The Fereydani Georgian Representation of Identity and Narration of History

A Case of Emic Coherence

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Abstract: The Fereydani Georgians are Shi'a Muslims, while the Georgians of Georgia are predominantly Orthodox Christians. This article deals with the mechanism by which Fereydani Georgians reaffirm their Shi'a identity in harmony with the Iranian Georgians' role in the Iranian history. After discussing the theoretical foundation of the relationship between history and ethnic (and national) self-identification, the article describes how Fereydani Georgian identity is represented today and how important historical events are narrated in order to create a cohesive and coherent image of self – an outcome that is called 'emic coherence'. The concept of historical peak experience is introduced on an ethnic level.

Keywords: emic coherence, ethnic identity, historical peak experiences, Iranian Georgians, self-identification

Introduction

The Fereydani Georgians inhabit Fereydunshahr and its vicinity in the region of Fereydan, 150 kilometres to the west of the seventeenth-century Iranian capital of Esfahân (see fig. 1).[1] Nowadays, the Fereydani Georgians are also referred to as 'Fereydunshahri Georgians' after their main urban centre, Fereydunshahr (Fereydunšahr).[2] Nevertheless, due to historical reasons the designation 'Fereydani Georgians' is preferred in this article. These people call each other *čem-dzowli* (*čemi dzvali* in Standard Georgian), which means 'my bones'. This designation indicates a sense of primordial attachment and ethnic solidarity. Despite more conservative estimations, the number of *self-aware* Fereydani Georgians living in Fereydan itself could be over 61,000 (Rezvani 2008: 594). They are descendants of Georgians who were moved, either voluntarily or by force, during the seventeenth century from the Caucasus into the territory of contemporary Iran.

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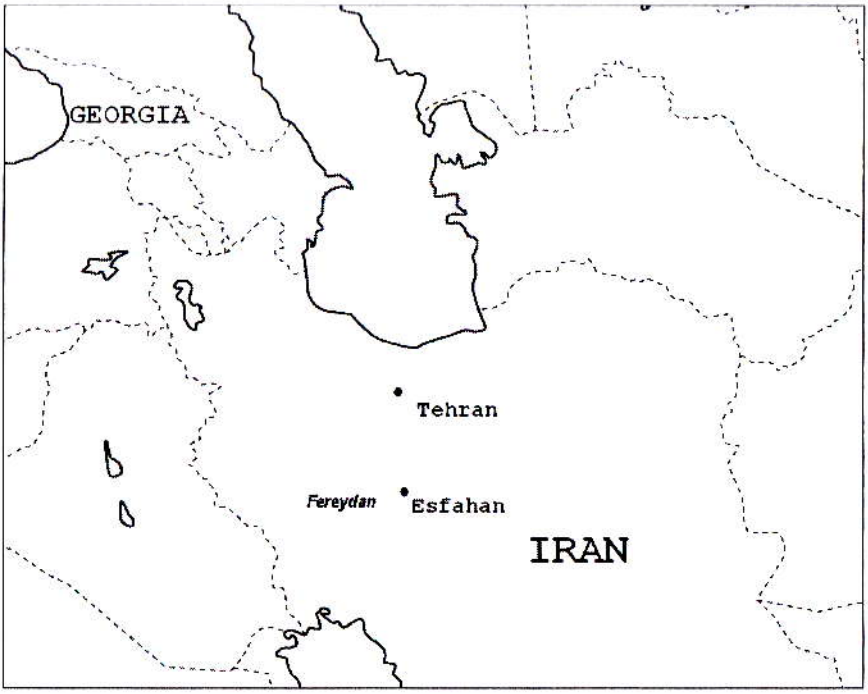

Figure 1: Location of Fereydan in Iran.

