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"Caucasian sketches" Georgia between contemporary everyday problems and abstract religious rituals

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Translated from the German Angela Unkrüer

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Abstract

The following academic essay is titled "Caucasian sketches" Georgia – between current problems of everyday life and abstract religious rituals" and seeks to portray both sociological and cultural-anthropological aspects of everyday life in the Caucasus republic of Georgia, while also discussing – from the perspective of a traveling author and in a low-threshold manner – the country's political and socio-cultural features as well as its people. Key to understanding local realities is the reference to various philosophical schools, including Horkheimer, Adorno, but also Mannheim, Bourdieu, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. In order to further explore the challenges of everyday life in the Caucasus Republic of Georgia, the essay also delves into history and recent political events. Cultural concepts such as the human-animal dualism (Human-Animal Studies) will also play an important role.

Keywords: *Georgia, cultural diversity, challenges of everyday life, political orientations, animals in needs*

Introduction

The following academic essay deals with a topic that, at first glance, may not seem particularly relevant in terms of the sociology of everyday life. Not only will the writer`s ventures into Georgia will be discussed, but this essay also seeks to build a bridge to cultural anthropology. [1]

"On 26 October 2024, Georgia was faced with a directional decision. Previously, the ruling party 'Georgian Dream' (GD) had

1 In this essay, the author will describe her experiences in Georgia in the first person. I was invited to the International Congress of Economics and Sociology at the University of Tbilisi and I therefore spent a week in Georgia. I would like to dedicate my essay to all homeless animals in the world and to animal welfare and its active members. I am currently taking various steps to set up an "Animals in Need in Georgia" foundation in Germany and I cordially invite all interested parties to visit golombek1@gmx.de.

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alienated some of its supporters with its increasingly authoritarian rule, while also isolating the country from the West. The EU accession process was put on hold, even though the population is overwhelmingly pro-European."

This is how an article by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation from 23rd October 2024 describes the situation.[2]

However, it is more difficult to actually prove this so-called pro-European "thinking". After all, how do you know how many Georgians actually think in a "European" way and how many do not, and whether this assumption is not simply a bold hypothesis along the lines of "being positioned in all possible directions, while taking pains not to mention the Russian option "? One way or another, 26th October 2024 was a fateful date for the Georgian people, since voters were called upon to decide whether there would be a return to "Mother Russia" or whether Georgia would move closer towards the European Union, even though Europe is geographically and culturally quite far removed from Georgia. As a "travelling observer from the West", I am not only interested in Georgia's political future, but also in the everyday problems of Georgian citizens and other nationals living in this Caucasus republic.

Since I am not a particularly political person, I will focus on both regional studies and the cultural characteristics of the population of this region. For this very reason, I will also offer a low-threshold discussion of my experiences during my short trip to Georgia. The article will offer a colourful mix of different perspectives, oscillating between my perceptions and reflections on what I experienced in Georgia.

Meanwhile, particular attention will be devoted to the following question: How will both the people and their respective cultures affect me? This question will inevitably open up other horizons which, on the one hand, alternate between the past and the present, between sacrum and profanum and, on the other hand, will address both style and topics of everyday communication. (Cautiously, I will refer to this as the "folk language", "language of the people", or "lingua avernacula". It can inform us about Georgian everyday life, its potential problems and what people associate with the feeling of contentment. Prior to this, I would like to sketch out a brief timeline of Georgian history.

1. From Herodotus to Karl Marx: a brief historical timeline

Even in ancient times, historians such as Herodotus already mentioned the kingdom of Colchis, which was located in the area that is now Western Georgia and Homer set the Argonaut saga, the myth of Medea or Prometheus, here. This land, rich in precious metals and with its long wine-growing tradition on the edge of the Greek Empire drew great interest early on (Eberhardt 2024: 8). The introduction of the Georgian script with its 33 letters took place in the 3rd century. The introduction of Christianity as the state religion in the 4th century led to a rich hagiographic literature alongside the oral tradition, which was cultivated in numerous monasteries. Secular literature developed with the rise of chivalry during the "Golden Age" in the 12th to 13th centuries. The national epic in verse or prose written by Shota Rustaveli (ca. 1172-1216) on behalf of the legendary Queen Tamar became part of the UNESCO "Memory of the World" documentary heritage in 2013 (ibid.8).

With the Mongol invasion, Georgia became subject to tribute and was broken up into several kingdoms. When the Persians and Ottomans conquered the country from 1463 and divided it into two spheres of influence in 1555, Persian poetry and its imagery were reflected in Georgian literature. In 1783, Russia became the patron of Kartli Kakheti and annexed it in 1801. For the first time, the conquerors were Orthodox Christians. In the age of Romanticism, Georgia, in the context of the national revival movement, gained access to world literature – for instance in the poetry of Nikolos Baratashvili, which is available in two languages in the translation by Rainer Kirsch. The turn towards realism was soon taken up by a young generation of poets. In today's Georgia, Tillmann writes about Rustaveli Boulevard in the centre of Tbilisi: Early in the morning, the boulevard of Georgia's capital is already bustling with traffic. Antiquarian booksellers lay out their books on wall ledges and homemade wooden stands. The curtain, an iron one for the West at the time, was less tight, at least for readers in the GDR. Between Russian editions of Tolstoy, Pushkin and Dostoevsky and illustrated books about the Soviet Union, old Russian and more recent English and German language textbooks, there is always an anthology of Georgian poems or Georgian stories published in the 1970s or 1980s by GDR publishers such as Rütten & Loening or Volk und Welt" (ibid: cf. 6f).

Retrospectively, the author refers to German-Georgian relations in the past, with flourishing travel as early as the 19th century. Georgia achieved a republican form of government after the October Revolution, but it only lasted from 1918 to 1921. The following Soviet years brought industrialisation, an agricultural focus on exporting southern fruits as well as the development of tourism as a dream destination for the Soviet nomenklatura. The threat posed by the Nazis, who sought to capture the rich oil reserves in the Caspian Sea, was fended off in the "Great Patriotic War"; in Georgia, as in the West, it is now simply called the Second World War (ibid.: 3). After that, life took place under Soviet occupation, which came to an end with the secession from the

Soviet Union, which was declared on 31st March 1991. To this day (so it seemed to me), Georgia is still searching for its true self, tangled up in different Western-influenced orientations and Russian dependencies, since the country shares a direct border with Russia.[3]

Becker et al view large cities as metropolises that have repeatedly been met with an ambivalent response throughout history – both from contemporary commentators as well as from the inhabitants of the large cities themselves (who are not entirely unaffected by such criticism). The focus is on the appropriation of urban phenomena by city dwellers and communication about changes in urban life in which the speakers themselves are actively involved (cf. Becker et al 2011: 82). During my "street life" observations, passersby were asked about their current situation in the run-up to the elections on 26th October 2024, for instance. These "interviews" were conducted spontaneously, as they were not prepared beforehand and were not guided by any prewritten questions.

