

Environmental Political Theory

Paper 2

Sophie Wieland

Perceptions of place, politics, and the environment vary widely within countries due to the range of experiences and values of individuals. Experiences and values diverge even more widely internationally, which allows for even broader understandings of the forces that drive individuals as political actors. While such information may eventually be used to understand environmental political relationships, for example between nations or individuals battling climate change, this paper begins by describing a single country, Georgia, and introducing two hypothetical Georgian citizens and their perceptions of place, politics, and the environment. I conclude by comparing those perceptions to each other and to my own as a US citizen.

Introduction to Georgia

Georgia is a small republic of nearly 5,000,000 people, slightly smaller than South Carolina in land area, south of Russia and east of the Black Sea. The government consists of an executive branch, including both a president and prime minister, a unicameral legislative branch, and a judicial branch. Over half - 59.9% - of the population lives in urban areas, with most centered in the capital Tbilisi. There is a significant mining industry and agricultural and wine production, as the varied climate of Georgia allows uniquely diverse agricultural possibilities. Approximately 40% of Georgia's nearly 5 million residents live in rural areas (CIA World Factbook, 2021).

Georgia has a history of political occupation; it was a part of the Ottoman, Persian, and Russian empires, and most recently, the USSR. Georgia gained independence in 1991, and has struggled to create and maintain a democracy. In 2003, the Rose Revolution overthrew the government of President Eduard Shevardnadze, who had ruled the country since 1995. Georgia also struggles to maintain independence from Russia. There have been wars in northern regions of Georgia with Russia in 1992 and 2008. While the country as a whole supports Western market reforms, democracy, and hopes to join the EU and NATO, two separatist regions in the north of the country, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, have voted for independence. Russia supports the separatist regions, and in 2008 Russian troops entered the two regions and clashed with Georgian forces (CIA World Factbook, 2021). The war affected or displaced 158,000 people (New York Times, 2008), partially due to bombings in the area (Champion and Osborn, 2008). Champion and Osborn describe the regions as "unrecognized Russian protectorates", as Abkhazia and South Ossetia – 18% of the country – remain occupied by over 7,000 Russian troops and no Georgian forces (Champion and Osborn, 2008, CIA World Factbook, 2021).

Georgia has an extremely varied terrain, as it stretches from the Caucasus mountains in the north to the Black Sea (CIA World Factbook, 2021). Nearly every climate zone, except for tropical zones and deserts, can be found in Georgia (Nikolaishvili et al., 2015). The important waterways are the two primary rivers - the Mtkvari and the Rioni (Curtis, 1994) – and the Black Sea. Many of the rivers are used for hydropower; Georgia already had a significant amount of

hydroelectric power in 1994 (Curtis, 1994). As of 2010 there were 43 dams, which are also used for irrigation (United States Agency, 2010).

Introduction to Batumi and Marneuli

The two hypothetical Georgian citizens under consideration live in Batumi and Marneuli, which necessitates a deeper introduction to those two areas. Batumi is a large coastal city close to the country's southern border with Turkey. Batumi is in the autonomous republic of Ajara, and a major tourism hub. Batumi in some senses may be considered a microcosm of Georgia as a whole. The country is developing as a transit hub because of its strategic location on the Black Sea, increasing shipping from its port cities, and international tourism. The country transports fossil fuels from the Caspian region to the Black Sea port cities via three oil pipelines, where it is then shipped internationally (United States Agency, 2010, CIA World Factbook, 2021).

Georgia, and Batumi specifically, both relies on and has had considerable foreign investment in recent years (CIA World Factbook, 2021). Both the former president Mikheil Saakashvili and the former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili prioritized investment to build and develop the country, and foreign investment increased after the Rose Revolution (Burton, 2021, Spritzer, 2010). While Georgia often had blackouts after the fall of the USSR (Chivers, 2007), electrification is now at 100% (CIA World Factbook, 2021). Spritzer reports that water and electricity services were sporadic as recently as 2006 in Batumi (Spritzer, 2010). Recent improvements were due to large, recent governmental and foreign investment. However, Chivers noted that as recently as 2007 Georgians often traveled internationally for work (Chivers, 2007), and Kramer points out that development from foreign investment has been unequal, with large groups of Georgians still living in poverty or unemployed (Kramer, 2008).