Fereydani Georgians have formed an ethnic identity that is compatible with the historical role played by Georgians in Iran and is distinct from that of Georgians living in Georgia. The most notable difference is that the Fereydani Georgians are Shi'a Muslims, while the Georgians of Georgia are primarily Orthodox Christians. Although it is an essential element in the Fereydani Georgian identity, Shi'a Islam is more than just a cultural marker: it has been functional in the preservation of Georgian identity in Fereydan. The Shi'a belief among the Fereydani Georgians is very profound; it is interwoven with and, in many cases, the basis of their cultural expressions and traditions (Sepiani 1979: 144–155, 194–266). In contrast, pre-Islamic beliefs are much more vivid among many other peoples who were Islamised during the same period or earlier. One such example are the Kyrgyz, whose traditional (popular) Islamic practice is viewed as heterodox by their neighbours – and even by themselves (Abazov 2007). Although pre-Islamic traditions do exist among the Fereydani Georgians, they are not much different, either in quantity or in quality, from those of their non-Georgian Shi'a neighbours in Iran (ibid.: 145).[3] In fact, being Georgian, Iranian and Shi'a are compatible with Fereydani Georgian self-identification. According to Fereydani Georgians, '[A] pleasure is hidden for an Iranian to be a Georgian and a Muslim.'[4]

The unique combination of Georgian language and Shi'a belief is all the more remarkable when one realises the number of other Georgians who relocated to Iran and became integrated into other ethnic groups after Islamisation. Although once larger in number, most Georgians in northern Iran have been assimilated into the Gilaki and especially the Mâzandarâni peoples. Apparently, these Georgians were not as successful as the Fereydani Georgians in preserving their ethnicity after conversion to Shi'a Islam. In addition, there are no groups of self-aware Muslim Armenians in Iran, despite the fact that many historical accounts report cases of conversion among them as well. In reviewing the histories of many ethnic groups, it appears that religious conversion has more often than not been accompanied by loss of language and ultimately the loss of original ethnicity:

> Examination of the histories of numerous ethnic groups reveals that a religious conversion by the minority to the religion practised by the majority often results in the loss of the ethnic group's original ethnicity and assimilation into the ethnic majority. This prevails in the case of migrants and to a much lesser extent those who were converted in their original homelands. Nevertheless, the latter case is exemplified by the Christian Orthodox Assyrians who converted to Islam and became Arabs in their original homeland Syria as well as the majority of the Christian Egyptians (Copts) who converted to Islam and were Arabicized in their native Egypt. The Fereydani Georgians constitute an atypical example in this respect because, while they are Shi'ite Moslems, they have not assimilated into the ethnicity of their Shi'ite Moslem neighbours. Perhaps the most unique fact is that Fereydani Georgians take pride in their ethnic identity consciously as Shi'ite Georgian-speaking Iranians. (Rezvani 2008: 595–596)

The Iranian nation is best described as a (quasi) civic nation, in which all ethnic groups, as such, enjoy equal status but in which Shi'a religion is the official state religion. The mainstream Iranian cultural values are derived from Shi'a history and its belief system, or in any case are interwoven with it. Although there are many Iranian values which may be derived from Zoroastrianism or may even be universal, they are also present in the Shi'a belief system. The Shi'a character of the Iranian state and mainstream Iranian society gives Shi'a ethnic groups a privileged position.

In a multi-ethnic, predominantly Shi'a environment, the Fereydani Georgian ethnos logically faced many challenges, yet it still managed to be preserved. The Georgian Shi'a ethnos had to create its roots in an environment in which the Georgians were not natives initially. Considering the fact that Georgian Orthodox Christianity takes a central place in the Georgian ethnonational identity (see Hin 2003; Pelkmans 2002),[5] the Fereydani Georgians' self-identification as both Shi'a Muslims and Georgians seems to be an atypical combination at first sight. Nevertheless, in the Fereydani Georgians' perception, Shi'a religion is not incompatible with their Georgian identity but rather an integral part of it. At the same time, their Christian past has been an extra

burden on them to prove that their Shi'a beliefs are profound. This burden is even heavier when one realises that, except for the Armenians who are Christians and also arrived in the seventeenth century, the other peoples of Fereydan – that is, the Persian and Turkic speakers, as well as the Khânsâri (Xwânsâri) people and the Bakhtiyâri (Baxtiyâri) tribes – are Shi'a Muslims and often claim more antiquity with regard to the inhabitation of the region.