2 Cf. https://www.freiheit.org/de/suedkaukasus/schicksalswahlen-georgien-ein-ende-des-albtraums, accessed on 26/10/2024.

3Georgien Geschichte - Übersicht - Zusammenfassung - kurz gefasst (Accessed on the 4th November 2024).

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1.1. "Street life" in Tbilisi

Having escaped the Western European "world", which is guided by norms and rules and where everyday life is characterised by the social values of individualism, I looked out of the plane window and gazed at the majestic peaks of the Caucasus Mountains. Instead of green, forested mountain ridges, the barren and brown mountains looked rather forbidding. This is my first "airplane view" of a country that I have associated with the mythological tales of the ancient Greeks since childhood. The ancient Greeks referred to what is now Georgia as "Colchis".

However, I am not only familiar with Georgia from a historical perspective, but I also learnt about the country at school in Poland as a 'sister state' of the former Eastern Bloc. In the late 1990s in Germany, I also had the opportunity to teach thousands of refugees from Abkhazia and Georgia in my classes. The subject of my lessons, which I gave in Russian, was labour and social laws in Germany. What struck me even then was the fact that people from Georgia are very polite and approachable.

How will I experience life in Georgia this time, since I have already met so many thousands Georgian nationals during my day-to-day work in Germany? How will they behave and how will their local cultural programming affect me? How do Georgians go about their everyday lives and what problems do they face? Questions upon questions...

At Tbilisi's airport, I was picked up by the driver from the hotel where I would spend the following week. I introduced myself as a guest attending the International Congress of Economics at the University of Tbilisi. My driver told me that he was a relative of the hotel owner and that he enjoyed hunting in his spare time. He was particularly enthusiastic about bear hunting, while this topic encouraged me to remind him of the "noble" nature of this animal, which should actually be under animal protection. At this point, the driver laughed at me a little. Meanwhile, his driving style reminded me of scenes in Hollywood movies that are supposed to generate an adrenalin rush. I just hoped that we would arrive at the hotel safely, since we could have been involved in a pile-up every few minutes. These were my first impressions on the way to my hotel, which was located in the middle of the city centre. More about this is in my encounters during my "street life" obeservations here on the ground.

The mental imprints of metropolitan life will also be discussed in this essay. Simmel suggests a total of four imprints of metropolitan life. Firstly, "heightened tensions of the nervous life" of the metropolitan individual are mentioned most frequently. The second characteristic of metropolitan life refers to personality patterns such as intellectuality and "blasé behaviour". Simmel contrasts the impersonal solidarity associated with this with the construction of emotional community and empathy in the small town. In his remarks on "blaséness", however, Simmel then builds a bridge to a sociological perspective: the big city as the place where the monetary economy generates "blaséness" through consumption, which only the wealthy can afford. Nevertheless, he generalised this mindset into a general metropolitan personality pattern. Thirdly, the coexistence between individual city dwellers is therefore characterised by a precarious balance.

The fourth socio-political characterisation comprises tolerance and cosmopolitanism. However, these traits would not arise of their own accord, since they can only develop from a social space of indifference.

Simmel's (cultural) sociological perspective comes into play in his discussions of the monetary economy, competition and the division of labour, which are traditionally based in large cities. As he argued in his "Philosophy of Money" (1900), factual, impersonal relationships are initially mediated via the medium of money. In the dominance of money, Simmel sees the emergence of a gap between "objective" and "subjective culture". This also means that the social connection experienced by people in traditional ways of life has dissolved in favour of an objectified dependency. He explains the dissonances of modern life with the fact that the "objective culture" has gained the upper hand over the "subjective culture". Although the city dweller is cultivated, the individual has not made the same progress psychologically and mentally, and in many cases has even fallen behind.

These dissonances are further fuelled by a life that is shaped by science and technology. Modern means of transport may serve as a symbol for this. To summarise, it is clear that Simmel sees the big city as both a process and as cause and effect at the same time. Almost one hundred years after Simmel, the famous US-American singer Randy Crawford addresses the "street life" in one of her songs. In one verse of the song, she sings: "I play the street life. Because there is no place I can go, street life it is the only way I know". Yes, I will answer this "call", as I am very curious about everyday life in Georgia.

Upon arrival at the hotel in Tbilisi, the hotel driver was very helpful and gave me three bottles of the famous 'Borjomi' spring water. I was able to easily chat with him since we both spoke good Russian. The capital Tbilisi stretches over 40 kilometres and is home to roughly 1.6 million inhabitants. There are probably more cars on the roads than people. Traffic jams, a high level of noise and lead in the air are constant companions of everyday life. Homeless, sick and abandoned animals are everywhere. Many of them suffer and wait to die every day, barely moving as they have no strength left to get up. They also no longer eat because their stomachs have shrunk so much that they can no longer digest food. What a "hell"... I asked myself this question constantly during the seven days of my stay. In addition to these animals, there are also children stricken by poverty and looking for food.

Some of the houses were practically falling apart and it was hard to imagine them actually housing people. Adjacent to this was a gallant luxury mile in the centre of the city, which reminded me of the *Königsallee* in Düsseldorf, with Chanel and Armani stores in a quest to catch up with the luxury of the West. In between, there were small traders selling cheap goods. Even in the first few days, I realized that Georgia has economic problems and probably a high unemployment rate.

Before the congress began, I moved around the city a lot with other Polish scientists. Taxi rides including all-day guided tours were offered. Many academics have taken up work as taxi drivers in Tbilissi , since they cannot make a living from their profession. For instance, I met two lawyers, who also worked as taxi drivers. I also asked people on the street as well as my Georgian colleagues from academia for short interviews about everyday life and politics in the country. People were happy to talk about their lives and they did so very naturally, politely, and with great motivation.

In the hotel lobby:

The hotel employees were very apprehensive about Georgia's future, with their fears relating in particular to the country's economic instability. When I asked them about their political

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position, they were in favour of joining the EU and rejected Russia's influence. However, they were quite unsure whether EU membership would actually be possible. One hotel employee said: "It's already too late for us to set off for Western Europe. That train has already left the station..."

