as they contain a double discourse: on the one hand, there is a discourse of education and modernity, aligned with the human rights narrative, and on the other hand, there is a weak articulation of traditional-conservative views represented by rigid stereotypes and idioms still remaining in the Georgian language.

¹³ For information about various religious organizations, refer to the research by the Tolerance and Diversity Institute – “Assessment of the Needs of Religious Organizations in Georgia”, Tbilisi, 2014 (http://www.tdi.omedialab.com/sites/default/files/assessment_of_the_needs_of_religious_organizations_in_georgia_tdi.pdf)

DATA

Focus group discussions were conducted at universities of six Georgian cities: Telavi, Gori, Akhaltsikhe, Kutaisi, Zugdidi, Batumi. The goal of the research was to reveal the attitudes and views among students towards specific minorities. In each city, groups were divided based on gender and separate discussions took place with female and male students. The main purpose of this division was to set apart the female narrative – there was an expectation that during discussions in mixed groups, females would be less articulate, while comparing minority issues seen from women’s viewpoints to narratives provided by men would allow us to see similarities and differences between the two. Eight participants took part in each discussion and they were chosen randomly, without preliminary determination of their faculty, year, or whether they identified themselves with any ethnic, religious or other group.

During focus group discussions, interviewees’ description of their own social environment provided information about minority groups in their society. Labeling minority groups during the discussions turned out to be an issue. When talking about ethnic minorities, interviewees often meant religious groups and conversely, while discussing religious minorities, they referred to issues and examples in connection with foreign citizens. In addition, almost no differentiation was made between ethnic and religious narratives. From one region to another, religious, ethnic and national discourse were interchangeable, with one main ideology defining this or that identity. Namely, ethnicity was defined by religion, religion was defined by nationality, nationality was defined by sexual identity, etc. Within the scope of this research, minorities were not viewed abstractly in a philosophical or historical category, they were discussed by the students taking part in the study in terms of modern

social and daily life, in contexts of education, employment, along with ethnic and religious integration and socialization within their society. The relevance of the issues differed from one region to another. Based on the interviews conducted within the scope of the research, students of each specific city focused on specific characteristics of their region. The views and perceptions of minority groups and tolerance towards them also varied in female and male groups.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Learning a foreign language is a significant characteristic of the youth's information scope. The majority of students who participated in focus group discussions are learning English, with Russian being a popular language as well. During the course of the study, it was determined that knowledge of these two languages has a decisive role in employment of youth. Besides, according to the students, the older generation mostly uses Russian information sources because of their knowledge/ understanding of the language, and consequently the students have to listen to news in Russian too. This tendency is further encouraged by the fact that, in some of the regions participating in this research, access to news channels in Georgian language requires a special device, namely a satellite dish.

ATTITUDE DIFFERENCES ACROSS GENDER

In male discussions, the dominant attitude was “we are more oppressed”. In this case, “we” means Georgian, Orthodox Christian citizens of Georgia, whose “oppression” is manifested in economic hardship and the existence of the potential “other” as a threat, while being “more” oppressed refers to the hierarchy that may exist in a given society between

dominant groups and various minorities. Female discussions, in comparison, were more self-oriented, the focus being education and employment, viewed as paths to success and independence. In female discussions, a certain loyalty towards minority groups was also displayed, although nationalistic-religious attitudes were actively manifested in their speech as well. Although the first group is more tolerant towards those who are different from them, a contradictory attitude that includes both “the Georgian nation is traditionally tolerant” and “tolerance represents a threat” is the main idea present throughout all discussions conducted within the scope of the study. The students’ solution to overcome this contradiction is to set boundaries for minority groups, such as limited use of public spaces (or other benefits) or special rules. Both female and male narratives were characterized by a contradictory demonstration of tolerance. On one hand, students discussed “the traditional tolerance of the Georgian people” and, on the other, the perception of tolerance as a threat or the placement of boundaries to tolerance. The students’ narrative within the scope of the research is critical of the government policy, this criticism being expressed in the perception of inequality and lack of access to resources.

Based on the attitudes and opinions displayed during the students’ discussions, several forms of tolerance and acceptance of others and their differences could be defined, as well as a few forms of intolerance. Provisional names were chosen for these forms in the frame of the research:

Acceptance:

1. Tolerance of a familiar “other”, only because they are familiar and not because their existence is acceptable (“my gay friend”, “my Jehovah’s Witness relative”).
2. Acceptance of others as a Georgian tradition (“hospitality is traditional in Georgia”, “Georgian people have always been tolerant towards foreigners”).

3. Acceptance of others as a European/modern approach and an attribute of civilization („it’s like that in Europe”, “if we want to be part of the European Union, then...”).
4. Public space as a boundary to tolerance (“let them be, but there are limits to everything...”).

Lack of acceptance:

1. Lack of acceptance of others based on lack of knowledge („I don’t know, I haven’t heard anything about that”).
2. Lack of acceptance of others based on lack of familiarity (“I have nothing to do with them”).
3. Lack of acceptance of others as protection from a collective threat (“the Georgian nation will die out if it goes on like this...”).
4. Lack of acceptance of others as fidelity to tradition (“that is not acceptable in Georgian traditions...”).

The forms of acceptance and lack of acceptance towards the other and the different revealed within the scope of the research are contradictory and conflicting. While hospitality is considered Georgian tradition, meaning any guest is to be accepted, including for religious motives (“guests are godsend”), the same argument dismisses the other and the different (“Orthodox Christianity forbids this...”). The other is acceptable to the extent that they do not represent a threat to the dominant identities, do not ask to be established in public spaces or social positions, do not try to obtain economic power, do not seek self-expression or self-determination. The view is that the hospitable Georgian nation accepts the other (non-Georgian, non-Orthodox) because they are a guest, but if the other is not a guest anymore and tries to become another equal citizen, they may become a threat for the Georgian identity and therefore turn into the object of an intolerant, unaccepting attitude.

ATTITUDES ABOUT GENDER DIMENSION OF EMPLOYMENT

In focus groups conducted within the scope of this research, when discussing their main problems, students in every city talked indirectly about unemployment or various types of discrimination in the workplace. Among those are some gender-based negative attitudes that have a specific influence on work relations.

According to the research data, students cited supermarket consultants, cafe/bar waiters or working in a bank as popular work positions for females, while for males, popular jobs are in distribution, security services, contract military service, and seasonal work in factories, hazelnut plantations or restaurants located in Turkey and Germany. A tendency toward temporary or permanent work abroad was also displayed among females. Although part of the students hopes to find employment in their field of studies, they try to use any and all work opportunities in order to pay for their studies and their material needs. According to the interviewees, employers often demand several years' work experience, including from students. In addition, women's experience in labour and education is different from men's and for them, higher education or a work position that has no connection with their profession is an alternative to starting a family/getting married or sometimes the only way to socialize. Students also pointed out that representatives of the older generation who could not find a permanent job in Georgia went abroad – men as physical workers and women mostly involved in domestic work. What they send home constituted the main income for their families.

“There is a woman who has gone to Turkey for work in every other family”.

“Mainly they have gone abroad [for work]. It's mostly women.”

“Young men have gone too. They mostly work in factories”.

“80% of the students in my year are studying German. Everyone went, girls and boys, a large group of them went and came back satisfied, brought back money and cars”.

“In my opinion, emigration is in first place in terms of income, it’s the most popular way – going abroad and sending money from there. I say this based on my family’s experience”.

Labor migration was relevant in the case of all cities participating in the research and was considered a popular alternative to employment. Students generalized various types and ways of emigration from their subjective experience (based on examples from their friend circles and family). They differentiated migration forms depending on age and gender, defining a certain pattern – students drop out of their higher education studies because of financial issues and go abroad in labor emigration, or the parents of the student emigrate for work in order to be able to pay for the student’s education. Data collected within the scope of the research shows that for most of the interviewees, going abroad is associated to labor emigration, and “working there” is associated with “slavery”, which may strengthen the negative perception and attitudes of the youth towards foreign countries, their citizens and acceptance of others.

“We have strong villages here, lots of land, agriculture is more or less developed. There is cattle, a lot of potatoes. People don’t go anymore to be somebody’s slave and tries to do something here that will give them a permanent income.”

“That’s not even work, it’s slavery, they work 12-14 hours a day. It’s mostly seasonal work”.

“But there are jobs that they can do all the time – gardening, jeans... but they are not getting paid as much there as the Turkish. The salary is really low.”