The Fereydani Georgians use history in order to construct and stabilise their unique identity. This is not to doubt the veracity of their history, but it is their selective emphasising and memorising – and hence forgetting certain past episodes – and the way in which the events are narrated that makes this history coherent and compatible with their self-identification.

The scope of this article is to show the Fereydani Georgian (self-)representation of identity as a layered concept and to discuss the way that these people narrate and represent their past coherently and consistently with their currently assumed ethnic identity. After having elaborated on the theoretical underpinnings of the relationship between history and ethnic (and national) self-identification, the article describes how modern Fereydani Georgian identity is conceived today and how Fereydani Georgians narrate important historical events in order to project a cohesive and coherent image of self. I call the desired outcome of this process 'emic coherence'. Emic coherence can be defined as cohesion and coherence between the self-identification of a people at the present time and its narration and representation of its historical past, as well as its identity and all of its aspects, components and attributes.

History and Identity

Inspired by the linguistic concepts of the 'phonemic' versus 'phonetic', the concepts 'emic' and 'etic' were coined by the linguistic anthropologist Kenneth L. Pike. 'Etic' is the way a researcher or anyone outside a social system gives meaning, interprets and makes sense of the behaviour of (members of) that social group. 'Emic' refers to the way that the members of a social group itself describe and give meaning to their own behaviour (in a broad sense). Simply put, 'etic' stands for an outsider's and 'emic' for an insider's reality and point of view:

> [Emic and etic perspectives] describe behavior from two different standpoints ... The etic viewpoint studies behavior as from outside of a particular system ... The emic viewpoint results from studying behavior as from inside the system ... Emic descriptions provide an internal view, with criteria chosen from within the system. They represent to us the view of one familiar with the system and who knows how to function within it himself. (Pike 1967: 37–38)

Benedict Anderson's (1983) understanding of the nation as an imagined community implicitly means that the narratives produced by the members

of national groups (or, for that matter, self-aware ethnic groups) are constructed from an emic point of view. Although an outsider might be able to understand them and the logic behind them, they have a more profound meaning for the members of those ethnic groups or nations. For them, this meaning is interwoven with their world view and hence their ethnic or national identity. The way that a nation or ethnic group narrates major historical events is intimately related to the way it perceives its own identity. Dijkink (1996) has discussed the influence of 'historical peak experiences' on the national orientation of different peoples, regarding both their own identity and that of the outside world. Dijkink relates the historical peak experiences at the national level to national identity. However, national identity is not the only source of identity and therefore should not be equated with ethnic identity.

In multi-ethnic countries, where many ethnic identities exist next to each other, ethnic historical peak experiences may be anchored at a local level. Historical peak experiences are events reproduced overtly and can be observed. More importantly, however, is the way that the peak experience is connected to the ethnic and territorial identity of the people who have experienced it. The orientation and direction of action of people are influenced by these historical peak experiences, but at the same time the identification of those events as such and their representation and narration are co-determined by the self-identification and national or ethnic (political-historical) orientation of the national or ethnic groups concerned.

The commemoration of historical peak experiences implies a process of selective memorisation and interpretation of the past that is suitable for the purposes of the present. This process entails the invention of myths, yet the mythification of history does not necessarily contradict the veracity of historical events. In fact, there is a core of truth in each myth. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) have pointed to the 'invention of tradition', and, to a certain degree, it is true that ethnic and national histories and traditions – and hence identities – are constructed. But this is not to say that there are no actual historical components in them. Although it is contestable that all historical facts are fabricated, their selection and interpretation contribute to a certain historiography. Myths are inventions, and 'inventions are common components in the ongoing development of authentic culture … [I]nvention is an ordinary event in the development of all discourse' (Hanson 1989: 899).[6] The invention of myths is a functional component of historiography and a means of distinguishing the here and now from the past. Anthony D. Smith (1984: 288) states that 'without myths, memories and symbols by which to mark off group members from "strangers," and without the cultural elites to interpret and elaborate them, there can be no real ethnie'. The invention of historical (peak) experiences, understood as (re)interpretation and (re)narration of historical events, is not an abnormality or intellectual perversion but a regular trajectory in the politics of identity formation and identification:

