

THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON NATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION: AN ETHNOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE CASE OF GEORGIA

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Abstract

In the era of modern globalization, migration has become one of the most significant social phenomena, influencing both individual and collective identities. The aim of this paper is to analyse the impact of migration processes in the context of the formation and transformation of national identity. The research is based on an interdisciplinary approach, combining ethnological, sociological, and political perspectives. Within the ethnological analysis, the mechanisms of cultural adaptation and the preservation of traditions are explored, while the sociological aspect focuses on migrants' social interactions and their level of integration into society. Simultaneously, the political-analytical perspective examines the role of the state and political discourse in maintaining national identity. The paper demonstrates that migration entails both the risk of identity loss and the potential for its renewal and enrichment. As a result, national identity emerges as a dynamic and constantly evolving construct that, under the influence of migratory processes, takes on new forms. Particular attention is given to the experience of Georgian diasporas, which provides the opportunity to analyse unique mechanisms for preserving and transforming identity.

Keywords: migration, national identity, interdisciplinary approach, ethnological perspective, socio-political influence

Introduction

Migration is one of the most large-scale and complex processes that plays a crucial role in the social, political, and cultural transformations of the modern world.¹ As a result of globalization, migratory flows have triggered radical changes in the lives of individuals and families, as well as in societies.² This process has significantly influenced the perception of national identity, which has become one of the most debated and important research subjects in contemporary social sciences.

National identity, as a cultural, historical, and socio-political construct, undergoes challenges and transformative processes under the conditions of migration. Migration gives rise to new identities and alters the relationships between migrants and host populations, often leading to socio-cultural tensions. However, it also creates new integrative and hybrid models. Therefore, analysing the multifaceted interaction between migration and identity is essential both in national and global contexts.

It is noteworthy that the study of national identity requires the synthesis of global and local factors, which is why an interdisciplinary approach drawing on the methods and theories of ethnology, sociology, and political science provides the most coherent and in-depth research framework. This paper examines the impact of migration on the formation of national identity through such an interdisciplinary lens, enabling us to explore the processes of both individual and collective identity transformation.

Moreover, the paper investigates the political role of the state and the dynamics of public attitudes, which play a significant part in shaping national consciousness and migrant integration.

¹ Castles, S., and Miller, M. J., *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, Guilford Press, 2009, p. 102.

² Vertovec, S., "Super-diversity and its implications", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 6, 2007, pp. 1024–1054.

The case of Georgia is particularly interesting, as over the past three decades, a significant portion of the country's population has lived abroad, leading to structural changes in both individual identity and national unity.³ Diasporic practices, forms of cultural adaptation, and new models of self-identification offer a unique opportunity to study the mechanisms of national identity transformation under the conditions of globalization.

Considering public and academic interest, this research is both significant and timely not only for Georgia but also for countries where migration dynamics have had a considerable impact on social, political, economic, and other processes.

The Relevance of the Topic and the Significance of the Research Issue

Migration has become one of the central social phenomena of the modern era. Against the backdrop of globalization, economic inequality, and regional conflicts, the movement of people leads not only to demographic changes but also to cultural and identity transformations.⁴ Within this context, the issue of national identity acquires particular significance, as it undergoes re-evaluation, transformation, and the integration of new elements in the migratory setting.⁵

Understanding this process allows us to explore how the notion of “national belonging” evolves under conditions of global mobility, and how the state and society can support the cultural integration of the diaspora without losing national distinctiveness.

Moreover, this issue is important from an ethnological perspective as well, as it provides an opportunity to study strategies of cultural adaptation and the mechanisms behind the formation of transnational identities.⁶ Within the framework of social sciences, this research fills a knowledge gap concerning the analysis of the interaction between identity politics and migration an increasingly prioritized topic in 21st-century global society.⁷

Thus, recognizing the inherent interdependence between migration and national identity contributes to the formulation of significant conclusions at both theoretical and practical levels particularly regarding respect for cultural diversity, integration policy development, and the preservation of national self-awareness.⁸

Research Methodology

This study is based on an interdisciplinary research approach that integrates theories and methods from ethnology, sociology, and political science. Such an approach is necessitated by the complexity of the research subject- migration is simultaneously a social, cultural, and political phenomenon, which requires a multidimensional and integrated analysis.