Service:
My taxi drivers, who are both law graduates, saw the situation in a similar way, even though they were more willing to concede that Georgia can hardly avoid Russian influence, especially since petrol and natural gas from Russia are cheap.

The retailers in their small shops were quite pessimistic and pointed to their children who work in Western countries and thus generate financial resources for their parents and families. For me, it was quite frustrating to hear these answers. In most shops, prices have gone up and many everyday items are of low quality (mostly made in China). Local products were hard to find, except for handicrafts and agricultural products. While the people on the street spoke Russian, the academics (sometimes also the Georgian youth) conversed in English.

Academics:
On the day of our scheduled appearances at the congress, all lectures were held in English and translated into Georgian. This privileged segment of the population also favours EU accession. On the other hand, they were socialised in the Soviet Union and still harbour longings for Western Europe.

One of the younger professors approached me and wanted to talk about Germany. As he explained in English, he himself has spent several years in Western Europe during his academic studies and sees Georgia's political situation at a critical point. "You know, for us there is currently no recognisable path for our political aspirations. There is a large percentage of people, who are pro-Russian and a lot others, who are pro European".

And one who is pro-European So, is he not positioning Russia in Europe? "So Russia is not in Europe for you?" I asked him. "No, because most of it is in Asia and not in Europe..." he argued. "Then what do you expect from the EU?" My counterpart said: "It's primarily about economic aid for Georgia and steady economic growth..." So, almost only economic reasons are at play when it comes to the future direction of Georgian politics. Not a word about democratic values or norms and laws that could lead to such an outcome.

On public transport: Buses and underground trains
I slowly realized that the country's capital, like almost every other country in the world, is contradictory and multi-layered and, due to its geographical location and historical passages, has a great wealth of transcultural characteristics. In addition to the locals, other ethnic groups such as the Abkhazian population, Jews, Russians and Muslims also live here.

The metro in Tbilisi was built in 1966 and has the longest escalators in the world with a length of 120 metres. At 60 metres deep, Tbilisi also has the deepest underground station in the world. I entered the underground, even though I felt not particularly comfortable. The train carriages must be at least 40 years old. Passenger density was high. There was hardly any room to stand, not even enough 'space' to breathe. At one of the final stations of the line, it became more comfortable since many passengers got off. When I inquired about my station in Russian, a student answered me in Russian. However, she preferred to continue our conversation in English and I was happy to oblige. "Where do you want to go?", she asked me. "Rustaveli Square," I said. She told me that it would take a while and proceeded to tell me that she had worked in the catering industry in England a few years ago and that she was currently finishing her medical studies at the University of Tbilisi. She also told me: "You know, after my studies, I'm not going to stay, I'm going to emigrate to Western Europe for good." "Is this the only alternative for you to live happily?" "Yes, it's the only way to get out of this crisis-ridden country." A young man next to us had listened to our conversation and spontaneously stated: "I will also leave the country and emigrate to Russia after completing my education." So for me, the scene of my underground journey unfolds with a frame of reference in which the young generation is sitting on packed suitcases and has mentally already moved to another country.

This felt very familiar to me, because I also migrated from Poland to Germany as a young teenager, as my parents sought to escape the communist system. The following day, I embarked on my next street life experiment and took a bus to another part of Tbilisi. It is almost 30 kilometres from my hotel. In order to use local transport in Tbilisi, each passenger is given a plastic card that always has a credit balance. A journey costs roughly 50 cents (converted into Euros). However, I made a mistake when checking my credit, since I took a card that no longer had any credit on it. I asked the driver what I could do. The driver was speechless until I heard a loud voice near me: *"Дочка, садись рядом, если придет контроль, то ты под моей защитой. Ничего не произойдет..."(*Daughter, come sit next to me, when a ticket inspection comes, then you are under my protection. Nothing will happen to you). An old man invites me to sit next to him. My goodness, the last time I was called like this was by my ather! I feel it ; I am in a collective culture. I answered the call and the old Georgian man told me that he lived near Tbilisi. He asked me where I came from. My answer was that I lived in Germany, but my roots were in Poland. He was very pleased with my answer and referred to the former Polish President Lech Kaczynski, who supported Georgia's independence from Russia. He then asked me: "Why are you still living in Germany when Poland has long been free?" In his opinion, I should "rather return to my homeland, as there is no more important appreciation than being at home in your own house." At this point, I agreed with him: "You're right". I got out of the bus and was once again absorbed in everyday life on the streets. I attribute this encounter not only to the collectivism in which the old man was brought up, but I also see his warm and benevolent manner as an expression of conservatism. This makes me think of Shalom H. Schwarz, whose research is based on the assumption that "the value of conservatism describes cultures that are characterised by very close group relationships. The group pursues common interests and strives to preserve the present, with an associated sense of tradition, security and adaptation" (Schwarz 1994: 85ff).

Arriving at Rustaveli Square, which is a calling card for Georgia's purchasing power, I heard loud voices. Groups of women on strike were sitting on the steps of the country's parliament. On the other side, they were surrounded by police officers. I asked a policeman for the reasons behind the strike, but he did not answer. I asked a local journalist why there was a strike. Again, no direct answer, but the instruction: "Please ask the man standing at the front." A Russian-speaking man was the coordinator of the women's protests. The women were from Abkhazia and no longer had a place to stay because they have lost everything. I wanted to talk to

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the women, but they did not speak English or Russian. Nevertheless, I shook their hands, in order to show them I wished them what they would wish for themselves.

Once again, in a snapshot of my travels through Tbilisi, I realized that the country has all kinds of problems. As I was in Georgia shortly before the elections, I observed numerous protests in various districts of the capital: Most of them were about the desire to join the EU. Everyday communication with tourists alternated between Russian and English.

Amid this social turmoil, I found myself a seat in a café to check out my photos. The host was an old Georgian who addressed me in his native language. “No, I'm not Georgian,” I explained in Russian. He smiled and asked: “But you're not Russian?” “No.” I ordered a slice of cake and the host asked me where I was from. I replied that I was from Germany, which he commented on his own initiative: “I hope we don't become a member of the EU, as this alliance is causing all kinds of chaos in Europe.” “What kind of chaos are you talking about?” “My son lives in France and always provides us with the latest news about EU crises, such as the fatal refugee problem, corruption or the increasingly severe recession in Western countries.” Apparently, the Georgian host was always kept up to date with the political mood inside the EU. I began to realize how deeply divided the country is politically. Let's see if this division also becomes visible at other levels of the Georgian social consensus.