> Making history is a way of producing identity insofar as it produces a relation between that which supposedly occurred in the past and the present state of affairs. The construction of a history is the construction of a meaningful universe of events and narratives for an individual or collectively defined subject. And since the motivation of this process of construction emanates from a subject inhabiting a specific social world, we may say that history is an imprinting of the present onto the past. In this sense, all history including modern historiography is mythology. (Friedman 1992a: 837)

The strategic use of history builds bridges between the past and present, and hence between the contemporary representation of identity and historical experiences, thus anchoring historical roots in the present time and place: 'Politics of identity consists in anchoring the present in a viable past. The past is, thus, constructed according to the conditions and desires of those who produce historical textbooks in the present' (Friedman 1992b: 207).

By selective stressing, interpreting and narrating an orderly, meaningful whole, ethnic (and national) groups build a coherent identity. They select, imbue with meaning and represent those elements which are coherent with their ethnic identity as perceived by themselves. Personifying ethnic or national characteristics and putting this in simple words, a group says: 'This is who I am. My experiences show exactly that I am the one who I claim to be.'

Representations of historical peak experiences contribute to emic coherence, which acquires a spatial component when belonging to a place is an important aspect of self-identification. In this sense, emic coherence is not only concerned with who a people are but also implies that they have a legitimate place in their geographical environment, due to the identity that they assume. Emic coherence gives the ethnic group a raison d'être in the space it occupies geographically with all its cultural attributes. In fact, emic coherence is reached in full when a people narrates and represents its historical past coherently and consistently with how it perceives and defines its identity culturally and geographically.

Modern Self-Representation of Fereydani Georgian Identity

There have been many Iranian Georgians who have played an important role in Iranian political history (e.g. see Muliani 2001; Savory 1970). Among the most famous are Allâhverdi Khân Undiladze and his son Emâmqoli Khân Undiladze, Rostam (Rostom) Khân Sepahsâlâr, Gorgin (Giorgi) Khân, Yusef Khân and Manuchehr Khân Motamed-od-Dowleh. The Qâjâr prime minister, Amin ol-Soltân, had Georgian roots and was a descendant of Lâchin Khân, a Georgian companion of Abbâs Mirzâ in fighting the Russians in the Caucasus.[7] Also Bahrâm Âryânâ, the Iranian nationalist general during and after the Second World War, had Georgian roots.[8] The Allâhverdi Khân's Si-o-se-Pol Bridge (see

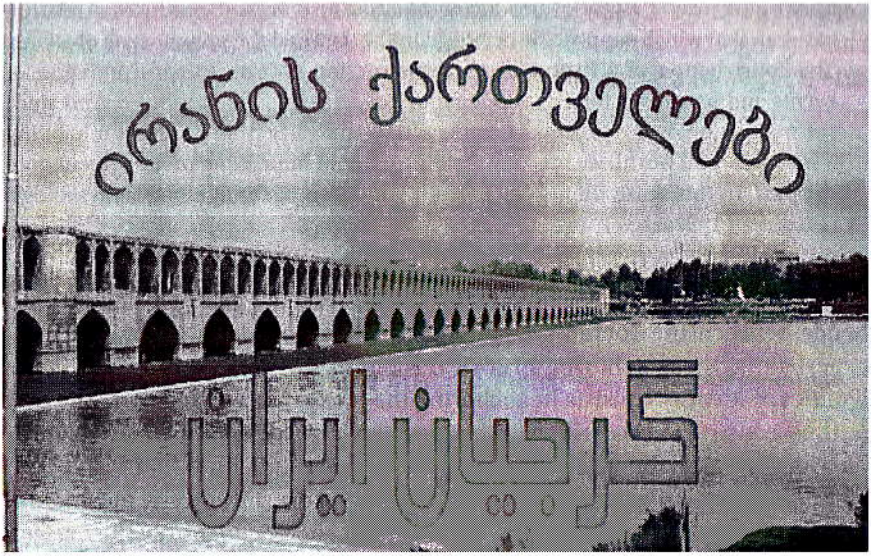

Figure 2: The Allâhverdi Khân's Si-o-se-Pol Bridge in Esfahân. The text reads 'Georgians of Iran' in Georgian and Persian, respectively, above and beneath the bridge.
Source: Gorjiyân-e Irân dar Târix.