The study employs qualitative research methods aimed at a deep analysis of the transformation processes of national identity. The following approaches have been used:

1. **Case Study Method** - This approach involves a detailed analysis of the experiences of a specific diasporic community (e.g., the Georgian diaspora in Europe), illustrating how migration affects the preservation and transformation of national identity. The case study explores cultural practices, social relationships, and interactions with state policies.
2. **Comparative Analysis Method** - Applied to compare the characteristics of identity formation among migrants living in different countries and to identify distinct models of cultural adaptation. This method allows for an analysis of how the social and political environment of the host country influences migrants' self-identification.

³ Gamkrelidze, M., “Social Consequences of Migration in Georgia.” *Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 12, 2018, pp. 34–36.

⁴ Castles, S., and Miller, M. J., *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, Guilford Press, 2009, p. 1

⁵ Hall, S., *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Routledge, 1990, p. 235.

⁶ Clifford, J., *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 88

⁷ Faist, T., *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 212

⁸ Tajfel, H., *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 255.

3. Semiotic Analysis Method - Used to assess how national identity is reflected in language, traditions, and other cultural symbols. This method is particularly important for examining the subconscious layers of identity, revealing deeper mechanisms of migrant self-identification.
4. Documentary Analysis Method - Includes the study of state migration policy documents, reports from diasporic organizations, and media resources, which together provide insight into the socio-political context of migration.

The methodology is grounded in social identity theory and intercultural communication models, which help explore how national consciousness is formed and transformed in migratory environments. The research, conducted through an interdisciplinary lens, makes it possible to simultaneously evaluate the level of cultural adaptation, strategies for preserving identity, and the impact of state policies on these processes.

The collected data were analysed using semiotic analysis, thematic analysis, and comparative evaluation methods. These methods make it possible to identify both individual experiences and broader trends. The results of the study provide a significant theoretical and practical foundation, contributing to a deeper understanding of the transformation of national identity in the context of migration and reflecting the impact of these processes on social and political realities.

1. Theoretical Foundations of National Identity in the Context of Migration

The study of national identity is a complex and multidimensional field that encompasses various theories and approaches explaining how the self-perception of a nation or ethnic group is formed, maintained, and transformed within historical, social, and cultural contexts.

The Anglo-Irish political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson considered the nation to be an "imagined community" a cultural construct that enables people to perceive themselves as part of the same group, even when there is no direct physical interaction among them.

The contemporary British scholar and sociology professor at the University of London, Anthony D. Smith, viewed national identity through the lens of ethno-symbolism, where national identity is seen as a system of ethnic memory, myths, symbols, and historical narratives. According to Smith's theory, in the context of migration, these elements are reactivated, reshaped, and play a vital role in the preservation and adaptation of migrant identities.⁹

Stuart Hall, a British sociologist of Marxist orientation and a key figure in cultural and media studies, described identity as a hybrid and ever-evolving process, constantly reshaped through social and cultural influences. In his view, migration produces new identities that synthesize memories of the past with contemporary experiences.¹⁰

An important theoretical framework in this discourse is the Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and later expanded by John Turner. This theory aims to explain how and why individuals identify with certain groups and how this identification influences social behaviour and attitudes.¹¹

In the study of national identity and migration, the Georgian academic community has also made significant contributions, enriching the international theoretical discourse by incorporating local specificities. For example, L. Bakradze notes that national self-awareness is a dynamic and multilayered process influenced by both global and local socio-cultural factors.¹² T. Nozadze's research emphasizes the specific adaptive mechanisms of the Georgian diaspora, particularly the central role of language, religion, and cultural practices. M. Kobakhidze explores the transformation of national identity within

⁹ Smith, A., D., *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*. Routledge. 2009. pp.54.

¹⁰ Hall, S., "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Framework*, no. 36, 1996. pp. 222–237.

¹¹ Tajfel, H., Turner, J., "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Brooks/Cole, 1979. pp. 33–47.

¹² Bakradze, L., *Transformation of National Identity under Conditions of Global Mobility*. Tbilisi, 2018. pp. 45–60.

the interaction between migration and state policy, where personal and collective factors are interwoven.¹³

Thus, the combination of Western and Georgian theoretical perspectives allows for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of national identity in the context of migration.