Houses of prayer in the Orthodox rite

When travelling to the surrounding monasteries, of which there are 12 in the Tbilisi region, each built on a hilltop, I experienced the Georgia of rituals and Orthodox rites. The faithful touched the glazed surface of a coffin or a relic of a saint and wished each other luck and “miracles”. The “guardians” of the sacred places, usually monks or nuns, collected donations or sold their homemade products. Their gaze was stiffened and rather dismissive. Meanwhile, the donors' money creates a path of inner dialogue which integrates the abstract level of worshipping God. However, for me, these places did not show themselves as merciful “oases of faith”, since numerous homeless animals with dilated pupils, trembling bodies, and obviously in severe pain lurched around the monasteries, but no one seemed to care. This touched me to my DNA strands.

I thought of a habitual programming of the faithful and the clergy,[4] which can probably be linked to their current despair, their everyday hardships and associated pessimism, especially as the long-term consequences of the paternalistic communist system are still salient. Therefore, these people may lack the belief in their own independence and self-efficacy. If this hypothesis could contain a comprehensible perspective, then rituals would have arisen from powerlessness – according to the motto “Only miracles from heaven can help us...”

At this point we remain in the realm of the sacrum and look at Christianity through the work of one of its saints. As in every faith – and this also applies to Georgia – the everyday problems are seemingly consolidated at the level of abstraction. It does not seem to include all living beings, but is reserved for humans. The starving animals begging for food around the monasteries were met with indifference by most of the parishioners. At this point, I would have wished the country the Franciscan order. In addition to an attitude of humility and patience towards all people, St Francis of Assisi regarded animals as independent beings in the Christian sense as early as the 13th century. However, his love for animals was less of a sentimental nature and more a result of his relationship with God.

Two aspects can be mentioned that are of particular importance for hagiographies – for descriptions of the lives of saints. The saints' good relationship with animals symbolises their special perfection. Their aura of peacefulness takes away even a wild animal's fear of humans. However, the actions towards animals and humans are the same: sympathy, kindness, and gentleness lead to a transformation. A threat is transformed into a just and peaceful coexistence.[5] In the monastery, I asked the monks if they still believed in God, as they would simply ignore the living, four-legged creatures before the threshold of the “holy house”. They responded with excuses such as: “Sometimes they are fed by the parishioners”. In his systems theory, Luhmann refers to an “analytical key” known as latency protection. I realized once again that the formative sociologists of the West still preoccupy me. Life under a “cheese dome” can certainly have its advantages. It follows the traditional pattern: “What I don't know won't hurt me”. Only when you talk about problems, they will become problems. Every culture has its respective latency protection “territories”. [6]

1.2. Recent political events

The region of Abkhazia, which plays an important role for Georgia, is regarded as a “Caucasian powder keg”. In its environment, global, regional and local factors may lead to conflicts. The major powers are directly involved through their interests, but also through formal conflict resolution mechanisms. The CSCE/OSCE was asked by the Georgian government in 1992 to provide assistance in resolving the conflict in the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region. The OSCE Mission to Georgia was established in October 1992 in the midst of civil war-like conditions. The conflict with Abkhazia led to an extension of the mandate, which was finally completed in 1999 by the border monitoring mission on the Chechen section of the border with Russia. In addition, there is the mandate to support Georgia in the protection of human rights and democratisation. This gives the OSCE a strong presence, at least on paper, in one of the world's most important crisis regions, which is characterised by an explosive mix of ethnic separatist movements, strategic and economic interests of the major and regional powers, as well as weak institutionalisation, statehood, and democracy. The attention Georgia receives from the international community is primarily due to its geopolitical position. Important trade, traffic and transport routes pass through its territory; it is located in the strategic foreland of the Russian Federation and at the same time

4 The monastery or convent as “a total institution can be defined as a place of dwelling (...) where a large number of individuals in the same situation, cut off from the wider society for an extended period of time, lead a secluded (...) life” (Goffman 1981: 11).

5 Cf. https://franziskaner.net/franziskus-und-die-tiere/ (Last accessed on 26.10.2024).

6 Luhmann's sociology of culture remained a fragment, but it can provide inspiration for a media-theoretical derivation of cultural forms of society as well as for a social theory of values. Luhmann remained sceptical about the concept of culture throughout his life, as any attempt to “register a social phenomenon as culture” runs the risk of disregarding the latent protection of this phenomenon (Baecker 2016).

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shares a border with the NATO state Turkey (Heinrich 2001: 229f).

The pro-Western position of past governments and the relatively advanced state of democratisation compared to other Caucasus states suggest that Georgia has played a kind of pioneering role in the adoption and anchoring of Western international values in the Caucasus region. At the same time, however, Georgia shares many problems with other successor states of the former Soviet Union, since this policy has a twofold price: firstly, Georgia is still closely linked to the Russian market and is in Russia's sphere of influence, which occasionally comes into conflict with its Western orientation. Secondly, the stabilisation policy has contributed to the fact that the conflicts remain unresolved to this day and have become so-called frozen conflicts. The interests of the major powers in the Caucasus are by no means diametrically opposed and the danger that this region could become the front line of a new Cold War is rather low. Russia and the USA have an equal interest in curbing drug and arms trafficking and in preventing and eliminating Islamic extremism. However, the Chechen war brought weapons and drugs (mainly for financing) (cf. Heinrich 2001: 230). Another task for the OSCE, which - given the difficulties in resolving the conflict in Georgia - has so far had little tangible success in this mandate area, could be to contribute to the return of Chechens to Georgia in a preventive manner so that a further regional conflict does not escalate further (ibid. 2001: 233).

The "Georgian Dream" party of Bidzina Ivanishvili, the richest man in Georgia, ultimately won the election on 26th October 2024. As a result, pro-European policies appear to have taken a back seat in favour of a return to "Mother Russia". Georgia is thus (once again) playing a pioneering role in the region,[7] but democratic stability in the country has not yet been secured in the long term. Given the dominance of "Georgian Dream", the question arises as to how effective the (parliamentary) control of the government is, how sustainable the separation of powers is and how consolidated democracy in Georgia ultimately is. Critics of the "Georgian Dream" therefore see the danger of de facto one-party rule, similar to that which previously existed under Saakashvili's ENM.

The opposition and various NGOs are also accusing "Georgian Dream" of having tailored the amendments just in time for the parliamentary elections. The new constitution provides for purely proportional representation. Although the opposition also supports this in principle, it is angry that the change is not due to come into effect until 2024 (ibid.: 2). Georgia signed a comprehensive association agreement with the EU as recently as 2014, thus leaving the country in a special position. Certainly an obsolete document, as a Russia-oriented policy has been promoted since 26th October 2024. The Europeanization course that failed to materialise is being transformed into a historical narrative that could not prevail in the Caucasus region. This means that the country's desired, original affiliation with "Western civilisation" has been put on hold for the time being (cf. Halbach 2015: 1).