fig. 2) in Esfahân, the Safavid empire's capital, provides a physical remembrance of Allâhverdi Khân's role in Iranian history, while the statue of Emâmqoli Khân on Qeshm Island in the Persian Gulf commemorates his son. As one of few Safavid Iranian politicians, Allâhverdi Khân is buried in Iran's most sacred site, the Imâm Rezâ's shrine in Mashhad. He is regarded as 'Shâh Abbâs's right hand' in the wars against the Ottomans (Muliani 2001: 247), and Emâmqoli Khân is a clear example of the prominence that Georgians could achieve.[9] Iranians take pride in him as the victor and liberator of the Persian Gulf from the mighty Portuguese navy, even more so after 29 September was declared in 2005 by the Iranian government as the National Day of the Persian Gulf.[10]

Despite the fact that most, if not all, of the famous Georgian Iranian statesmen were of non-Fereydani origin, Fereydani Georgians take pride in them as fellow Iranian Georgians. On the other hand, key figures in Georgian history, such as King David the Builder and Queen Tamar, one of three female Georgian saints, have remained relatively unknown to them.

Muliani's (2001) book, *Jâygâh-e Gorjihâ dar Târix va Farhang va Tammaddon-e Irân* (The Georgians' Position in Iranian History, Culture and Civilisation), with 352 pages of extensive information, is so far the best historical work on the Iranian Georgians written by an Iranian Georgian. Muliani mentions at least 41 Iranian Georgian statesmen who were at least partially Georgian, aside from the members of the Safavid royal dynasty, as well as many poets and writers. On 52 pages Muliani (ibid.: 243–294) discusses Iranian Georgian statesmen, of which 35 pages deal with Allâhverdi Khân and Emâmqoli Khân (ibid.:

243–277). By comparison, not much is said about the Georgian Golden Age in the twelfth century. David the Builder, his son Giorgi III and his granddaughter Queen Tamar, the most important key figures in the history of Georgia, are only briefly discussed on (less than) four pages (ibid.: 79–82).

Ordinary Iranian Georgians refer most frequently to the services to Iran performed by Allâhverdi Khân Undiladze and Emâmqoli Khân Undiladze, while almost nothing is said about the golden period of Georgia's history. In addition, they praise the efforts of the Iranian Georgian martyrs who 'defended the Iranian fatherland against Saddam and his international allies'. Fereydani Georgians respect their martyrs with great devotion; they visit the Golzar-e Šohadâ (Martyrs' Rose Garden), bringing flowers and paying tribute to the martyrs each Thursday afternoon and evening, according to Shi'a tradition.[11] A Fereydani Georgian poem (in Persian) about their martyrs says:

Čo xwâhi ze jânbâz gui soxan
Az ân torbat-e pâk âyad navâ

Be xâk-e šahidân-e mâ sarbezan
Fadâ-ye vatan bâd sad jân-e man.

(Rahimi 2001: 73)

This poem can be roughly translated as follows: 'Visit the soil of our martyrs if you want to speak of martyrdom. You will hear a voice from their sacred soil screaming that they wished they had sacrificed hundreds of their lives for their country.'[12]

One of the best representations of Iranian Georgian identity was presented by the Iranian Georgian Association of Tourism at the Esfahân Tourism Exhibition of 2005 and published by the Esfahân Organisation of Cultural Heritage in a special edition of *Aqvâm* (Ethnic Groups):