2. Migration and the Transformation of National Identity

Migration is not merely a demographic or economic phenomenon it is a profound social and cultural process that transforms both individual and collective identities. In the contemporary era of globalization, as borders gradually lose their traditional significance, migration acquires a new symbolic function: it becomes a catalyst for identity dynamics and a space for intercultural communication.¹⁴

According to Anthony Giddens, in modern society, identity is no longer something inherited it is a constructive process that individuals must build through everyday social interactions. For migrants, the shift in cultural space often brings about significant transformations. Upon entering a new environment, they are compelled to reinterpret and adapt their identity to new social and cultural realities.¹⁵ In this process, migrants often develop a "transitional identity", one that simultaneously retains elements of their past cultural characteristics while integrating into the norms of the host society. As a result, identity becomes flexible and often hybrid.

Stuart Hall's concept of identity hybridity emphasizes that migrant identities are constantly evolving and are shaped by the clash and merging of cultures. Cultural hybridity creates a "third space" in which elements of old and new identities coexist.¹⁶ For example, the experience of Georgian emigrants in Europe shows that adapting to a new culture does not mean losing national identity on the contrary, that identity transforms and evolves in response to the new environment.¹⁷

Georgian scholars often refer to this process as "identity regeneration", in which traditional national markers language, religion, and cultural traditions retain a central role but acquire new meanings and functions.¹⁸ As L. Bakradze notes, Georgian national self-awareness becomes especially active in a foreign cultural environment.¹⁹

The impact of migration on the transformation of national identity is closely linked to the socio-political environment as well. State policy and the activities of diaspora organizations significantly influence how migrants perceive their national belonging. Western studies often note that policy frameworks that support cultural diversity create more favourable conditions for multilayered identity models, while assimilationist approaches tend to suppress cultural self-expression.²⁰

In the case of Georgia, emigration has simultaneously generated trends of both identity preservation and change. On the one hand, migrants maintain national symbols and traditions; on the other, new living conditions often lead to a re-evaluation of values and the formation of new self-perceptions. This results in the emergence of "transnational identity" a condition in which an individual belongs to two or more cultural spaces simultaneously.²¹

Example: Transformation of Georgian Migrant Identity in Europe (e.g., Germany or Italy)

Many Georgian migrants who live temporarily or permanently in European countries go through a process in which their national identity becomes intertwined with the preservation of Georgian

¹³ Nozadze, T., "Adaptation and Integration of the Georgian Diaspora." *Ethnos and Culture*, no. 12, 2020. pp. 112–130 & Kobakhidze, M., "National Identity Politics and Migration in Georgia." *Georgian Sociological Review*, no. 4, 2019. pp. 88–105.

¹⁴ Castles, S., & Miller, M., *The Age of Migration*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. p. 42.

¹⁵ Giddens, A., *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Polity Press, 1991. p. 70.

¹⁶ Hall, S., *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Routledge, 1996. pp. 110–115.

¹⁷ Nozadze, T., *Migration and National Consciousness*. Tbilisi: Universali Publishing, 2017. p. 45.

¹⁸ Bakradze, L., "Globalization and National Self-Consciousness." *Scientific Reviewer Journal*, 2019. p. 83.

¹⁹ Vertovec, S., *Transnationalism*, Routledge, 2009. p. 18.

²⁰ Favell, A., *Integration and Nations: The Nation-State and Migration*, Princeton University Press, 2014. P. 64.

traditions, language, and religion, while also adopting the host country's social norms, values, and lifestyle.

Real-life example: A woman who has worked in Italy for years is raising her child there. At home, she speaks Georgian and celebrates national holidays, but her child simultaneously learns in Italian, plays with Italian peers, and holds Italian citizenship.

- In this situation, the child's identity becomes multilayered they are both Georgian and Italian.
- The parent gradually acquires a "migrant identity", shaped by nostalgia for the homeland, experiences abroad, and often a sort of intermediate cultural position.

What does this example show us?

National identity is not fixed it is not solely tied to ethnicity or place of birth. Identity is dynamic, responsive to new social environments, and multilayered. A person can feel Georgian, European, and a migrant simultaneously.

Thus, migration is not merely a social movement but a complex and contradictory process of identity transformation, where tradition and modern experience interact. The transformation of national identity under migratory conditions represents not a loss, but a continuous process of re-evaluation, giving rise to new forms of preserving and enriching cultural self-identity.

3. State Policy, Diaspora, and the Preservation of National Identity

Migration has become one of the defining social processes in Georgia's modern history. The fact that a large portion of the population lives abroad has affected not only demographic but also cultural and identity-related dimensions. Therefore, the preservation of national identity and the involvement of the diaspora have become key priorities for both the state and civil society.