In Batumi, the government invested \$103.9 million in infrastructure improvements, and private foreign investors spent \$311 million on tourism development between 2004 and 2009 (Spritzer, 2010). Tourism has grown significantly and changed the country as it shifts from domestic tourism to international mass tourism, a change many young Georgians support (Gogua, 2021, Spritzer, 2010). The Adjara region has 28% percent of beds in the nation, the highest of any region (Jerenashvili, 2014), and 13% of tourists visit the region (Paresashvili and Chitaladze, 2019). The city strives to position itself as a destination for international, particularly European, tourists. In fact, the 2023 World Travel Awards are going to be held in Batumi (Georgian Journal, 2021).

Marneuli is in an agricultural region in the south of Georgia. Agriculture is important in the country, though it has declined since Georgia's independence. Georgia exported food to other Soviet countries and lost that trade and has had decreased productivity because of war (United States Agency, 2010). Only 11.5% of the land is arable, but between 25% and 28% of the country's land area is used as pasture (United States Agency, 2010, CIA World Factbook, 2021). Most family farms are small, following the privatization of land after the collapse of the USSR. Originally the government sought to hold some farmland by the state to be leased by corporate farms, but the model was not very successful, and the remaining state land is being privatized (United States Agency, 2010).

The territory of Georgia after the dissolve of the USSR included areas with significant Russian minorities in the north and Azeri minorities in the south, including Marneuli. There are key differences between the central government and the Azeri minority, based on a combination of ethnicity, language, religion, and region. Following independence, Georgia built a state based on national (and thus ethnic and linguistic) unity. This led to conflict, both within the country – between Azeris and Georgians – and between Georgia and what Berglund calls kin states. In this circumstance, Azerbaijan is the kin state; the nation where the ethnic majority is the ethnic minority of concern in Georgia (Berglund, 2020). As early as the 1940s, towns in the Marneuli, Bolnisi and Dmanisi districts (the southernmost Georgian districts, with high Azeri populations), were renamed in Georgian. For example, Marneuli was originally Borchali, an Azeri place name (Berglund, 2020).

Ethnic Azeris make up 6.3% of the country, compared to the overwhelming majority – 86.8% - of ethnic Georgians. Georgian is the official language, and Orthodoxy is the official religion; over 87% speak Georgian and over 83% are Orthodox, respectively. Overall, only 6.2% of Georgian citizens speak Azerbaijani, and 10.7% of the country is Muslim (CIA World Factbook, 2021). However, in three southern-most districts, 76% of the population was Azeri in 2014 (Berglund, 2020).

Power struggles from ethnic identity are most apparent in the Russian-backed regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As previously mentioned, there were wars in 1992 and 2008 between the ethnically Russian de facto governments in the two regions and the Georgian national government (Champion and Osborn, 2008, CIA World Factbook, 2021). However, the Azeri regions are notable in that they are not occupied by foreign forces. Berglund offers context into how Azeris have more peacefully assimilated into Georgia. During the 1990s, there was much tension surrounding ethnic minority regions. Regional parties were banned, which decreased the representation of regionally-grouped ethnicities. Berglund writes “Gamsakhurdia [the first Georgian president] dismissed Azeri officials from their posts in the borderland, threatened to withhold citizenship and the right to own land from minorities opposing Georgian independence, and appointed an ethnic Georgian prefect to govern the area.” Zviad Gamsakhurdia was succeeded by Eduard Shevardnadze, who implemented a policy of ignoring ethnic diversity. While Shevardnadze removed ethnic information from passports, he “did little to either protect or integrate minorities” (Berglund, 2020).