Data collected within the scope of the research concerning labor emigration from the country shows a self-perception of subordinancy towards citizens of foreign countries, which may reinforce negative attitudes towards other ethnic or religious groups, in this case, toward ethnically non-Georgians, which is reflected in labour relations. Popular positions for female citizens of Georgia who emigrate for work are help with housework in families. While men leave to pursue positions requiring physical labor, such as working on construction sites, in factories and on plantations, as this kind of work does not require any qualifications or specialization.

The separate narrative of female students concerning employment displayed a positive discrimination form, for it is easier for females to find jobs as consultants in shops and supermarkets, and in the service industry in general, because of their external and behavioral characteristics, as ascribed to the character of the female gender. These include obedience, tidiness, being prone to smiling, and being more accepting of criticism than males. This opinion is supported by views expressed in the male focus group concerning the gender dimension of employment:

“Girls look nicer. It depends on the job. Both boys and girls can work as consultants. Girls are more hired as waitresses, and as consultants, too”.

“If a girl wants to start working in Gori, she goes to work in a bank or in a shop as a consultant”.

“Girls are employed more, because of their gender and their appearance. Like promo girls, for example. Men are mainly employed in construction”.

“In shops, or wherever we go, everywhere they tell us they have no jobs for boys”.

“If I had a shop, I’d hire some nice-looking girl too”.

“If foreigners have companies here, they prioritize hiring girls, even in shops. Some say that looks matter. Why can’t a boy be a shop salesman? They’re mostly looking for girls, ones who do not have any children”.

“One can give a remark to a girl, our Georgian boys have less patience for remarks”.

Such perceptions and attitudes towards females show that offering minimum wage and disadvantageous work conditions to women in exchange for more work is a gender-based norm because of characteristics attributed to their gender, reinforced by traditional expectations of women’s role and nature. This discriminatory attitude can be explained by Georgian traditions and favorable disposition of the society towards this kind of role for women.

Conversely, for employment among males, one of the issues that stood out was that of mandatory military service, which can be avoided by “mandatory higher education” or a contract military service for financial benefit.

According to a study (p.86) published in 2017 by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), when replying to the question about choosing a military career, 88% agreed that people who choose military careers do so for the stable income and 77% believed that they have no other alternative.

Opinions expressed by students within the scope of the research concerning economic conditions, income and labor environment show the possibilities as well as the limitations that may form obstacles on their path to development and socialization, representing the precondition to creation of various cultural or social circumstances. Unemployment of parents, high education costs and the necessity to gain work experience in order to find future employment forces students to begin working at an early age, despite the fact that most jobs are full-time, which means they are faced with a choice – go to classes or work. The reason why students start working is to be able to go on with their studies. However, due to unfavorable labor conditions, they are not able to do so anymore. In addition, there is the gender factor, reflected in a discriminatory approach towards women, namely based on appearance and encouragement of the obedient nature ascribed to their gender.

ETHNIC-RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF EMPLOYMENT

The student narrative concerning employment issues mainly describes unemployment and low salary or difficult working conditions. They view unemployment and low wages as a national problem, and focus less on unfavorable working conditions with Georgian employers than those condition arising under employers of a different ethnicity or religion, pointing out these specific categories of their identity as a source of the problem. During discussion of the ethnic-religious dimensions of employment, the main groups mentioned by students could be identified:

“We have a hard time finding employment in our own country, while foreigners have it easier here”.

“We are the ones most discriminated against in our own country”.

While discussing work, unemployment, labor rights, students display negative attitudes towards persons of non-Georgian descent or non-citizens of Georgia. An especially negative attitude can be observed towards the Chinese and the Turkish. The subject of Chinese employers is connected to a chain of shops owned by them and the case¹⁴ of the tunnel construction in village Zvare of Kharagauli district, where working conditions are very poor and this gives rise to a national identity issue in a negative context.

“...Whatever jobs there are, the Chinese take them”.

“When they come here, they have such a good life that they even start having more influence than we do”.

“A Chinese came here and started his own business, while when our people go to other countries, they are treated so badly...”

“So many of them come and invest in their future here, and so many create a future for their descendants in Adjara that a lot of things may be happening while we are asleep. And we don’t think about that at all. All we think about is having fun. Little by little, the future of Adjara is being created by the Turkish and we don’t even realize that. When it comes to that, it will be too late”.

¹⁴ Bogveradze, Mariam. “Railroad Work Conditions are Under Inspection.” ნეტგაზეთი. August 12, 2016. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://netgazeti.ge/news/134003/>.

An especially negative attitude towards Turkish employers and Turkish people in general was exhibited in the Adjara region. According to the students, this is caused by their economic wealth and the lack of government regulations on foreigner-owned businesses (mostly meaning Turkish). Such narrative of the students shows a negative attitude towards economic power, in which ethnically Georgians, despite being the numerical majority, are economically subordinated to the materially wealthy non-Georgian employers.

“Let’s say I want to find a job and there are Georgian businessmen too, but when a Turkish person opens a shop and tells you you don’t have to speak Turkish and can start working for them anyway, they like you as a nice-looking consultant and you will not go to that Georgian, because he doesn’t want to employ you”.

“I never go on Kutaisi street. It’s full of Turkish people and that irritates me. It annoys me that they spread everywhere, like the Chinese and such. It’s irritating to see more Turkish and Chinese people on the street than Georgians”.

When describing their negative attitude towards Turkish people, the interviewees, in addition to being of non-Georgian descent and having money, also noted their different religion as a circumstance which aggravated working conditions from the employer’s side. Focus group discussions conducted in Adjara region show that an ethnic and religious numeric majority of Georgian citizens feels they are subordinate to a non-Georgian population with a different religion and this situation is perceived as “a threat of outsiders taking power”. Most of the interviewees believe this situation is caused by government policies.

According to the Tolerance and Diversity Institute’s (TDI) 2016 study on Religious and Ethnic Diversity in School Textbooks¹⁵, textbook materials are compiled based on specific religious and ethnic characteristics. The study reviewed textbooks of history, civic education, Georgian language and literature.

According to the study, the school textbooks advocate for the superiority of a specific religious and ethnic group and the narration is oriented on portraying other religions as hostile forces. History and Georgian language and literature textbooks use xenophobic references without providing corresponding explanations from the authors.

One of the key findings of the study is that school textbooks fail to provide sufficient or qualified knowledge on religious or ethnic diversity, and some religious texts and clerical publications are presented in a nonacademic language, without distancing from religion, which promotes the formation of negative attitudes towards certain groups in young people and affects the next stages of their lives.

FAMILIARITY

While discussing employment in the cities participating in the research, the students’ narrative refers to the importance of social capital, informal networks and its influence on daily life, namely on labour relations, as reflected in having a “someone familiar”, “an ally” in different places, automatically giving an advantage compared to those who do not have an acquaintance/ally. According to the students, if there is an opportunity to do so, it is logical and expected to hire and promote

¹⁵ “The Effects of Religious and Ethnic Diversity on School Books.” Tdi.ge. 2016. Accessed June 15, 2017. http://www.tdi.ge/sites/default/files/saxelmzgvaneloebis_analizi_tdi_2016.pdf .

someone you know rather than a stranger. This view demonstrates the significance of a social capital, which may entail exclusion of and less tolerance towards various groups. Such differentiation is neither new nor characteristic to Georgian society exclusively, but it is in direct connection with social stratification, social mobility, integration, civil solidarity, and unity.

Several forms of familiarity were revealed: 1. Direct familiarity – when informal networks help out directly, hiring someone familiar for the purpose of supporting one of their own, 2. Indirect familiarity – when bonding does not help directly because a person thinks the one does not have enough qualification but recommends the friend or relative to someone else so as not to lose social desirability in their circle, not be frowned upon, 3. Employing a familiar in exchange for exploiting them.

“...the issue of informal networks... I am from Khulo and whenever there is a vacancy, people are hired because they know someone. In Batumi, it’s a bit different, it is more possible here to achieve something. There is the issue of language as well. Knowledge of Russian and English is mostly required and in Batumi, Turkish as well”.

“Because it’s someone close to me, I want to help their professional development, help them grow as a person, so why would I bring someone else’s son or daughter and put them in my place”.

“When they hire someone from their own circle, it’s someone they trust, with recommendations, so they demand more and they are fixated on the fact that they expect more from you”.