After the 1990s, especially between 1992 and 1995, a significant number of Georgian citizens were forced to leave the country due to economic crisis and wars. During this period, the first wave of the diaspora was formed in Greece, Turkey, and Russia. In these countries, Georgian emigrants established numerous associations that often served as cultural centers. For example, the "Georgian Community of Athens" (founded in 1996), the "Georgian Cultural Center" in Moscow (1998), and the "House of Georgian Art" in Istanbul continue to actively preserve Georgian culture and traditions to this day.

The second wave of migration began in the early 2000s, when Georgians moved more massively to Western Europe particularly to Italy, Germany, and France. For instance, the number of Georgians living in Italy tripled between 2005 and 2020, reaching over 80,000 today²². Among them, various cultural and religious communities have been established, including a Georgian church in Rome, a Georgian Sunday school in Milan, and several cultural associations aimed at preserving the Georgian language and culture among the younger generation.

In response to these processes, the Georgian state began formulating a targeted policy. In 2011, it adopted the "State Strategy for Cooperation with the Diaspora of Georgia," one of whose main goals was to preserve the national consciousness of compatriots living abroad and to strengthen their connection with the homeland.²³

Within the framework of this strategy, several initiatives have been implemented:

- Since 2013, the "Georgian School" program has been operating, offering online education in the Georgian language and culture to children living abroad;
- In 2016, a project to support return migration was launched, helping emigrants reintegrate economically and socially upon returning to Georgia;

²² IOM Georgia, Migration Profile of Georgia, 2023. pp. 22-25.

²³ "Georgian Diaspora and Migrant Associations in Germany, Greece and Turkey." International Centre for Migration Policy Development, April 2014. https://migration.commission.ge/files/full_version_web_ge.pdf [L.s. 18.11.2025].

- In 2020, the “Diaspora Engagement Fund” was established to provide financial support to Georgian cultural organizations abroad.

Specifically:

- In Germany, the Georgian community in Berlin has been hosting the annual cultural festival “Georgian Days in Berlin” (since 2017), featuring Georgian music, dance, and folk art exhibitions. Both Georgians and Germans participate, promoting intercultural dialogue and the popularization of Georgian identity.²⁴
- In France, the Paris-based Georgian Sunday school “*Georgian Language and Culture*” unites about 200 children who study the Georgian language, history, and traditions. The school is one of the successful examples of the state strategy, as it is directly funded by the Department for Diaspora Affairs.²⁵
- In Turkey, ethnic Georgians living in the Artvin and Trabzon regions have in recent years actively cooperated with Georgia’s Ministry of Culture to preserve their language and folklore.

It is important to note that migration trends have changed over time:

- In the 1990s, migration was primarily a strategy for economic survival;
- In the 2010s, it evolved into a form of social mobility migration for education and professional development;
- Since the 2020s, circular migration has become more visible, where emigrants periodically return to Georgia, maintaining business and family ties. This gives new meaning to the preservation of national identity in a transnational space.²⁶

As of 2023, the number of Georgian citizens living abroad is approximately 1.5 million,²⁷ almost one-third of the country’s total population.²⁸ A significant portion of this diaspora remains economically connected to Georgia as well. In 2024, total remittances amounted to 3.3 billion USD, directly reflecting the diaspora’s economic and social engagement.²⁹

These facts demonstrate that the preservation of national identity is no longer merely a cultural issue it has become an integral part of state policy, economic strategy, and foreign relations. Diaspora organizations have become a kind of cultural ambassadors who spread elements of Georgia’s national identity across the global space.

²⁴ Diaspora Engagement Mapping Report, Georgia, 2021. p. 44.

https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CF_Georgia.pdf [L.s. 19.10.2025].

²⁵ Embassy of Georgia to France, “Progress Report of the 2023 National Action Plan for Georgia’s European Union Integration”, 2023.
<https://mfa.gov.ge/pfiles/files/Progress%20Reprot%20of%20the%202023%20National%20Action%20Plan.pdf> [L.s. 18.11.2025].

²⁶ Georgian National Statistics Office (Geostat), Migration, Tbilisi, 2025.

<https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/322/migratsia> [L.s. 18.11.2025].

²⁷ World Bank. Migration and Development Brief 33,

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialprotectionandjobs/publication/migration-and-development-brief-33> [L.s. 18.11.2025].

²⁸ IDFI. Migration Statistics of Georgian Citizens, 2024.

<https://idfi.ge/ge/statistics-of-migration-of-georgian-citizens> [L.s. 19.10.2025].

²⁹ National Bank of Georgia. Remittance Overview, 2024.

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