These discriminatory policies are one reason an ethnic minority may reject the government’s rule. The other is the ability for the state to provide public goods, including providing said goods equally to minorities. In the economic disarray and corruption that followed Georgian independence, Azeris were not provided public goods well or equitably, decreasing their favor of the government’s rule. Berglund writes specifically about power structures at this time, noting the relatively power-less position of the Azeri: “Without speaking the state language, Azeris struggled to find jobs and protect their legal rights. Most civil servants were ethnic Georgians and demands for bribes were frequent, so interactions with officialdom often gave rise to frustration. To boot, well-connected Georgians acquired much of the arable soil in the region, leaving some Azeris no choice but to lease land at steep prices” (Berglund, 2020).

Much changed in 2003, following the Rose Revolution. Mikheil Saakashvili rose to the presidency and implemented a number of crucial reforms. First, Saakashvili fought corruption, and while some corruption at higher levels remains, much petty bribery has been eliminated (Bureau, 2021). He also implemented a two-fold strategy to integrate Azeris. First, he promoted the Georgian language, and required state officials to use Georgian for work. However, the policy excluded those without adequate language ability, especially from governmental and decision-making positions (Bureau, 2021, Berglund, 2020). To counter the discriminatory effects, Saakashvili also created affirmative action language learning programs and protected Azeri legal and religious standing.

Whether these reforms are successful in practice is another consideration. Some have argued that Saakashvili did not act enough, to the extent that life in Georgia was so poor for Azeris that the conditions effectively evicted them from the country, and integration was unlikely. However, more recent studies suggest that Azeris are willing to learn Georgian to integrate into the country but refuse other forms of cultural assimilation. This all culminates to suggest that local governments are only loosely connected with the central government (Berglund 2020), which means there are significant power inequalities between regions of Georgia, based on religious, ethnic, and linguistics differences.

Environmental Concerns

Before turning to the political and environmental opinions of the two hypothetical Georgian citizens, one needs to consider the environmental context of Georgia in more detail. The Black Sea, important to Batumi, was described in 1997 as being in crisis because of the large amounts of eutrophication (primarily from sewage dumping and industry), and the corresponding decrease and extinction of fish, increase in toxins, and increase in water related disease (United States National, 1997).

Climate change, which likely threatens all of Georgia, is believed to pose a significant danger to the economy of agricultural regions like Marneuli. The primary environmental threats Georgia faces are soil erosion, deforestation, desertification, declines in biodiversity, increases in natural disasters, and decreases in agricultural productivity. The leasing of land – instead of users owning land – has also led to unsustainable land use (United States Agency, 2010). Of course, many of these threats exacerbate one another. For example, droughts are becoming more common because of climate change, and thus increases the soil erosion already present because of overly intensive grazing. The most susceptible landscapes in Georgia to climate change include the Black Sea coast and southern Georgia, where both citizens live (Nikolaishvili et al., 2015).

Drought is particularly concerning for agricultural areas, which already rely on irrigation (United States Agency, 2010). Wastewater is often used for irrigation, which increases heavy metal pollution. Industrial wastewater is also often treated to reduce acidity, which creates calcium buildup in soils. These pollutants are associated with mining and industry from the Soviet era. The Lesser Caucasus region, including Marneuli, had significant mining of copper, zinc, cadmium, and sulphate and the area also had processing associated with those mines. The

area directly around mines and plants and surrounding rivers are extremely polluted. Unfortunately, as this area is also an agricultural region, pollution is well poised to decrease agricultural output (Matchavariani et al., 2015). Antithetically, agricultural pollution also contaminates rural water supplies (United States Agency, 2010).

Despite all these examples of environmental degradation, 58% of the country land area is considered relatively pristine (Nikolaishvili et al., 2015). Forty percent of Georgia's land area is still forested, which likely contributes to the measure of unaltered habitats, and the forested regions are biodiverse. They are, however, unsustainably logged and overgrazed and as of 2006, only 3.9% of Georgian land is in protected areas (United States Agency, 2010).

Georgian National Policy

To draw conclusions from these physical and environmental details, we next turn to Georgian policies and political history, especially those that are most impactful to Citizen X and Y. While Burton emphasizes the increasing rule of law in the budding democracy, corruption still taints the government (CIA World Factbook, 2021, Burton, 2021).