“Yes, some might not employ you in their own business, but they might recommend you to someone else and that other person may hire you. Then that person will not let you go, out of respect”.

Those who do not share these opinions about familiarity prioritize professionalism and qualification, which, according to one of the participants of the discussion, is the “human” way: “that’s human perspective, that you might love someone. Each person puts themselves in first place and that is why familiarity works so well. Take the entire world, it’s like that in general. Everywhere”. But when talking about facts, they state that familiarity is important for finding employment, and this is caused not by the trust factor, but rather the motivation to support people you know and promote and care for your own closed ones.

Within the scope of the research, potential cases of employing or helping strangers were often referred to as human, while hiring and “giving a hand to” a familiar was explained by Georgian tradition. Students also spoke about the negative aspects of working with familiar people and some, who were mainly focused on mutual support and trust evaluated being in business with strangers positively:

“If you want to be successful in what you do, do it with strangers”.

Therefore, contradictory opinions and experiences can be observed in students’ narrative when describing the “my own-somebody else’s” dichotomy in the employment market. On one hand, employing “one of your own” is an important obligation to the circle a person belongs to and is dictated by collectivistic, group values where the main criteria is and on the other hand, there is a completely opposite opinion according to which familiarity does not play a key role in business relationships, because negotiation and rational decision-making is easier with

a stranger and in case of a break in – ties, there is no additional social pressure. Accordingly, decisions are made with a more individualistic motivation. As shown from the students' discussions, both viewpoints are widespread, but helping out someone you know, collective behavior, taking into account the interests of the group is the more socially acceptable, favorably looked upon, and a culturally justified way to go.

MIGRATION

In Georgia, a high index of emigration is characteristic for urban settlements. The tendencies observed in this research confirm this fact from one city to another, and significant particularities were discerned for Kutaisi and Gori. Turkey and Germany are popular destinations for labour emigration of the youth. As for Batumi, there are more opportunities for employment there compared to other cities of Georgia, as it is a touristic town because of its coastal location, although the focus shifts to other specific issues. During group interviews conducted in Adjara, while discussing employers, the focus was mainly on their national identity and religion. Despite having had positive as well as negative experiences working with foreigners/representatives of ethnic minorities, students used contradictory examples and focused on negative attitudes from Turkish employers and the importance of religious identity in hiring process. Another tendency observed during group discussions was that in cases of labour rights violations, students were denouncing non-Georgian descent of the blamed party and oppression of the Georgian people, in this case, compared to the wealthy Turkish employers. It is perceived by some of the participant interviewees as economic expansion and neglect on the government's part. The students also displayed an attitude according to which, violations of labour rights by non-Georgians are perceived as a negative outlook of the specific nation

(a representative of which committed the violation) towards Georgians. This opinion becomes generalized to the entire Georgian nation. Meanwhile students justify violations of labour rights by a Georgian employer by the severe economic conditions in Georgia.

“I went to the Arabs, they fix fridges and gas stoves. In Georgia, when I saw how the Georgian youth were working, they could not even sit down, they had to crouch”.

“You know, I don’t want to be offensive, but the number of ethnic Armenians almost outnumber Georgians’, the Armenian population is almost larger now”.

“In my opinion, they are given more rights than we are”.

MINORITIES

The students' associations to the word "minority" are connected with religious, ethnic and sexual minorities. When talking about ethnic and religious minorities, the interviewees made comparisons with Georgians, while mention of sexual minorities was followed by silence, laughter or awkwardly, quietly voiced opinions. Ethnic and religious minorities were used as synonyms, while sexual minorities were referred to as LGBT or its inaccurate, distorted variations.

In male focus groups, more tension and awkwardness could be felt, then defused by laughter from other interviewees.

“That immediately reminds me of how small the Georgian population is, how there's fewer and fewer of us”.

“LGBT representatives”.

“A part of the society that is a minority and is discriminated against by the majority. It can be a religious, or any kind of group”.

“There may be minorities inside the majority. I mean people who are minorities because of the way they think”.

Participants of focus group discussions could be categorized as having active, passive and neutral positions. The active participants displayed

religious-nationalistic narrative. The passive interviewees agreed with active students and neutral positions were characterized by putting the “others” in their place and “indicating boundaries” to them, which was explained by safety purposes and the unconditional superiority of the majority. As for gender-based differences in discussions, the females’ narrative can be characterized as more tolerant compared to the male students’ narrative, which, according to the interviewees, can be explained by the “inflexible nature of Georgian men”.

During discussion of minorities, their rights and attitudes towards them, students focused on ethnic and religious diversity, citing examples of the tolerance of the Georgian people throughout history, remembering the historical account of King David the Builder praying in a mosque, and the fact that a synagogue, a mosque and an Orthodox Christian church exist side by side. These are widely known examples of tolerance of the Georgian people, but when discussing specific issues, students bring attention to stories and opinions in which they examine various religious or ethnic identities in a negative light. As for discussion of the LGBT community (sexual minorities), the context is generally negative and their position is placed in a conditional category – if “they stay within boundaries”, “they will not be subject to negative attitudes”. The third tendency observed concerning the sexual minorities is positive discrimination, according to which there is an exoticization of members of the LGBT community (sexual minorities) and they are acceptable as long as they belong to the LGBT community (sexual minorities).

The demographic factor (“there are fewer and fewer Georgians”) and a high index of economic means are the two factors which students stress negatively in connection with non-Georgian ethnic groups. The demographic index argument is mostly used in settlements with a large concentration of ethnically non-Georgian population, where students, on one hand, bring attention to the small number of Geor-

gians and, on the other hand, speak about the group isolation of ethnic minorities, which, according to them, is partly caused by government policies and partly by the attitudes of the ethnic minorities themselves, who do not wish to integrate. They also given a certain role to the difference in religion and in language, which are presented as distinctive characteristics.

“Part of the population has a very negative attitude towards them. It mostly depends on the person. Women, of course, are more tolerant. I guess Georgian mentality is stronger in men”.

Terms of reference were problematic in every discussion, especially during discussion of ethnic and religious minorities as well as racial issues. Interviewees often used ethnic and religious identities as synonyms. This tendency was clear during talks about Muslims, when interviewees referred to them as Turks or used “Mahmadian” as a synonym for Muslim. During this type of discussion, the interviewee’s definition of ethnic, religious and racial notions were constructed in opposition with the historically developed Georgian identity, according to which whoever is not a Christian, is not ethnically Georgian, does neither speak Georgian nor looks like one, is difficult to perceive as Georgian. In discussions like these, the notion of being Georgian was not equated with civic identity, but rather with a religious, linguistic or ethnic category.

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Within the scope of the research, the attitude towards religious minorities is closely entwined with national identity, as based on popular historical examples. Accordingly, in the research, while discussing religious minorities, religiousness motivated by nationalist identity could be

observed as well as the opposite, national identity defined by religiousness. Other religions were viewed as threatening identities.

“Here, ethnos is mainly associated with religion, and that’s... for example, a Turkish person must be a Muslim, Azerbaijanis are also Muslim, if I am called Georgian, then I have to be Orthodox Christian, that’s how things are”.

While discussing religious minorities, interviewees listed religious groups represented in their cities: Jehovah’s Witnesses, Muslims, Catholics, Buddhists, followers of the Armenian Apostolic Church and also atheists. During discussions conducted in each city participating in the research, students answered questions about religious minorities based on the local specificities. In Telavi, Gori, Akhaltsikhe, Kutaisi, Zugdidi and Batumi, “religious minorities” had a different meaning and attitudes towards them were variable accordingly, although, despite different attitudes towards specific religious groups from one city to another, the general attitude towards minorities were similar in every city. The relation towards religious minorities and minorities in general is reflected in common values, such as safety, “collective/national extinction”, disappearance, demography and competition for public benefits. This is due the quantity of the “others” and privileges given to them by the government, which can be translated into economic and political language as access to resources and from this position, shed light on the interviewees’ possible fear of the “others”, the ones different from them. When describing religious minorities in their cities and regions, students brought special attention and spent more time discussing Muslims and Jehovah’s Witnesses compared to other minorities. In discussion about Muslims, the issues of ethnic-nationalistic identity, the construction of mosques and the influence of Turkey were most prominent, while for

Jehovah's Witnesses, a negative attitude was observed towards their means of spreading information about their faith. As for other religious groups, they are referred to as branches of Christianity, small in numbers, with less public activity and therefore considered as less threatening religions.