> We Georgians of Iran, or better said the Georgian Iranians, are the descendants of Allâhverdi Khân and Emâmqoli Khân Undiladze. We have travelled from the land of rivers and hot water springs of Tbilisi[13] and have planted the seeds of friendship and solidarity for more than 400 years all over Iran, from Farah Âbâd in Mazandarân, to Fars and Esfahân and to the dearest Fereydunshahr – the roof of Iran. We are immensely proud that we are Shi'a Muslims, that we are Iranians and that we speak the sweet Georgian language. Georgians have offered great services to Iran, from the military wisdom of Allâhverdi Khân to the braveries of Emâmqoli Khân, who put an end to the Portuguese occupation in southern Iran ... up to the martyrdom of young Georgian men during the eight years of sacred defence[14] ... Georgians are a hospitable people.[15]

It is remarkable but not surprising that in a book by Sharashenidze (1979),[16] which discusses the encounters between Fereydani Georgians and Lado Aghniashvili, a Georgian from Georgia who visited rural Fereydan in the nineteenth century, the ethnonym *Gurji* (Gorji) is used for the Fereydani Georgians instead of *Kartveli*, an ethnonym familiar to both Caucasian and Fereydani Georgians. By choosing an ethnonym which is used by Iranians and other Muslim peoples rather than the one used by Christian Caucasian Georgians,

the author or visitor may have intended to emphasise the differences in identity between Shi'a Fereydani and Christian Caucasian Georgians.

Today, the most frequently reproduced and visualised Georgian symbols in Iran are the Allâhverdi Khân's Si-o-se-Pol Bridge in Esfahân and the Tsikhe (Cixe)[17] Mountain in the Iranian Georgian heartland of Fereydan to the west of Fereydunshahr. Both are depicted on the cover of Muliani's (2001) book. Tsikhe, the locus of an important battle in Fereydani Georgian history, was chosen as the background image during the 'day of honouring the Georgian language' in the Yazdanshahr (Yazdânšahr) suburb of Esfahân in 2005. As part of Esfahân's 2005 tourist exhibition, paintings of Tsikhe and a wooden miniature of Si-o-se-Pol were on display.[18] Although the Georgian alphabet is not much used by Iranian Georgians, there were many handicrafts and rugs on which Georgian texts in the Georgian alphabet were written. In addition, 33 Georgian letters were written on wooden artefacts and mounted under each arch of Si-o-se-Pol. Indeed, a sense of 'primordial' Georgian pride, attached to Iranianness, echoes in these displays. There are also discussions of Georgian letters in the historical and geographical books written about Iranian Georgians by Iranian Georgians, such as Sepiani (1979), Rahimi (2001) and Muliani (2001). Emphasising the Georgianness of Si-o-se-Pol through Georgian letters not only highlights that this bridge, which is a main tourist attraction, was built by a Georgian, but also that it has a deeper connotation. Located in the Safavid capital of Esfahân, in the centre of Iran, Si-o-se-Pol was the most prestigious connection between northern and southern Iran. By stressing the bridge's Georgianness, the central position of Georgians in the consolidation of Iranian statehood and society is underscored as well.

The name Fereydunshahr itself illuminates how Fereydani Georgians represent their identity. Fereydunshahr was historically called Akhoreh (Âxwore). Its inhabitants called it Sopeli ('village' in Georgian), while some local Georgians, notably those from Buin-Miandasht (Bu'in-Miyândašt), called it Mart'q'opi after the name of a town in Georgia. Although it was the largest town in Fereydan, it was not appointed as the administrative centre of Fereydan county (Šahrestan-e Fereydan). Disappointed by this, the Fereydani Georgians nevertheless succeeded in elevating Fereydunshahr's status by effective lobbying. It was due to become the administrative centre of a newly established county, and local Georgians wanted to chose an appropriate name congruent with its ambitions. In the end, Fereydunšahr (Fereydunshahr = the city of Fereydun) was preferred above Gorjišahr (Gorjishahr = the Georgian city) and Golšahr (Golshahr = the city of flowers) (Sepiani 1979: 170).