Political stability seems distant even now; the nation is currently gripped in a new political crisis. The ruling Georgian Dream Party has been accused of holding power illegitimately, which caused a snap election that opponents claim the Georgian Dream Party corrupted. Former president Saakashvili recently returned to the country following nearly a decade abroad, and was immediately arrested (Geybullayeva, 2021). He began a hunger strike in prison to protest the current regime (Georgia Today, 2021). Saakashvili positions himself against the ruling Georgian Dream Party, saying recently "I will stand up to Ivanishvili's regime, which is dragging our homeland to Putin's Russia. We should not allow this together and we should all return Georgia together on a path leading to the West. Let us be a place of democracy, reforms and development" (Interpressnews, 2021).

This is particularly important for the tourism industry. Paresashvili and Chitaladze emphasize that social, economic, and political stability, achieved through a stronger democracy, is key to improving the Georgian tourism market (Paresashvili and Chitaladze, 2019). Though Batumi is only 12 miles north of Turkey, and thus much farther south than the warzone with Russia, tourism fell in Batumi in both 1991 and 2008 (Spritzer, 2010). Tourists are obviously less willing to vacation in a partially occupied or war-torn country (Paresashvili and Chitaladze, 2019).

The national process of land privatization is also important to the position of the two citizens. As mentioned, most land was privatized after Georgian independence in the 1990s, especially in urban areas. Land is of low market value, to the point that it won't be accepted as collateral for loans (United States Agency, 2010). All these factors likely feed into the higher levels of poverty in rural areas. In fact, environmental degradation from overuse like overgrazing stems from the need – through poverty – of those people to use that resource unsustainably for their immediate survival (Troschke, 2015).

Environmental Policy

With a deeper understanding of Georgian policy and physical geography, we now turn to environmental policy. Environmental policy in Georgia shares many features with the governmental programs already mentioned, namely corruption and poor enforcement from instability. There is a vast divide between law and practice. In theory the country is party to many UN environmental conventions, like the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement (CIA World Factbook, 2021), and has national laws to implement environmental policies, like the 1997 (amended 2000) Law on Water. The country also conserves protected areas. However, the effectiveness of these laws in practice is low; pastures and forests are often overgrazed or unsustainably logged because of poor management. The government simply doesn't have the capacity to enforce regulations (United States Agency, 2010).

Troschke provides an in-depth review of why environmental policy is so ineffective in Georgia. To move chronologically, we begin with the Soviet Union. While there were significant environmental policies in the USSR, most businesses circumvented the policies rather than made their business strategies sustainable, a practice that continues to this day. Following independence, Georgia suffered a considerable decrease in environmental policy possibilities. Soviet scientists left the country and were largely not replaced. Georgia was in economic crisis, and could thus offer only low wages, and scientists needed to be able to speak Georgian. The economic and political upheaval of the period immediately following independence also created significant corruption, which has made environmental policies even easier to circumnavigate. Georgia does have a Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection (MoENRP), but the department was reorganized in 2011, which decreased its governmental power (Troschke, 2015). Environmental policy in general is not a priority (Energy Charter Secretariat, 2012).

Environmental policy is chronically underfunded in Georgia as tax revenue is low. This results in three primary problems. First, little or no environmental data is collected (Energy Charter Secretariat, 2012, Troschke, 2015). Georgia often requires external funding to fulfill international reporting obligations associated with, for example, the Kyoto Protocol and other conventions. Georgian national law also requires the publishing of a National Environmental Action Programme (NEAP) every five years and a National Report on the Environment every three years, but the reports are often delayed because of a lack of funding. The 2012-2016 NEAP was partially funded by the Netherlands, and many of the programs described in the report were at least partially funded by donors (Troschke, 2015). Many programs that weren't funded by donors were not implemented due to the lack of resources (Energy Charter Secretariat, 2012).

Environmental data that was either never collected or is no longer collected because of a lack of funding more significantly means that Georgia cannot base policies on scientific measures. Emissions are not recorded, so it is impossible to create schemes taxing or fining pollution. This also means that data cannot be used to sway political opinions. Troschke argues that, "economic development and the environment need not be arch-enemies, but without data and research, that truth cannot be demonstrated to political decision makers and entrepreneurs in Georgia" (Troschke, 2015).