The discussion about Muslims transitions from religious narrative into ethnic and nationalist matters. It is constructed as in opposition to the notion of being Georgian, while the negative attitude towards Jehovah's Witnesses is exhibited against their means of spreading their own beliefs. Although, in order to refute a special significance of this occurrence, the interviewees use the means with which Christianity was spread in ancient times, citing as an example the preaching of St. Nino, who, according to the legend, walked from one place to another to spread Christianity.

“Each nation chooses their religion, we chose Christianity. Therefore, it is our religion, but followers of another religion can be Georgian too. They can love the country, the language, the culture. Religion is just one part of being Georgian, of which some television channels make fun of, they mock our traditions, they think it's just about the feasting and drinking...”

ETHNIC MINORITIES

Within the scope of the study, ethnic minorities are perceived as opposing the interests of the majority and are therefore presented as a threat. Ethnic minority is equated with non-Georgian, which, in turn, should be expressed in lesser exercise of their rights and more difficult access to social goods.

In the interviewees' narrative, distinctions were observed between the economic means of ethnic non-Georgians and ethnic Georgians. Ac-

According to the students, ethnic Georgians possess less material means. The economic wealth of ethnic non-Georgians, according to the students' narrative, is the result of the privileges and the opportunity to "dominate" which are offered to them by the government. Such attitudes are especially strongly exhibited towards Turkish and Chinese people. Turkophobic attitudes, besides the fear of economic expansion, are reinforced by religious distinction and the "historical enemy" argument.

"In my opinion, the government should not allow them to dominate. I think they are already ruling here. When the government can sell land to Georgians, they should not sell it to Turkish people and allow them to rule things. I would say that the government turned the Turkish into rulers of Adjara. For example, the fact that Georgians go to Turkey to find work there, it should not be like that. The government should create conditions here so that people are not torn apart from their families".

"I think that everyone has a good life in Georgia, everyone is mixed together. Even the Chinese, for example, they have such a large influence on people in our region, for example, the people they employ. I heard a few days ago that Chinese hired a girl to work in their shop and she could not even last two weeks, because the schedule and working conditions were so bad".

"A Chinese came here and started his own business, while when our people go to other countries, they are treated so badly..."

When making distinctions among cultural characteristics, the narrative of the interviewees indicates the obligation of integration and cultural assimilation. Low integration of ethnic groups can be caused by

high concentration of their population in a specific settlement. In some regions, the language barrier is also an obstacle and these factors are reinforced by negative attitudes towards religious differences. Students also note that ethnic minorities are offered privileges, which strengthens the feeling of inequality and injustice towards specific groups and also the local government. Authorization to build churches for religious minorities, promoting socialization for ethnic or linguistic minorities are perceived as privileges by the students, even though these initiatives may aim at integration and at ending inequality.

“I am a representative of an ethnic minority myself. I have not had problems because of this, which is very good. From my appearance, you cannot tell I am different, so I usually say it myself. That is because this person mixed with Georgians and feels good like this. Yezidis mixed with the population of Telavi, they did not stay in a group with only ethnic minorities in it”.

“Always, in any country there will non-integrated national minorities if they stay closed among their group. In Pankisi valley, the Kists are most closed off, in Javakheti, it’s Armenians and Azerbaijanis”.

“There are members of an ethnic minority in my village – Kists. I don’t even perceive them as a minority. The government gives them a lot of attention, builds schools for them, justice houses etc. They have mosques, too”.

“For example, the profession of tailor, or hair stylist – they are mainly Armenian here. I respect them and have a lot of friends among them, they do not mind doing that, we do mind. They have jobs and they make money”.

In the students' narrative, these attitudes exhibit a feeling of injustice and inequality. According to the students, ethnic minorities are perceived as "others" who receive privileges at the expense of ethnically Georgian or Orthodox Christian people.

LGBT COMMUNITY

Compared to other minorities, interviewees had the most distinct position towards the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people, had mostly negative attitude or their existence deemed acceptable only within certain "boundaries". Sexual minorities, in comparison with other minorities included in this research, are favoured with a higher loyalty by females than by males, which is explained by the "nature of Georgian men". In addition, some types of negative attitudes or intolerance could be observed that stem from the religious narrative – fear of sin, as well as social anomie – diverting from the established female and male roles and most importantly, the fear of social exclusion.

"Yes, I do have a friend who is gay and he is hiding it, he is afraid, of course, if everyone finds out he is gay, he will be excluded".

The most widespread form of tolerance towards the LGBT community (sexual minorities) is setting boundaries and putting them "in their place". A similar approach can be observed in the case of other minorities, but for the LGBT community, this attitude gains a political aspect and is characterized as something imported from the West, something non-Georgian, non-Orthodox, different from the majority, viewed by them as being in opposition to the Georgian identity.

"We, the majority, are not followers of a different religion, and we are not, for example, of a non-traditional orientation, I mean us, who are the majority".

“In my opinion, I cannot forbid anyone from doing anything, and we have no right to do so, if a man wants to be with a man, it’s up to him, as long as he keeps it to himself, without stepping on my rights and exaggerating and if I want to be with a girl, it’s my business”.

“This should not happen, if it is allowed, they should be by themselves, have their own corner, without them involving us and us involving them”.

“As long as they keep it to themselves and do not involve us”.

“Everyone is born with the freedom of speech, but I believe that they should not make a show of it. They can do whatever they want by themselves. But when they do such things publicly, it’s not good. They should not be that obvious, sometimes it happens in parks, even”.

In terms of numeric characteristics, it is hard to say whether the sexual “minority” is in fact a minority, because people are afraid to express their sexual orientation publicly, therefore, it is irrelevant to speak of this specific group in terms of their numbers, when official statistics are available for ethnic and religious minorities. The issue for this group consists in access to resources and participation in social life, which is a defining trait of a minority, even though it is not quantitative.

“One should only be hired on the condition that they will not cross their boundaries, otherwise they may go and tell some customer: I’m gay, you know”.

While discussing attitudes towards sexual minorities (the LGBT community), it was observed for the majority of the interviewees that

they do not have correct information about sexual orientations and related matters. During the discussions, they often used hearsay, information compiled from articles, phrases or opinions heard from friends and acquaintances, information that was incorrect – for example, that sexual orientation can be transmitted through looking at or listening to a person. Incorrect information or constant negative information is problematic as it strengthens the existing attitudes towards members of the group. The most widespread perception of the sexual minority group members is their perception as just one identity, which implies oppression based on sexual orientation and creates a stereotype according to which everyone who belongs to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, community is oppressed and has no distinct life experience.

“We cannot have [an opinion], because we do not receive enough information”.

“So according to what I read, it’s going public, they are asking us to give them the rights to one-sex marriage and adoption of children, then I read a psychologist’s article about the rights to adopt children, some NGOs say, why shouldn’t they have the right to do it, but according to the psychologist’s article, a child cannot be raised in such an environment, if he does not know who is the mother and who is the father, his mind is not healthy”.

“From the television, we always hear negative things, that they are oppressed, then they are on TV too, talking about it”.

“It became a very popular thing lately. There are a lot of videos and photos in the social media. On television too, they were on “Im-edi”, then they were comparing Georgian transgenders to ones

from abroad. You should see what they look like, there is even a trans model and they compare them to Georgians. They like Ke-so-Beso and if they are regular people, they don't like them”.

When discussing sexual minorities, students began talking about the so-called “one-sex“ marriage, their rights to adoption, and “gay parades”. During this discussion, May 17th (of year 2013) was referred to as a gay parade that took place in Georgia, towards which the students exhibited unanimous negative attitudes, although their opinion of the violence displayed by Orthodox Christian priests was also negative.

“For me, one-sex marriage is unacceptable, I live in a traditional country, a Christian country and I cannot stand it that a man marries a man and a woman marries a woman. This is against God's law, like what happened when they were building the Babel tower. I only support the persons who are born with two sexes. I will always confront that kind of discrimination. They should be like we are, regular people. But when a regular man with a wife and children comes out and says that he wants to be a man, I will always oppose that man and I will never sign a law to defend them.”

„When they say, gay parade and all that, come on... they say: we have to ask what's ours. But as long as you were keeping quiet, no one was bothering you, were they...”

These kinds of comments show the importance of information sources and content, terms of reference, and the influence of the media for the formation of opinions and attitudes in citizens.