Georgia continues to be affected by crises, e.g. the currency crisis. Since Georgia's independence in 1991, its state authority has never extended to its entire internationally recognised territory (Halbach 2008:2). Before and after the "five-day war" in August 2008, the terms "Georgian crisis" and "Caucasus conflict" became synonymous. It was only after a delay that people began to look beyond the focal point of Georgia to the regional context of the conflict. What is the situation in Georgia and its Caucasian neighbourhood today?

What were the consequences of the war for Georgia? Estimates regarding the civilian victims of the war still vary to this today. The Ministry for Refugees and Resettlement in Tbilisi speaks of 1,800 missing persons. The number of casualties caused by the Georgian offensive in South Ossetia, which preceded the Russian intervention, also remains controversial. The only thing that is certain is that Moscow's initial claim that more than 2,000 Ossetians were victims of a "Georgian genocide" was propaganda. The consequences of the war also affected a country in which a third of the population was already living below the poverty line (Halbach 2001: 1).

The following models are now conceivable for the future status of Georgia and its breakaway regions:

1. The Cyprus model: Russia supports the "statehood" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and their separation from Georgia – analogous to Turkey's behaviour towards the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus". A reunification of the two territories with Georgia remains unlikely in the long term, as does broader international recognition of Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence.
2. The partition model: the division of the country is accepted by Georgia and recognised internationally. "Core Georgia" integrates itself into Euro-Atlantic structures, while Abkhazia and South Ossetia become part of the Russian economic and security space.
3. The internationalisation model: Abkhazia and South Ossetia - and not just the buffer zones in "core Georgia" - are placed under international administration and peacekeeping.
4. The neutrality model: Georgia renounces its NATO accession perspective and thus opens the way to reunification with the breakaway parts of the country in the form of a confederation (ibid. 2001: 8).

1.3. Culturally recognised concepts

"..Home is the escape from being..." Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (1984: 97).

So far, we have ascribed history, politics, and everyday life in Georgia through facts, hypotheses, and perceptions. It will be more difficult to interpret the designation of cultural orientations, as the term "culture" does not actually exist and each society constructs its own meaning of "culture". We will focus on the philosophical and sociological perspectives to which some cultural terms refer.

The German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch sees the question "Where are you from?", a common phrase to initiate a conversation, as tricky business since it seeks to pin a person down to their origin, categorise them according to the stereotype we have

7As a historic regional power in the Caucasus and Black Sea region, Turkey plays a role that deserves Europe's attention. Recently, it has also gained prestige through its solution-oriented foreign policy towards conflicts in its Middle Eastern neighbourhood. It was and is involved in the regional conflicts and nationality problems in the post-Soviet region like no other state outside the CIS. This affects ethnic groups that either belong to the Turkish ethnic group themselves (such as Crimean Tatars, Azerbaijanis or Gagauzians) or that have politically active diaspora communities in Turkey (such as Abkhazians, Circassians, Chechens and other Caucasians) (Schiffers / Smolnik 2017: 7).

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of them. But “we humans are essentially cultural beings ...”, argues the author. This applies both individually and socially. Growing up as an individual involves developing cultural skills while growing into a culture. And this culture, for its part, is based on a long cultural evolution that has taken place over the course of human history, ranging from the mastery of fire to the founding of cities and the invention of the internet.

The concept of culture has at least two dimensions that should be differentiated between. Firstly, there is the substantive meaning of culture, where “culture” is a collective term for practices through which people create a life that is typical of human beings.

This substantive meaning includes everyday routines, competences, convictions, manners, social regulations, world views and the like. Secondly, however, when we speak of “culture”, in most cases we also have a geographical, national or ethnic extension of these practices in mind. Here, “culture” refers to the extension of the group (or society or civilisation) for which the cultural content or practices in question are characteristic.

“The concept of transculturality seeks to do justice to this condition. When I began to develop this concept almost 20 years ago, I was driven by the impression that our conventional concept of culture simply no longer fits its object, today's cultures. Contemporary cultures seemed to me to have taken on a different constitution than the traditional notions of culture still claimed or suggested. In this respect, it was necessary to develop a new conceptualisation of ‘culture’. ‘Transculturality’ seeks to do justice to today's cultural conditions” (Welsch 2010: 1f).

Finally, I would like to take a step back from present-day considerations and ask how the trend towards transculturality plays out in the overall course of human history. We usually believe that we humans are very different - the readers of these lines, the people in this country, the people of the world as a whole. But basically we are all surprisingly similar – at least genetically. The genetic differences between people around the world are far smaller than those within any population of chimpanzees living in the wild.

But then a second period began, which was characterised by the formation of differences – admittedly not genetic differences, but cultural differences. Roughly 40,000 years ago, humanity transitioned from biological to cultural evolution. Cultural evolution, however, was associated with a gigantic production of differences. Distinction within groups and between groups was now the motor of development. For this reason, humanity in its cultural period has become involved in ever greater cultural differences (right up to the nationalisms of the 19th and 20th centuries). As a result of the mixture of cultural patterns, people are now developing more common ground culturally than in the millennia before, when differences were emphasized. Transculturality seems to be leading to a new kind of cultural (no longer just genetic) commonality among people. Scheler had already predicted such a development with his concept of a “balance” between cultures (1927) and Jaspers with his idea of a “second axial time” (1949). Perhaps in the age of transculturality, we are actually getting a little closer to the old dream of a “Family of Man” (ibid. 2010: 16).

As a social philosopher and one of the most famous sociologists of modern times, Pierre Bourdieu devoted his entire academic life to empirical research, which can be categorised as cultural sociology. He became famous for his habitus and field theory, which can also analyse cultural codes. I would like to briefly outline the basic approaches to habitus theory, since it is important for my argument and is now part of the standard repertoire of social sciences. “I have also and above all said habitus, not to say ‘habitude’, habit - namely the generative, not to say creative capacity that is laid out in the system of dispositions as “ars” - as art in its proper sense of practical mastery - and especially as “ars inveniendi “. In short, they form a mechanical conception of a concept constructed against the mechanism” (Bourdieu / Wacquant 1996 [1992]: 154f.; emphasis in original).