The second problem from a lack of funding is the inability of the government to maintain programs. The policy or project remains in effect legally, but without implementation there are

no tangible results. There is little monitoring, which increases nonconformity with regulations. As mentioned previously, many businesses avoid environmental legislation by paying bribes, when their non-compliance is noticed at all (Troschke, 2015).

The final problem is that Georgia still lacks experts to advise on or write policy. The EU, the UN, the German Corporation for International Cooperation (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit - GIZ), the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Dutch, British, Danish, and Norwegian governments have stepped in to fund projects or create legislation. However, such programs are weak or inefficient because they are not specific to Georgia and do not engage with locals. The country's wide variety of landscapes and climatic zones requires a diversity of legislative approaches, but internationally applied law is country-wide and only reflects what is considered best policy by outsiders. For example, overgrazing is important for Georgia, but of little importance for outsiders and is thus not funded or addressed. International funding is also usually short term, so there is little stability in programs (Troschke, 2015, Energy Charter Secretariat, 2012).

In addition, Troschke explains, "Laws, programmes and regulations developed by foreign experts are often not felt to be 'owned' by national experts or policy makers, and hence often the motivation to implement them is not intrinsic, even if it exists at all." This lack of motivation could be seen as a lack of environmental awareness or interest. However, whereas USAID considers Georgia to have "low [...] public awareness", Troschke argues that average Georgians are the most aware of environmental degradation but unable to participate in the centralized environmental policy making (United States Agency, 2010, Troschke, 2015).

Hypothetical Georgian Citizens

Citizen Y, whom I have named Davit Kartvelishvili based on prevalent male names in Georgia (Public Service Hall, n.d.), works as a dealer in a casino in Batumi, and is thus dependent on and supports the tourism industry. His spouse, a Turk he met in the casino, works for a real estate company and is thus also dependent on economic growth and development. Kartvelishvili does have a conflict of interest; increasing tourism increases the cost of real estate, which is beneficial for his spouse, but also increases the cost of living for Georgians.

Kartvelishvili is a thirty-year-old Orthodox of Georgian ethnicity, and is thus in the dominant majority in both ethnicity and religion. Eighty-seven percent of the country is of Georgian ethnicity, and 83% of the country is Orthodox (CIA World Factbook, 2021). I made Kartvelishvili male to match his other majority traits; while men are not numerically more prevalent in Georgia (CIA World Factbook, 2021) the conception of women as primarily maternal figures (Adamia, 2018) suggests a sexist system that would prefer men.

As a thirty-year-old, Kartvelishvili was born in 1991 as Georgia gained independence. Though too young to remember the 1992 war in Abkhazia, the war, political instability, and economic instability likely influenced his childhood. At twelve Kartvelishvili would have been old enough to remember the 2003 Rose Revolution and Mikheil Saakashvili's rise to presidency. South Ossetia voted for independence in 2006, which culminated in the 2008 August War. The

war coincided with the global economic crisis, the combination of which resulted in high unemployment right as Kartvelishvili was 17 years old, and likely looking for work (CIA World Factbook, 2021, Jerenashvili, 2014). As of 2019, there continues to be 30% unemployment for those 15-24 years old, and nearly 12% unemployment overall. Nearly 20% of Georgians live below the poverty line (CIA World Factbook, 2021).

I have named Citizen X Hasan Mammadli, based on common male Georgian-Azeri names (Kinch, 2021, Pelkmans, 2013, Wikipedia, 2021). Mammadli is a forty-year-old pharmacist of Azeri ethnicity in the town of Marneuli. I have made him male because he is a pharmacist; he would have begun post-secondary education assumedly in 1999 (at 18). At that time, approximately 60% of post-secondary STEM graduates were male. Male STEM graduates also accounted for approximately 30% of all male post-secondary graduates. For women the same value was less than 20%, making it unlikely that Citizen X would be a woman pharmacist (United Nations, 2019). Mammadli is a Shia Muslim and likely speaks Azerbaijani as his first language. While Mammadli is a minority in many ways compared to the rest of Georgia and Kartvelishvili, he is likely in the majority in the southern-most districts of Georgia. As I already noted, in that region over 75% of the population was Azeri in 2014 (Berglund, 2020).