GROUPS WITH DISTINCT PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Within the scope of the research, the interviewees talked about people with distinct physical characteristics, such as skin color or other visual traits. The discussion was mainly about Chinese and Nigerian people. No strong negative attitude was exhibited towards Nigerians, even though students often mentioned their skin color. The negative attitudes towards Chinese people were caused by their active economic activity, while the comparatively mild attitude towards Nigerians may be explained by their lesser economic means.

“The visual aspect is very important. When a German person comes here, you can’t really tell that they are German until they start speaking. You can tell if a person is Chinese right away”.

MAIN ATTITUDES TOWARDS MINORITIES

Five most widespread positions could be observed from the group discussions with the interviewees:

1. Demographic threat

In connection with religious and other types of minorities, the main threat perceived by interviewees is the potential demographic problem of Georgia. This implies the scarcity of Georgians and also Orthodox Christians, and specifically, the tendency of these groups to decrease more rapidly compared to followers of other religions.

“There is a war in Syria and Afghanistan, migrants are going to Europe. The USA does not accept migrants. France and Great Britain have a bad demographic policy, that will not work for us. The nation is shrinking and there are more and more migrants and they are asking for equal rights and comfort. Muslims reproduce very quickly and in a few years, we may be faced with an entirely different situation, which will not work for us. Moreover, they are telling us that the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations are growing and ours is decreasing”.

“There are two kinds of demographic policies – China, for example, decided the opposite, that people cannot have more than two

children. We, on the other hand, have this severe demographic problem. Georgians are not reproducing”.

“Georgia has always been tolerant, this commercial road went through us and many ethnic majorities lived in the country and it was not a problem because the Georgian nation was reproducing too”.

During discussions about religious minorities, a large amount of time was spent talking about Muslims, and attitudes varied from one region to another. On the one hand, the matter of construction of mosques was active, being especially significant in Adjara, Akhaltsikhe and Kakheti; and on the other hand, discussion mostly examined the incompatibility of Muslims’ ethnic descent with Georgian identity and its proximity with Turkey. This was explained by the following historical arguments:

“Historically, we have a very bad relationship with them [Muslims]. Everyone around us, only Russia has the same religion as us”.

“...Muslims are Georgian too, they are not Russian”.

“I am not saying there should not be a mosque. They live here and they can have their own place to pray. But the number of mosques and churches should not be the same. There should be more churches than mosques.”

“Turkish people who come here, why I should go to one and why I should start working for them. It irritates me that as soon as you go there, they ask you whether you are a Christian or not. This is Georgia, of course I am a Christian”.

Besides Muslims, from the discussed religious minorities, a particular negative attitude was observed towards Jehovah's witnesses, especially, their form of preaching their faith. Students noted that it is not "pleasant" when people stop you on the street or come to your house to spread their religion, although not every interviewee agreed with these opinions and part of them believe that in the name of Georgian hospitality, they are guests and should be treated as such.

"Yes, but Jehovah's Witnesses' buildings should not be in front of churches, they should be further away".

"We do not persecute anyone because of their religion, but it's human psychology, when you are going to mass and you hear prayer of a representative of a different religion from five meters away, hostility kicks in".

"They come to your house. We, Georgians have this tradition that when a guest arrives, you cannot close the door in their face..."

2. The fear/threat of turning into a minority (from the majority's position)

During group discussions, a certain fear and alienation could be observed towards minorities, while the majority is perceived as some kind of separate identity, whose representatives appear to be only Georgian, Orthodox Christian, heterosexual people, while minorities and their social activity is perceived as threatening and there is a fear of becoming a minority.

"The population is protesting the fact that mosques are being built next to churches, or they say that mass construction of mosques should not be allowed, the majority does not like it".

“I, for instance, have neighbors who are Jehovah’s witnesses and I have a very good relationship with them. We never talk about religion”.

3. “They can be by themselves, within boundaries”

During the discussions about minorities, a clear desire was exhibited to isolate them, put them within “boundaries”, which draws imaginary borders in the environment and society, where the main space still belongs to the majority, the so-called dominant groups. These imaginary spaces imply public spaces, because of the necessity for minorities to “know their own place” in exchange for “offering” them safety, as mentioned by the interviewees. In addition, interviewees assume that conversion from Orthodox Christian to other religions happens because of economic poverty and for the purpose of material gain, which they view negatively and as a threat to the country.

“There should be boundaries for relationships between people of different religious faith. Being buddies and familiar, that’s alright... but participation in religious services is unacceptable. An Orthodox Christian should not go into a mosque or a Catholic church. Of course, if you do not respect those rules, you betray your faith”.

“It is not acceptable to build Muslim houses of prayer next to Christian houses of prayer. It’s very nice that in Tbilisi, there are synagogues, mosques and Catholic churches next to each other, but... that much tolerance is no good. Like those migrants are all over Europe, and these Muslims, I don’t know, the same thing will happen to us”.

“...But since always, it’s been “language, land and faith” – they are all connected with each other. Everyone should know their own place in a country. They can be, we are not going to harm them, but they need to know their place. There is poverty in Georgia, they promise people things in exchange for becoming members. That is the cause of all the troubles”.

Being within boundaries may be the alternative to the private space where “everyone can do whatever they want”. However, public space, where different people gather and coexist is an essential precondition for tolerance. During discussions about the isolation and exclusion of minority groups, calling them to “stay within boundaries” becomes a contradictory statement.

4. Familiarity

While discussing minorities, interviewees displayed a tendency of being accepting of non-Orthodox, non-Georgian or non-heterosexual persons (not groups) as far as these were their friends and acquaintances. In this case, it is significant that tolerance was displayed towards individuals and not groups, a form of tolerance exclusive only to those who are “familiar”.

“For instance, I am Orthodox Christian. I have a friend who is an atheist, a Buddhist, Jehovah’s Witness, I have cousins, too. Personally, I do not have any problems with them and neither do they have a problem with me”.

“...Although my Jehovah’s Witness friends do not try to force their faith on me. What causes dissatisfaction is that they always try, everywhere, to force their religion on you”.

5. Love thy enemy, as a form of tolerance

During discussion on minorities, interviewees explained tolerance towards different religious minorities by the Christian dogma „love thy enemy” and the tradition of hospitality. This is a good indicator of their dominance and access to power, which allows them to put others in their place and decide how they should live.

“If any of you have been to Akhaltsikhe, you know that the Muslim mosque and Christian church are next to each other. We should take example from that. We should not kick anyone out of the mosque”.

GEORGIANNES AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

According to the study – „Generations“¹⁶ – conducted in 2012, religion is more important for the younger generation than for the older generation, the younger generation is less tolerant towards representatives of other religions and their religious identity is a stronger identifying factor for them than Georgian citizenship (p. 55). While in this research, we come across opinions according to which interviewees do not perceive religion as the main characteristic for being Georgian, they do call Georgia a Christian country and view tolerance accordingly. Acceptance of others is explained by interviewees with Christian morality, based on “loving thy enemy” and hospitality to foreigners. The notion of tolerance also acquires a different meaning within the scope of this research in connection with minority groups, reflected in a more positive attitude towards ethnic groups compared to groups with a religion other than Orthodox Christian, which are negatively perceived, and this also causes a lack of acceptance of sexual minorities, because students base their intolerance of this group on a religious perspective. This tendency can be explained by the renewal of religiousness after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In 2016, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation published the study “Generation in Transition”¹⁷, the main focus of which is the youth in Georgia. The study includes an overview of the opinions and attitudes of the

¹⁶ Sumbadze, Nana. *Generations and Values*. Tbilisi: Institute for Policy Studies, 2012.

¹⁷ *Generation in Transition*. Tbilisi: Friedrich Ebert Fond, 2017.

youth towards various issues. The data collected within the scope of the study concerning aspirations to migrate concurs with the data of this research. The youth wishes to leave the country and among their motivating factors, the first ones are better living standards and better educational opportunities (p.99), while as for their experience of discrimination, according to the study, interviewees consider themselves more often discriminated against because of their education level and their economic background rather than because of their membership in a minority group. Although, in these cases, the interviewee's identity and membership of certain groups plays a significant role, because if they are not a member of a minority group, they are less likely to have experienced being discriminated against.

Based on the attitudes observed within the scope of this study, it can be posited that among the interviewees, religious identity is stronger than national identity.