The concept of habitus is used in different areas and therefore has different, context-dependent definitions. In common parlance, the Latin term “habitus” refers to outward appearance. In philosophy, on the other hand, “habitus” is an Aristotelian-Scholastic term for an acquired behavioural disposition or habit that is closely linked to moral attitudes as a person's “second nature” (cf. Prechtl/Burkard 1999: 223f.). In this sense, habitus is also understood simply as an “attitude” (see Bourdieu/ Wacquant 2006). Sociologically, the term initially refers to the external appearance of people, from which conclusions can be drawn about the totality of attitudes and habits (cf. Fuchs-Heinritz et al.2007). Attitude (cf. Hillmann 1994: 317) as well as appearance (e.g. style of dress, language) is often included here (cf. Reinhold / Lamnek / Recker 1997: 249).

In Bourdieu's words, habitus stands for a person's “patterns of perception, thought and action”,in which all is incorporated , previous social experiences are expressed (Bourdieu 1970 [1967]: 153, 1987 [1980]: 101). The habitus is primarily characterised by the specific social position that members of a social group occupy within a social structure. More generally, the concept serves to mediate individual dispositions (subject level) and social possibilities (structural level). In contrast to Foucault, for instance, Bourdieu understands the subject less as disciplined and more as the bearer of a habitus (cf. Reckwitz 2008: 39).

Bourdieu's habitus concept can therefore not only be used in a modified form in various social science disciplines, but also represents a holistic concept due to its mediating character between subject and object, structure and action as well as individual and society, thus enabling interdisciplinary and subject-related research (Lenger et al 2013: 13f).[8] To unpack this statement, holism looks at a system as a whole, not only at the result of individual parts of a system. Every cultural programming of an individual and social groups has its specific, so-called “blind spots”. Ralf Bohnsack (2013) developed the documentary method as an interpretation technique that attempts to interpret every thought, feeling and perception of the world and of people in their actions. According to Mannheim, this is referred to as “aspectuality”. Mannheim's “aspectuality” is linked to a certain landscape on the basis of perception, which can necessarily only be recognised in the landscape itself and from a certain vantage point (cf. Mannheim 1980: 212). Mannheim further explains that every human cognition

8The theoretical foundations on which the habitus concept is based did not emerge directly from the practical examination of empirical observations in Algeria, but rather resulted from Bourdieu's philosophical background and its comparison with social practice, as well as the resulting transfer of these considerations to his native Béarn . Between 1962 and 1989, he produced a series of studies (Bourdieu 1962a), which were only published as a coherent work several years later under the title “The Stag Ball” (Bourdieu 2008 [2002]) (Lenger et al. 2013: 15).

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and idea refers back to the "situation of being", i.e. to the respective location from which the person originates ("relativity of being") (cf. Nentwig-Gesemann 1999: 217). Alfred Korzybski created a metaphor with his famous sentence "*The map is not the territory*" (1994: 58) for this. In addition, Alfred Korzybski also came up with the metaphor of mental "maps" that depict human constructions of reality. This "map is not the landscape, but if the map is similar to the structure of the landscape, it is useful".

This addresses the fact that man lives in two worlds: in the world of language (cognition) and symbols and in the real world of "experience" (practice) (Korzybski 1933: 58).

2. Of people and of living "things": Human-Animal Studies

Memo: Animals, amazing creatures of our social worlds

"*Animals interceded between man and their origin because they were both like and unlike man. Animals came from over the horizon. They belonged there and here..."* (cf. Berger 1980: 4).

In recent years, much has been reported and discussed about the changing relationship between humans and animals. Even beyond broader discourses and media cycles, there is a continuously increasing interest in human-animal relationships of all kinds. This illustrates, among other things, the changed perceptions of animals as competent, social interaction partners in modern urban living environments, and new inter-specific social relationships and forms of communication are being added (cf. Mütherich 2008: 5107).

For instance, Reiner E. Wiedenmann analyses human-animal sociality in relation to levels and elements of moral-ethical concepts with cultural connotations. In his cultural anthropological work titled "Animals, Morality and Society" (2009), he explains:

"The gaze of an animal is somewhat mysterious: this strange creature that is looking at me intently is somewhat "like me": born "like me", it obviously feels similarly "like me", it is mortal "like me", it can be frightened "like me", it can feel joy, trust, or express its astonishment. However, it is different if the animal shows an "absent" gaze – which can perhaps be explained by the fact that its attention is captivated by other, species-specific or momentarily "more interesting" sensory impressions (e.g. of hearing or smell). In such cases, the idea of a genuine human-animal relationship can seem precarious, deceptive, even impossible. My distance to the animal then feels like an insurmountable barrier, and this distance seems to increase when I realise how hopeless it is to put the mystery of this encounter into words (Wiedenmann 2009: 17). "Why look at animals?" asks John Berger (1980: 1ff.).[9] He reflects on human-animal relationships since the domestication of the wolf, thus opening an exciting field of research that corresponds with the "human-animal social relationship".[10] Berger's approach "seeing comes before speaking" (Berger 1974) deals with the intelligence of visual perception. Although this can be encapsulated and encircled by words, it cannot really be characterised, let alone described exhaustively, in its peculiarity and diversity. In this context, it is less important whether to refer to Rudolf Arnheim's (1972) studies on "visual thinking" or to phenomenological studies on the privileged position of seeing (Merleau-Ponty 1986) to justify this view. What counts is the realisation that even though human-animal encounters can be judged according to linguistic criteria, they can ultimately only be inadequately understood. Berger confronts this problem; he seeks to avoid the unproductive logocentrism that narrows the communicative potential of human-animal relationships to a question of animal participation in our linguistic competence.

Genuinely human ciphers of intersubjective self-assertion are by no means exclusively human for Berger: I look at an animal – and vice versa: I am also being looked at by the animal, I am the object of its attentive observation. The other person's eye is the window to their soul, their attitudes and expectations (wishes, hopes, fears etc.) are looking at me. As a social encounter per se, the chiasm of the gaze has an eminently "moral" dimension. This means the fact that the exchange of gazes creates reciprocal claims, only to the extent that the gaze of the other is characterised by a certain "unapproachability" and "untouchability'. A kind of "ethical resistance" emanates from their face; as a centre of expression, it combines attitudes and intentions that make the face of the other appear as a "sacred being" (Weidenmann, cited in Merleau-Ponty 1976: 192).