Mammadli works in a city hospital, which likely makes him a state employee. Depending on the required post-secondary schooling for pharmacists in Georgia, he would have begun working around or just after the Rose Revolution in 2003. At that time president Saakashvili implemented Georgian language requirements for state employees, so it is likely that Mammadli speaks some Georgian, or began learning it at that time; a Georgian language school for adults opened in Marneuli in 2011 (Berglund, 2020). As an Azeri with parents who worked in Soviet factories, he likely also speaks Russian. As mentioned previously, language is a key determinant of power and position in Georgia. Those who cannot speak Georgian are excluded from state positions or political office. This affects Mammadli's community, but likely not him personally, as his pharmacy job likely requires him to speak or be learning Georgian.

Perceptions of Place, Politics, and the Environment

With these assumed traits, we can next consider what views each citizen holds. War, political instability, and tourism are likely the predominate factors shaping Kartvelishvili's views of politics, place, and the environment. As a younger Georgian working in the tourism industry, he likely values political stability and Western connection. As such, Kartvelishvili would likely support Saakashvili's United National Movement for its anti-Russian, pro-democracy stance. He likely strongly condemns corruption for the sake of a stable democracy and tourism market. To encourage stability and democracy, Kartvelishvili assumedly supports rule of law and the duty to democracy required by civic republicanism.

It is important to next consider agriculture. Kartvelishvili has few, if any, ties to agriculture. Many individuals in Mammadli's family work in the agriculture industry, which is common in the region around Marneuli. Because there is higher poverty in rural areas, especially for agricultural workers (United States Agency, 2010), we can assume Mammadli is of a lower economic class than Kartvelishvili. Even assuming that his pharmacy job pays well, his parents

were factory workers and his extended family works in agriculture. It is also of note that, when land was privatized, ethnic Georgians purchased much of the arable land, leaving Azeris to lease land at high prices (Berglund, 2020), which would decrease the economic class of rural Azeris even more than that of rural Georgians.

Mammadli's connection to the land probably manifests in a greater environmental awareness than that of Kartvelishvili. His family relies on the success of the agriculture sector, which relies on environmental health. His parents also worked in Soviet factories, which have since been abandoned, making him even more aware of the economic and environmental damage that his region has suffered. The mining and industry in the Marneuli region have polluted the soils (Matchavariani et al., 2015).

Both Citizens X and Y likely value political stability and transparency, but for different reasons. Whereas Kartvelishvili is expected to condemn corruption to preserve the democracy that promotes tourism, Mammadli is expected to condemn corruption because it unfairly targets Azeris and misappropriates goods from the community. The two also likely both have positive views of former president Saakashvili, but again for different reasons. Kartvelishvili supports Saakashvili's United National Movement as it is anti-Russian and Western-oriented. Mammadli may not necessarily have positive views of Saakashvili, but would presumably have a higher opinion of Saakashvili than earlier Georgian politicians, as Saakashvili was the first Georgian president to attempt to integrate Azeris into the country.

Mammadli likely has a strong connection to the region he lives in, though perhaps not the country. When Saakashvili implemented education reforms in an attempt to unify the country, some complained "Azeri pupils 'read textbooks [from Tbilisi] claiming that we migrated here just 200 years ago'" (Berglund, 2020). This suggests that Azeris feel strongly about their roots in the region, regardless of how political boundaries have shifted. It is likely that Mammadli has a strong connection to (specifically) his region, perhaps even stronger than Kartvelishvili feels for Georgia. As an ethnic Georgian with an assumed anti-Russian tendency, Kartvelishvili likely defines his sense of place by the Georgian nation. His worry for the rising price of real estate reveals that he intends to stay in Georgia despite the possibility of better economic conditions elsewhere.