MAIN ATTITUDES

Within the scope of the research, the main attitudes towards minorities are contradictory and waver between leading with tradition and modernity, human rights, democratic and religious principles. There is a strong tendency among interviewees to talk about human rights and “correct” these human rights with a religious narrative. Religious narrative can be seen as an absolute approach, which can explain areas where religion has (or should have) no connection.

Besides modernity, attitudes towards minorities are also influenced by the perceived safety of the Georgian nation, expressed by a fear of becoming a numeric minority, which in turn means less access to resources or concession of other cultural privileges enjoyed by the majority.

Among attitudes towards ethnic and religious groups, a lesser level of tolerance can be observed towards difference in religion. Among religious groups, a hierarchy of tolerance exists towards specific sections. As for ethnic minorities, attitudes towards them can be characterized as more tolerant, since, based on group discussions within the scope of the research, it can be posited that religious identity is a stronger defining trait of being Georgian than ethnic identity.

According to Robert David Putnam (1941), there are two types of social capital: bonding capital and bridging capital. Bonding capital keeps people from leaving their social circles, because that is where they feel most comfortable and safe, with people who are similar to themselves.

Bridging capital, on the other hand, is used to describe interactions with people who are different, which creates connections with various groups and generates a wider social network. These two types of capital support each other, although the bridging capital is more relevant for measuring diversity and tolerance. From Putnam's point of view of social capital, differences between groups are seen as resources and not as a cause of conflict.

Gordon Allport's (1954) "contact hypothesis" refers and is used to establish contact between different social groups. According to this theory, if someone has been in contact even once with a person of a different identity/group, trust towards this person is increased and hostility is diminished. Although defenders of the "conflict theory" believe that limited resources cause growing fear and lack of acceptance towards others. According to this approach, diversity and differences lead to the strengthening of solidarity inside the group, among similar people, and increase mistrust of people who are different, those outside the group. Based on this theory, the more people are in contact with persons different from them, the stronger becomes mistrust between them and loyalty to their own group of people who are similar to them.

In the case of Georgia, ethnic, religious, economic, linguistic, cultural, political and other types of differences between groups and diversity inside the group, including age, language, gender, education and type of settlement, create a multitude of small groups and therefore decrease the feeling of unity and social solidarity. Normally, in such cases, the bonding and bridging social capital theory should work, according to the theoretical part about bonding capital, for example, a Georgian, Orthodox Christian man will make friends among people with the same characteristics as him, which is a negative factor for social integration and the social mobility of members of other groups.

To overcome such attitudes, a wider understanding of identity should be introduced, in which each small and large group will find themselves. This widening should also cause a review of the resources distribution system on a governmental level as well as for micro groups, introducing the notion of justice and equal rights – each citizen should feel equal, regardless of their group identities.

Identity should not be a category that determines and defines people's opportunities and possibilities in life. On the contrary, it should be an integral part of cultural diversity and society, its social capital, to be perceived as a resource instead of a limitation. With the increase of migration, in this information age, the development of communication technologies, because of active mutual exchange of cultural values, the future belongs to diversity and differences. In this context, the bonding and bridging factors of social capital should be used as a means to create a safe, tolerant and accepting environment.

MAIN PUBLIC DISCOURSE ABOUT MINORITIES IN MEDIA

Stuart Hall¹⁸ (1978) defined media discourse as a public idiom which is not homogenous and its main characteristic is selectivity, which means that journalists ascribe a category (political, economic, cultural) to specific stories and decide whether to cover them or not. By selecting stories, the media makes a structural categorization and thus transforms their importance. The main criteria are professional, technical and commercial limitations, and these play a significant role in the determination and definition of social identities, influencing them. According to Hall, world news and the media in general is dominantly oriented on scandals and sexuality, and in the process of news coverage, the media transforms a specific case into a finished media product using a specific language. Most importantly, various media channels develop their own language to address a specific audience, which, on one hand, should promote diversity, but according to Hall, has nothing to do with pluralism, because such linguistic specifics are ideologically limited. Despite each media having its own specific speech, which depends on their specific audience, they still share the “consensus in values”, which is more deeply rooted in society than language (Hall, 1978; pp 60–61). Therefore, each media decides what information to cover under what category, with what language, at what time and for how long. This approach creates the illusion of a diverse media, although ideologized categories and the “consensus in values” existing in society exert a strong influence on

¹⁸ Hall, Stuart. Policing The Crisis. Critical Social Studies.

the media's standards, limiting their "choice" to cover what they want and the choices they do make are based on context.

According to Stuart Hall, stories covered by the media wear a mask of objectivity and impartiality, even though the same stories may not even be considered as worthy of mentioning in reports by various specialists and experts. Therefore, the media has the power to confirm reality and give validity to a story. To concentrate attention on a specific case, media discourse uses allocation of time slots and the notion of public interest. According to Hall, scheduling coverage and using public idioms are a result of the "consensus of values" of daily communication.

According to Hall, everyday speech is saturated with dominant conclusions and interpretations with which formal, official terms and discourse is translated into colloquial dialogues. Despite its power to translate material within the same language, the media are not autonomous in creating discourse and need to base it on a specific story's connection with stereotypes and widely spread values like safety and justice.

In mass media, stories are covered using popular discourse. Stuart Hall calls this the prevalent cultural order, in which the creation of meaning is actively ongoing and these popular, dominant meanings are used to describe what is going on in the society. Dominant meanings reflect the opinions of the prevalent discourse or positions, and the media legitimizes and validates these, giving them a more natural aspect. According to Hall, in such cases, mass media takes on the role of arriving to a public consensus and spreading it, which makes the media an instrument for the reproduction of the prevalent ideology.

When discussing the influences and role of the mass media, in addition to news reports, the entertainment industry is a significant component. In his book "Media, Modernity and Technology", David Morley speaks of the importance of entertainment media, which stimulates

public perceptions that exist in the society with seemingly frivolous entertainment tools, which, based on empirical research, acquires a large significance, since it plays an important role in the determination of social reality and therefore reinforces the naturalization and normalization of the prevalent ideology.

Media discourse is one of the main components in the process of research of social issues, because media is what generates and disseminates opinions which afterwards are presented to us as the public opinion or the perception and attitudes of the majority.

Access to public discourse is connected to influence and control on texts and contexts, which is mostly the privilege of “symbolic elites” (Teun van Dijk; 1943). Journalists play a special role in the processes of presentation of discourse and development of public opinion because it is often up to them to decide who will speak in the media, where, for how long, how, with whom etc. Therefore, whoever controls the text controls the discourse as well, and the other way around. The media influence people’s everyday life by disseminating and delivering information the way they choose to. The balance, objectivity and impartiality characteristic for “traditional” journalism does not exclude that the media fail to cover minorities with equal attention or appropriately. In 1997¹⁹, the European Council officially admitted in its recommendations about minorities and diverse society that the media can play a positive part in the fight against intolerance towards ethnic, religious, and cultural minority groups.

The topic of the text has the largest influence on discourse and it is mostly expressed in the headlines; therefore, it is the easiest to mem-

¹⁹ Recommendations by the Council of Europe are available at: <https://colectivociajpp.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/stuart-hall-etc-policing-the-crisis-mugging-the-state-and-law-and-order-critical-social-studies-1978.pdf>, last retrieved on [20.06.2017]

orize for media users.²⁰ Whoever controls the discourse directly or indirectly controls what people think or talk about. Local discourse is also influenced by global texts and narratives, although understanding their meaning is possible only if local specific characteristics are taken into account, and the terms media discourses use to describe events or people acquires a special significance. A widespread media discourse is the “us-them” dichotomy, a crime committed by “us” being described as mutiny or fight for freedom, while a crime committed by “them” being characterized by their demographic traits (racial, ethnic, religious, gender identity). In the “us-them” dichotomy, “ours” always moderates any discrimination in the name of popular discourse, public opinion or the majority and may therefore appear more acceptable and democratic.

Media would not be a subject for research if it did not have a strong influence on public discourse. Of course, media does not directly influence the formation of values and tendencies in people, because people already have some characteristics by the time they start using the media and they read news or follow media coverage accordingly. Information plays a significant part in the formation of people’s perceptions, although aside from knowledge, there are personal opinions about what happens in the world. If these perceptions are widely shared despite factual knowledge, we refer to them as attitudes, which, instead of creating a new discourse for each event, allow symbolic elites to use general and fundamental values which then define small occurrences, everyday events and their representation. This approach is called an ideology, which uses specific values to define predetermined communication models and stereotyped attitudes. The influence of ideology and

²⁰ Van Dijk, Teun A. “Discourse, Power and Symbolic Elites.” Barcelona.cat. March 2010. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://lameva.barcelona.cat/bcnmetropolis/arxiu/en/page5f80.html?id=21&ui=337>.

symbolic elites is not always necessarily bad, because the goal of the ideological discourse may be based on public interest, for example, clean water, which is an important issue for every citizen. That is when the legitimacy of ideology and general values comes into question. Which is more legitimate and why? This issue also displays a dichotomy between the majority and minorities and is mostly on the side of the majority.