The chiasm of the gaze always implies an assumption of responsibility and a commitment to self-respect and consideration, to attentiveness towards the claims of others. If this moral entanglement is a general condition of interactions, then the question remains as to the conditions under which encounters with animals are affected by the ethos of this momentous obviousness (ibid. 2009: 15ff). When it comes to the "animal studies" published in recent years in this respect, it becomes clear that interdisciplinary cooperation has so far been rather hesitant or limited. There is now a considerable number of conference

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9The fact that the new animal rights movement - also in comparison with other ecologically oriented social movements - is often able to mobilise considerable resources (e.g. human and financial) and is demonstrated in particular by the expansion of the US animal rights organisation PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). PETA had 8,000 members in 1984, 84,000 in 1987, around 300,000 in 1990 and almost 400,000 in 1994. At the beginning of 1995, there was talk of "over 500,000" members (worldwide), and at the beginning of 2004, the PETA website stated that there were "over 750,000" members. Three years later PETA even quoted the figure of 1.6 million supporters worldwide, and in February 2009 "over two million" (Weidenmann 2009: 23). In view of these facts, it is very regrettable that organised animal protection is practically non-existent in Georgia. An animal shelter, the only one in Tbilisi, which houses over 500 dogs and 809 small puppies, has a staff of only 9 employees. The sponsor is a private citizen.

10A few years ago, sociologists at Stanford University published a study on US dissertations in the field of human-animal studies (Gerbasi et al. 2002). The study shows that the number of these studies has increased significantly over the last two decades, not only in absolute terms but also in relative terms, i.e. as a proportion of the total number of dissertations produced. The researchers scrutinised the titles and abstracts to identify linguistic phrases that could be used to describe different aspects of social relationships between humans and animals (e.g. "animal-assisted therapy", "bereavement and pets", "human-companion animal bond"). It became apparent that the number of dissertations dealing with topics from human-animal studies increased by around two and a half times in the 1990s (compared to the 1980s) (Weidenmann 2009: 19).

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proceedings and anthologies that bring together animal-related research from very different disciplines. The general denominator "animal" is often little more than a bracket term under which the findings and knowledge gained in a particular subject or field of work are presented in a rather additive manner (e.g. an overview of "Animals in Ancient Egypt") (cf. ibid. 35).[11] In historiography, the state of academic research on human-animal social relations must be viewed in a differentiated way, depending on which sub-disciplines, which epochs, which specific "factual problems", which methodological-theoretical approaches or even national historical cultures are singled out (ibid. 72).

All in all, one can certainly get the impression that many historical works and source editions, in which aspects of the human-animal relationship are discussed, nonetheless treat these aspects rather *en passant*. With regard to German historiography, Paul Münch (1998a: 14) states that "German historiography has not even begun to fulfil the postulate of seeing humans and animals as existentially connected participants in a lifeworld" (ibid.: 43). To conclude, I would like to mention a point from Max Weber about the animal-human social relationship, in which Weber writes: "Animals understand commands, anger, love, intent to attack, and in many cases do not react to them exclusively mechanically and instinctively, but somehow also consciously meaningful and experience-orientated..." (Weber 1980: 7).

How does critical theory understand the difference between living artefacts in relation to cultural categories? With reference to Critical Social Theory, I would like to quote Horkheimer / Adorno who focus on the duality of man and animal:

"The idea of man in European history is expressed in the distinction from the animal. With its unreasonableness they prove human dignity. With such insistence and unanimity, the contrast has been underlined by all the masterminds of civil thought, the ancient Jews, Stoics and Church Fathers, then through the Middle Ages and modern times, that it belongs like few others to the basic stock of Western anthropology. Even today it is recognised..." (Horkheimer / Adorno 1986: 262).

In her reflections on human-animal dualism, Mütherich scrutinises the critical social theory of Horkheimer and Adorno, as she seeks to explore the failure of the Enlightenment project in the face of the Holocaust (as the barbaric in man). Horkheimer and Adorno dedicate their research to, among other things, the different roots of the Western tendency towards destructiveness. According to a core thesis of the critical theorists, Western civilisation has produced a model of sharp demarcation against the "non-self", the "other", in order to define its own identity, to secure its order of domination and as an instrument of social differentiation and hierarchisation. The "mass racket in nature" (Horkheimer / Adorno 1986: 271) is demonstrated by the fact that the Western civilisation project is characterised by inclusion and exclusion and has created pre-modern concepts of opposition such as spirit – matter or soul – body, which are linked to the influential idea of the "natural" order. In order to maintain the species' own claim to superiority and based on powerful metaphysical ciphers, "culture" – as a self-concept – has since referred be "ex negative" to "nature", and primarily to the group of animals as supposed representatives of this counter-world. Horkheimer and Adorno critically describe the human-animal dichotomy constructed in the sense of a "significant contrast, which as a counter-image can reinforce precisely the identity of the self" (Schäffter 1991: 19) and coagulate into dualism as a basic model of asymmetrical determination of difference and efforts to declassify.

The theses found in the works of Horkheimer and Adorno on the human-animal relationship as an elementary relationship of violence and the construction of the animal as a hidden cultural model for exclusion, projection, externalisation, reification, and subjugation of the other illustrate the often underestimated scope and topicality of their approach (cf. Mütherich 2008). What was initially a cultural distinction soon materialised in distinct dog bodies, from which the respective dog breeds could be directly read. This shift from a cultural category to a material object cannot be adequately captured by terms such as "objectification", "naturalisation" or "reification" (Heintz 2024: 229).

In contrast to positions based on discourse theory and social constructivism in the broadest sense, new materialism asserts the resistance and intrinsic weight of material realities and argues in favour of the dissolution of a fixed boundary between matter and spirit, nature and culture, animate and inanimate entities and ultimately also between humans and animals. Jane Bennett (2005: 447) has labelled the neo-materialist conviction that as material things, whether living or not (Heintz 2024: 227). Human-Animal Studies set out with the aim of bringing animals out of their sociological oblivion, while also overcoming the anthropological difference. Instead of seeing animals as passive natural objects, they are ascribed agency or even the power to act (on the difference Roscher 2015), and instead of researching animals separately from humans and humans separately from animals, the focus is on their reciprocal relationship (Heintz 2024: 226).

Heintz names the dog, the animal, as a cultural construction that has decoupled itself from the concept of "I exist, animal existence" (cf. 2024: 224) and quotes Wild as saying that the boundary between humans and animals is not a given, but constructed and therefore historically variable. The most catchy argument is the classic justification of anthropological difference – "man is the animal plus x" (Heintz cited in Wild 2008: 26).[12]

11Martin Heidegger (1975: 69) wrote in his 1947 "Letter on Humanism" that the "living being" is "the most difficult to think because it is closest to us on the one hand and at the same time separated from our existing being by an abyss" (Wiedenmann, cited in Heidegger 2009: 66).