Both Mammadli and Kartvelishvili value ethnic identity and community and the places tied to those identities. This is in direct contradiction to my fragmented sense of place. The difference likely results from my situation as the descendant of colonial immigrants, whereas both Georgian citizens are descendants of ethnic groups from that region, whether Georgian or Azeri. While I feel at home with my immediate and extended family and define my place in the world as the descendant of specific German and Norwegian immigrants, I feel displaced in the Midwest. I am increasingly aware of the people who were a part of the ecosystem before the century of white colonization. I am not comfortable with living on stolen land, but I am also not comfortable in my ancestors' homes in Europe, because I am distinctively not from there – I do not feel connected to that culture, language, or geology the way I am familiar with the Midwest.

Perhaps because of my views on colonization, I do not have a strong identity as an American or South Dakotan. I do have a general identity as a Midwesterner. This is because citizenship as a form of identity concerns me; in my experience there is often only a small divide between patriotism and xenophobic nationalism. I believe my place is defined more by the culture and landscape of the area I call home than by national boundaries and patriotism. I am a citizen of the earth rather than a particular nation.

Kartvelishvili would probably disagree, as the national boundaries of Georgia have been and are contested. Ethnic identity and place are tied to political declarations on physical space much more in Georgia than can be done by the descendant of immigrants in South Dakota. While Mammadli may disagree with the republic of Georgia's ethnic claim to southern Georgia, his sense of home is also defined by a place-based culture. The Azeris have lived around Marneuli, whatever the current ruling nation's name, for centuries. These differences aside, the importance of community is central to all three of our senses of place.

Summary

We now turn to broader themes that determine perceptions of place, politics, and the environment. The first is socioeconomic status. Here I make three general categories. Those of the lowest socioeconomic status are often tied to the land, through subsistence agriculture, for example. While they may not be able to politically advocate for the land or devote time to environmental activism because some basic needs on Maslow's hierarchy of needs have not been met, they are often extremely concerned with the environment, and aware of environmental changes because they affect them directly. Economic needs limit ecological action, but not ecological concern. This is likely the category that Mammadli represents.

The second category is people of mid socioeconomic status, who are generally more concerned with economic growth than environmental health. Kartvelishvili is in this category; he doesn't necessarily discount the importance or value of the environment, but places its importance below that of development. Those of the highest socioeconomic status, with the majority of their hierarchical needs met, are the most able to both become aware of environmental concerns and act on those concerns.

This analysis also appears to hold true on a country-wide basis. Smaller and less industrialized nations, like Pacific island nations, are most concerned with climate change effects like sea level rise. These nations are tied more closely to the natural environment, and are thus most aware of environmental changes. Unfortunately, as with the individuals in the lower socioeconomic class, they often have comparably little power internationally to remedy the environmental problems that immediately affect them.

Quickly developing countries are generally more concerned with economic development and international trade than environmental regulations. While India and China are perhaps the most famous examples, Georgia also fits into this category. The most developed countries usually have the most (and most enforced) environmental policy. For example, western European countries are primarily transitioning to lower carbon economies. The United States is perhaps an

exception, as it does not have the level of environmental action expected based on its economic position.

These relationships to the environment perhaps stem from the level of connection each group has with natural areas. Those in lower socioeconomic classes or from less developed countries have a close relationship with nature. Agriculture, for example, directly depends on the health of the environment. Those individuals also likely have a personal or ancestral tie to the place they care for, as we see with Mammadli.

Those of higher classes likely have fewer connections with natural environments from living in urban areas or being employed in positions less tied to the land. Damages to particular environments are not damages to a place with particular meaning. This analysis, however, begs why those of the highest classes care for the environment at all. It is possibly the result of education or leisure time. Rather than from personal relationships to the land, these individuals may learn concern for the earth from academic sources. It is also possible (and not mutually exclusive with education) that those of the highest classes have more time to spend recreating or enjoying nature, and develop a personal connection through leisure rather than labor. Both of these likely result in a concern for the earth and its ecosystems as a whole, rather than precise, personal spaces; this is the explanation closest to my own perspective on the environment.

Perhaps the most important conclusion is that environmental consensus is not impossible; the vast differences in how people perceive the environment and their place in it does not mean that environmental destruction is inevitable. Instead, it highlights the importance of being aware of unique perspectives and circumstances. With such knowledge, appropriate and effective methods to conserve the planet may yet be created and implemented.

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