There are not many separate studies about the media available for Georgia and the fact that the information and communication media change very quickly further complicates things, conducted studies soon becoming outdated and irrelevant. Therefore, specific studies aim at determining the media discourse on a given issue, which in turn displays a knowledge or a perception about the condition of the media that is fragmented or out of context. In general, information about the variety of the Georgian media, its nature, and development in time, tendencies and characteristics, factors of influence are not unified and available. Therefore, media discourse and the study of its popular types imply a specific issue and the context of a specific study.

Within the scope of this research, Georgian popular media discourse overviews the common and widespread perceptions, which are not noticeable at first glance or without scratching the surface and require in-depth examination.

Regulations in the media are mostly based on self-regulation and do not concern the content component, while the work of the journalists is regulated by ethics and journalistic standards. Namely, the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters and Charter of Journalistic Ethics, which is based on 11 principles and the Public Broadcaster's Record, which should ensure production of programs with the participation of minorities. Therefore, the media try to cover minorities mostly through self-regulation.

According to media experts interviewed within the scope of the research, this approach is calculated for a long-term perspective and aims

at constructing ethical principles on internal rather than external regulations. This will promote the strengthening of the journalists' sensitivity while coverage of minority issues and corresponding advance of journalistic standards, which should be directed towards the eradication of discrimination. This approach is directed at avoiding media control and censorship.

TELEVISION

Based on a study²¹ (2011) conducted by Transparency International – Georgia, the most important information source for the Georgian population is television – 80% in Tbilisi, over 90% in the regions. For the youth, this role has been appropriated by the internet and the index of internet use is increasing. According to a study published by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in 2017, 76% of the population cites television as the first source of information for political and current events, 16% choose the internet, and the remaining population turns to neighbors, newspapers and magazines and friends. Among non-Georgian channels, Russian television channels are in the lead. For television, the coverage of minority issues is connected with specific events and the tone of the coverage varies according to context. For instance, in news reports, representatives of ethnic and religious minorities often overlap and televisions cover them in the context of a crime or a conflict, while the LGBT community (sexual minorities) retains an exotic niche, reflecting Stuart Hall's insights about world media discourse on scandals and sexuality.

The context of entertainment programs is even more vacant of standards or journalistic ethics and is entirely built on the “consensual

²¹ The study by Transparency International Georgia „Georgian Advertising Market”, 2016 is available at: <https://goo.gl/PF6oMx>, last retrieved on [21.06.2017]

agreements” that Hall calls public idioms. In the Georgian context, entertainment (“yellow”) programs containing hate speech are justified by basing it on the existing attitudes in the society, which allows the media to entirely avoid its responsibility to view stories as actual stories of people as opposed to just news. Such cases are completely dehumanized in the name of public attitudes and reality, which are actually set as standards by the media, with its prevalent political and ideological discourse.

One of the media experts interviewed within the scope of the research observed that television airtime is often taken by members of the political and cultural elite, and the rare exceptions when a regular citizen is on the screen are connected to the social “filters” serving television, discourse and ideology. Such filters can be scandals, crimes, sexuality, etc. Although, periodically, television still offers programs that are strongly distinct from being oriented on scandals and exoticism, but their ratings are usually quite low.

PRINT MEDIA

As for media in general, there is no available unified study about the print media discourse; therefore, it is difficult to make conclusions based on methodologically processed data. According to general observations by media experts, in Georgia the majority of the print media has occupied a more conservative niche²² compared to other types of media and accordingly, it uses linguistic characteristics that mainly have religious²³ connotations in its coverage of minorities. Minority issues are popular, albeit in a negative context.

²² Interview with a media expert

²³ Ekaladze, Zurab. “Homosexuality – Gravest Sin.” *Orthodoxy.ge*. 2001. Accessed June 15, 2017. http://www.orthodoxy.ge/tsodva_satnoeba/homoseqsualizmi.htm.

ONLINE MEDIA

Print media and online media are combined together and television channels have their own websites too, putting the entire media on the internet and therefore making it impossible to differentiate the various types of media based only on technical characteristics. Nevertheless, some popular online editions can be characterized as having a loyal attitude towards minorities, expressed in their linguistic discourse or their choice of interviewees. Selection of issues and corresponding respondents remains the key characteristic for coverage of a given story for online and print media as well as television.

According to the study *Hate Speech and Xenophobia*²⁴ conducted by the Media Development Foundation (MDF) in 2014–2015, the media itself is leading in terms of xenophobic or hate speech (35%), the remaining percentage being distributed among representatives of the public, politicians, and religious servants. According to the same study, out of 436 instances of xenophobia, the main source of the largest number – 154 – was media again, the most common form of discrimination being against ethnic groups and Turkophobia/Islamophobia. Discrimination against religion and Armenophobic expressions are also popular according to the study, which, in addition, demonstrates that many xenophobic statements are connected with the issue of selling lands and this topic displays negative attitudes towards Eastern countries in the media. Print media takes first place in terms of discrimination, followed by television and online media.

According to the report *Hate Speech*²⁵ compiled by the MDF in 2016, out of 868 discriminatory comments, 52% are homophobic, 17% are

²⁴ Kontsurashvili, Tamar. “Hate Speech and Xenophobia.” Mdfgeorgia.ge. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://www.mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/19/file/Hate%20Speech-2015-GEO-web.pdf>.

²⁵ Kontsurashvili, Tamar. “Hate Speech and Xenophobia.” Mdfgeorgia.ge. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://www.mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/19/file/Hate%20Speech-2015-GEO-web.pdf>.

Turkophobic, 8% discriminate against religion, 8% are xenophobic, 3% are Armenophobic and 2% are racist.

According to the study “Research on Coverage of Sexual Orientation/ Gender Identity-related Issues in the Media”²⁶ conducted in 2011, two main tendencies can be observed in the articles or stories about sexual minorities in the media: (1) inexact terminology, which, according to the study, is expressed by the difficulty to introduce new terminology in the language and (2) the criteria for selection of interviewees by journalists may in fact be strong hate speech towards sexual minorities. The study concludes that the situation in the media is improving in terms of opportunities to express themselves and space/time in the media for members of the LGBT community (sexual minorities).

Generally, the media exoticises minority issues, especially during coverage of religious and sexual minorities. Ethnic minorities and communities with distinct racial characteristics are relatively absent from the media, or coverage is connected to crime and negative events.

²⁶ Aghdgomaleshvili, Eka. “Media Coverage of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.” [Http://minority.ge/](http://minority.ge/). February 15, 2012. Accessed June 15, 2017. http://minority.ge/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Seqsualur_orientaciastan_da_genderul_identobastan_dakavshirebuli_sakitxebis_gashuqeba_mediashi_november_2011.pdf.

Within the scope of these research, during interviews with students, access to information was observed to be connected to a hierarchy of language and linguistic obstacles. Namely, group discussions in each city participating in the research exhibited a hierarchy in information language, expressed by active use of televised news reports from neighboring countries, especially by the older generation. This was explained by their knowledge of Russian language and the limitation in coverage of some regions by Georgian television channels. For the older generation, television remains the main source of information, and because of their better knowledge of Russian, Armenian, Azerbaijani language, and interest in program content. The older generation has a tendency to depend on neighboring countries' news report or entertainment programs, which keeps them in an entirely different information range. Besides, the student narrative displays a tendency to believe that Georgian news or entertainment programs are less oriented on the people living in the regions and focuses on the population of the center – Tbilisi, while coverage of ethnic and religious minorities is only provided in a negative context and in connection with crime, conflict and disputes.

„I'll tell you how it is, those who have Magtisar have access, the others do not”.

“Even the weather forecast, they show it until Borjomi and do not continue to Akhaltsikhe”.

“My father watches every channel in Georgian, my Grandfather – in Russian, “Vesti” and the first channel (“Pervii”) ...”