12To explain this, Heintz (2024: 227) outlines the boundary between "natural" and "cultivated" nature, which the case study "Becoming Salmon" by Lien (2015) considers to be fundamentally contingent. Meanwhile, she considers the "anthropological difference" (Wild 2016), i.e. the boundary between humans and animals, to be intact or ontologically given. One exception is the linguistic anthology edited by Miriam Lind (2022) on the linguistic production of anthropological difference. A fundamental difference between humans and animals comes from Ian Hacking (e.g. Hacking 1999, 2007a). Hacking's proposal is based on a strict separation between humans ("human kinds") and non-human entities ("natural kinds"), be they plants, animals, stones or artefacts. "Natural kinds", in contrast to "human kinds", are characterised by the fact that they exist independently of our knowledge about them. Over time, however, it seems that he himself was no longer entirely comfortable with his separation of humans on the one hand and the rest of the world on the other. He dropped the term "natural kinds" and the epistemological and

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For him, the difference between the categorisation of humans and animals, plants or inanimate objects lies in the fact that non-human entities are indifferent to their categorisation, while humans perceive how they are observed and classified from the outside and adjust their expectations and actions accordingly, for instance by defending themselves against the external description, instrumentalising it for their own purposes or adapting to it and also becoming in their self-perception what the external image ascribes to them.

External categorisations can induce changes in behaviour with the result that the characteristics considered typical for a category of person no longer apply, which may lead to a revision of the original categorisation. Hacking coined the well-known formula of the "looping effects of human kinds" for this interrelationship between categorisation and the categorised. "When we characterise a type of person or behaviour, it can affect some people so classified in a direct way, and may even change them. Hence regularities about individuals of that kind may change. Our knowledge of those individuals must be revised as they change, and our classification themselves may have to be modified. I have called that the looping effect of human kinds..." (Hacking 2002: 10).

By abandoning the idea that all entities belong to either one class or the other, i.e. that "being nature" and "being human" are mutually exclusive, the idea of a fundamental difference between culture and nature, humans and animals is also called into question. But Hacking did not take this last step, at least not explicitly (Heintz 2024: 226). Dogs that did not belong to any particular breed were in turn excluded from the world of pedigree dogs as "mixed breeds". Apart from the fact that they were dogs, there was no longer anything in common between pedigree dogs and non-pedigree dogs. Afterwards, the "purebred" dog stood for the "true" dog, while all other dogs were defamed as "mutts" or "mixed breeds" and associated with the "lower classes". One of the few people at this time who systematically studied the hereditary processes was Charles Darwin, for whom heredity, along with variation, was the key concept in his theory of evolution (Heintz, cited in Rheinberger & Müller-Wille 2009: 104 ff.).

Variation explains the change , heredity explains the long-term fixation of the changed characteristics.

In his book "On the Origin of Species" (Darwin 1859/2018) and especially in his later work "The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication" (1868), he compiled a huge wealth of material on animal and plant breeding. By placing humans and animals in a line of continuity and assuming that both were subject to the same laws of evolution, Darwin prepared the ground for the idea that the rules of artificial selection could also be applied to humans. What was successful in dogs could also be successful in humans, namely a controlled selection of the genetically "best" and reproduction control in those who carried "bad" genetic material, be they dogs or humans (ibid. Heintz:2024 : 235).

2.1. Together despite differences

In her multi-layered arguments, the author Heintz largely refers to the following authors, Huber, Chittka and Godfrey-Smith

ontological premises associated with it and at times replaced it with the term "indifferent kinds" and "human kinds" became "interactive kinds" (Hacking 1999: 162 ff.) and later "kinds of people" (Hacking 2007a).

The assertion of a fundamental difference between humans and animals is not only questioned today by the animal welfare movement and parts of human-animal studies, but also by scientifically orientated cognitive biology (e.g. Huber 2021). Despite their different disciplinary positions, the arguments are similar: Much of what was considered exclusively human and legitimised the drawing of boundaries can also be found in animals, not only in the obvious candidates, but even in bees (Chittka 2022) or octopuses (Godfrey-Smith 2018). Under these conditions, the assumption of a fundamental difference between humans and animals can no longer be justified: At least certain animal species are entitled to humane treatment.

Although animals and humans occupy different places in the "tree of life", they are not fundamentally different in terms of the evolutionary theory. In other words, the biological determinism of the eugenicists paradoxically went hand in hand with a relativisation of the boundary between humans and animals (ibid.: 237ff).

3. Conclusions:

At the end of my reflections while travelling in Georgia, I will now return to the original question of my essay: What effect did the people and their cultures have on me? There is no easy answer to this question.

Following Vogd's "Problematic self-relations and mediation. Qualitative therapy research as a reconstruction of the relationship of reflection", it would be appropriate to briefly address the relationship of reflection according to his analysis.

"What you perceive is a deception", writes the German medical sociologist and biologist. An illusion is not visible as such to the perceiver. However, from the perspective of a wider contexture,[13] which reflects the relationship of the perceiver to the perceived object, the perception can be questioned or given a different significance. Accordingly, transclassical operations are not trapped in a compelling relationship of being, but rather open up the possibility of co-creating the world via interpretation and attribution. Reflection also relates to the relationship of other contextures by affirming certain relations of reflection, while others can be rejected, i.e. changed. Consequently, they can emerge through a specific form of arrangement, i.e. a specific interrelating of individual contextures (cf. Vogd 2014: 10f).

Two interpretations are what my reflections on my week-long journey into everyday life in Georgia eventually opened up. Above all, my subjective lens was able to reflect city life in and around Tbilisi through two counter-horizons. On the one hand, Georgia is characterised by an inner political conflict, as membership of the EU or, alternatively, a return to "Mother Russia" appear to be very problematic. On the level of everyday life, I got the impression that the country has partly arrived in the modern age, while another part still lives in the past. On the one hand, Georgians are very devout Christians, but on the other hand I often missed a sense of empathy, for instance, in dealing with the diversity of life. As a

13 Günther (1976) describes observer-dependent relations of reflection as contextures. Even a social situation that appears simple at first glance, such as an interaction between spouses, can be described as a complex arrangement of overlapping systemic, observer-dependent relations of reflection that can only be understood if different standpoints are adopted (I-you relationship) (Vogd 2014: 9).

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symbol for this, the wooden doors richly decorated with inlays, came to mind. These doors lead into the monastery of St. Nino, who initiated the Christianisation of Georgia. One part of the door symbolises the entry into the digital, globalised age, while the other part symbolises the side of the country that remained concealed to me since I came to Georgia, where people are blessed with a natural politeness coupled with a willingness to help, as a visitor from another culture.

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