“Facebook and internet information, it’s like this – they will show 20 professors saying that these sexual minorities are a normal thing, then there is a new study that is made up and says that it’s a disorder. Most of the doctors say there are only two sexes”.

“They do not broadcast regional news on television”.

“My father watches foreign news reports, mainly in Russian, because he speaks the language better”.

“It’s a matter of trust, you cannot trust any television completely and the social media neither. I prefer to check several sources”.

The issue of state language is significant for the older generation not only in the informational context, but also in everyday life and the employment process. Their communication language remains Russian to this day, at home, ethnic minorities speak the language of their own ethnos, and for those who wish to be employed in the public sector, Georgian language is required.

PUBLIC SPACE: THE BOUNDARY AND LIMIT OF TOLERANCE

“They can do whatever they want in their bedrooms, as long as they do not take it outside” – this is the Georgian formulation of one of the most widespread type of tolerance towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, referred to in this research as sexual minorities or the LGBT community. The boundaries set by dominant groups for minority communities often delimit public space, which can also be referred to as social space. Tolerance is usually displayed (or not displayed) in spaces of concentration of diversity and not in bedrooms or private spaces. It is public space and social environment that give tolerance meaning and not the private nature of a given space. The description of public spaces may in its turn allow for a modern definition of tolerance and a new interpretation of the minority-majority dichotomy.

Aside from the LGBT community, it is essential for any non-dominant group to respect specific boundaries set for them in order to be tolerated by the dominant group. The only way to achieve this is for minority groups to remain subordinate to the majority or dominant groups. Namely, the precondition to tolerance is a low representation in public space and lesser activity, which demonstrates the closed nature and low level of social mobility of the specific society where such conditions are considered to be the norm.

SPECIFICS OF THE POST-SOVIET REGION: THE EXAMPLE OF GEORGIA

According to the 2017 survey of Pew Research Centre²⁷ on Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe, the restrictions of religious life and intolerance towards religions during the Soviet Union gave rise to the current resurrection of religiousness in the region. The study uses a quantitative survey according to which Georgia is considered the most religious of the studied countries (87% of the population believes their country to be “most religious”, followed by Armenia with 81%, when the religiosity index for Georgia in 1970–90 was 25%), and Estonia is considered the least religious (23%). Authors of the study believe this data may be a reflection of political geography. Since the Orthodox countries are further toward the east and most of them were part of the Soviet Union, they are more religious, while Catholic countries, which, according to the Pew Research, are now less religious, are located further toward the west and were less influenced by the Soviet Union.

According to the Pew Research Centre, in countries with a dominant Orthodox Christian population, 70% of the people on average say that to truly share the national identity of their country, to be “truly Georgian”, for example, one must be Orthodox. The index for this opinion in

²⁷ Mitchell, Travis. “Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe.” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project. May 10, 2017. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>.

Post-Soviet countries is highest for Georgia – 81% and Armenia – 82%. In addition, according to the survey, for countries in which Orthodox Christian is the dominant religion, a large part of the population believes that their culture is superior to others.

Such dominance of religion on other identities may be caused by many factors, including: the inertia of the Soviet totalitarian mentality, and strengthening of ethno-nationalist rhetoric with its religious connotations after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the unification of state and church instead of secularity, many years of government building secularity policy on privileging only one dominant religious group, while protecting the rights of minorities was of inferior importance; the continuous increase of the tendency of the Patriarchate of Georgia to accumulate social, economic and political capital, while state institutions and the judicial systems have not developed appropriately; the pro-Russian inclination of the Orthodox church; the domination of anti-liberal, anti-western attitudes and the “common faith” narrative in their discourse, which automatically connects the strengthening of democratic institutions and pluralism to threats, the loss of national identity and traditions. It seems that the “cultural defense” mechanism characteristic for nations with small populations, with the influence of foreign policy and geopolitical factors, is exhibited in such antagonistic attitudes towards minorities.

OPPRESSED MAJORITY AND OPPRESSED MINORITY

During discussions conducted within the scope of this research, a popular opinion among interviewees was: “we are more oppressed than others”. With this formulation, students imply that they are speaking from the position of the majority, in which they are “more” oppressed. Although they represent the dominant group (“we”), while “they” are representatives of minorities, with less social influence and low integration rate, who are also oppressed because of their lack of certain rights or access to resources.

Discussions with students showed that oppression of so-called minorities and majority has its own forms, which speaks of the existing inequality and mutual exclusion between social groups, manifests signs of social stratification, namely, unequal distribution of rights, privileges, resources and power. Furthermore, many groups are entirely excluded from this distribution based on their cultural, economic or social characteristics, which points to low possibilities of social mobility and involvement in an open society, democracy and civic engagement, and to increasing inequality.

CONCLUSION

Based on a superficial observation of societies in the 21st century, it can be posited that their most prominent characteristic is a growing diversity of ethnic, religious and other types of identities. High migration rates and the information industry are the main factors fueling this diversity. The variety of composition of societies and their differences, the struggle of minority groups existing within them is considered a value for democratic countries and modern society. The multitude of ethnic, religious and other small groups decreased a unified solidarity within society and creates separate, fragmented forms of social capital. Identities of small groups may be contradictory and this may become a cause for conflict, which is possible to overcome with a wider, broader and universal identity, manifested in human rights and the idea of equality among humans, a formulation in which members of small groups will easily achieve a sense of self-expression, belonging and safety. This broad identity will increase social capital and positively affect its members.

Tolerance, acceptance of others and the issue of identities become even more relevant in the context of safety and social unity when differences are brought forward that exist in modern societies, including in Georgia. Therefore, it is important to comprehend the significance and influence of differences and to use them as a resource as opposed to something dangerous, an “enemy” that needs to be tolerated and “endured”. To understand and eradicate such tendencies, the role of the

education system and the media is essential. In the Georgian context, with the domination of the Orthodox Christian church (80% of the population is Orthodox Christian; the state financing of the Patriarchate of Georgia is up to 30 million Georgian Lari per year)²⁸, an identity built only on religious, gender belonging or ethnic groups keeps the state and society from being flexible and achieving unity and solidarity. This gives negative connotations to these differences and viewing them as threats, “hostile identities” and thus creating a tension and intolerance that affects the development of the country negatively. Of course, context plays an important role in such situations and any identity that is not built on Georgian ethnicity, nationalism and Orthodox Christianity acquires an “opposite” meaning and is viewed as introduced from “outside”, which aggravates the perception of the outside world, its events and peaceful equal coexistence.

²⁸ Refer to the joint study by the Institute for Tolerance and Diversity (TDI) and the Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC), “State Policy on Funding of Religious Organizations, analysis of 2014–2015 practices”, 2016, available at: <https://goo.gl/j9oFhj>, last retrieved on [26.06.2017]

RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this research was to determine student narrative towards minority groups and the role of the media in the process of its development. The students participating in the study displayed practices of use of insufficient, unverified information and false facts, that engender their reasoning, opinions and attitudes.

Based on the main findings of the study, the corresponding institutions are encouraged to take into account the following recommendations:

Ministry of Education and Science

- Strengthen interreligious and intercultural components in the Teacher Training Program;
- Evaluate teachers' attitudes in terms of tolerance in the competence testing process (certificate examinations);
- Introduce historical events, civic values and literature texts depicting religious and ethnic diversity and tolerance culture in school textbooks;
- Require under the textbook development rules that the contents of the textbook shall take into account the principles of tolerance, thoroughly reflect diversity and describe events in a language that is academic and neutral in terms of religion and ethnicity;
- Regularly and systematically conduct activities that aim at raising students' awareness on human rights, tolerance and religious-ethnic diversity.

Self-Governmental Bodies

- For the purpose of raising the students' mobility and promote their involvement in cultural activities, improve the transportation system, its availability and update to a payment system by card, so that they are able to use their discount student transportation fare (such privileges are available to students of universities in the capital city);
- Encourage cultural diversity.

Media

- When covering issues in connection with religious/ethnic minorities or the LGBT community, journalists should have the corresponding information, be highly sensitive towards the issues in question, avoid political manipulation and association of minority groups with conflict situations and crime;
- The media should refrain from using and covering hate speech towards minorities; in cases of use of hate speech by interviewees, journalists should be critical, define the problematic issue, set aside facts from comments;
- Through coverage of religious, ethnic and cultural diversity, encourage reduction of the stereotypes, phobia and intolerance existing in the society.

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