According to the Iranian epic Šâhnâme (Shâhnâmeh = Book of Kings), Fereydun – a legendary figure crowned as a king after his victory – defeated the non-Iranian tyrant Zahhâk after Kâveh the blacksmith unleashed a popular uprising.[19] According to the locals, Kâveh was born and buried in Fereydan in a Bakhtiyâri village called Mašhad-e Kâve (Mashhad-e Kâveh = Kâveh's Martyrium). The name Fereydun resembles Fereydan and suggests that despite Dârân

being the centre of Fereydan (proper) and despite the fact that Fereydunshahr is now the centre of a newly established county, it is still *the* Fereydani city par excellence. No other town's name in the Greater Fereydan region resembles so strongly the name of the region. The naming shows that Fereydani Georgians represent their identity as Georgians who belong to Fereydan and Iran as a whole by stressing their legitimate 'place' in Fereydan and in Iranian political history. Nowadays, a nickname used by Iranian Georgians for Fereydunshahr is *bâm-e Irân* (the roof of Iran), not only because of Fereydunshahr's high-altitude location, but also because it connotes defensibility and watchfulness.[20]

As is apparent from the discussion above, the Fereydani Georgians' self-representation of their ethnic identity is a layered one. Next to a more or less primordial ethnic component, it is territorially associated and interwoven with Fereydan and Iran as a whole. For example, the Georgian alphabet is an embodiment of the ethnic component *Kartveloba* (Georgianness), Tsikhe Mountain is the embodiment of the regional spatial component *Phreidneloba* (Fereydaniness), and Si-o-se-Pol and the new (nick)names for the largest Fereydani Georgian town are embodiments of the Iranian 'civic' national component, *Iraneloba* (Iranianness).[21]

Fereydani Georgian Historical Peak Experiences

Three events are remembered, memorised and reproduced frequently and largely by and among Fereydani Georgians and therefore deserve the status of historical peak experiences: (1) the history of the first Georgian settlement in Fereydan, (2) the battle against the Afghans and (3) the battle of Tsikhe. Below are presented the ways that Fereydani Georgians narrate these events and how they relate to their self-identification. The peculiarities of the Fereydani Georgian ethnic group (i.e. their history, the size of the population, the availability of written sources, etc.) make certain research techniques and strategies more favourable than others (see Rezvani 2009). For this specific study, a combination of literature and interviews has been the most feasible technique. The primary source from which the narratives are taken is Rahimi (2001). Rahimi has gathered oral Fereydani Georgian history from the local elderly, the oldest being a man named Gholam-Ali Ioseliani who was 90 years old at the time (ibid.: 8). The reliability of Rahimi's book has been checked by other written sources and by methods of fieldwork. Although two other sources, Sepiani (1979) and Muliani (2001), do not elaborate on Fereydani Georgian oral history, the facts represented in them are in agreement with the oral history presented by Rahimi. In addition, a substantial number of Fereydani Georgians were interviewed in formal and informal settings, both in and outside of Fereydan. These interviews revealed a general consensus among Fereydani Georgians on the oral history as presented by Rahimi. It is noteworthy that an illiterate old man could tell the same story without having been able to read Rahimi's book. Also, the way in which middle-aged interviewees and youths represent the local ethnic history

testifies that this oral history is passed down across generations and that there is considerable agreement on the course and representation of these events.[22]

Consulting other sources, it can be concluded that these historical events have actually taken place. However, the Fereydani Georgian popular narrations add some elements to them and interpret them in a specific way. The discussion of Fereydani Georgian peak experiences below is conducted as concisely as possible but also as elaborately as necessary, in order to represent the local narratives accurately and to interpret and discuss the concepts and symbols they include.

The Settlement in Fereydan

The Georgians of Fereydan are descendants of Georgians who were relocated from Georgia to central Iran in the seventeenth century. This relocation, like any other, must have been accompanied by hardship. It is remarkable that while Fereydani Georgian historiography does not recall their ancestors' geographical location in Georgia, it does vividly remember their exodus from the Iranian cities of Esfahân and Najaf Âbâd (Rezvani 2008). Fereydani Georgians trace their ancestral origins back to 19 Georgian clans or extended families who once resided in the prestigious Esfahâni neighbourhood of Abbâs Âbâd. The account as it has been passed down states that these families left Esfahân for the newly built town of Najaf Âbâd, but due to a fight with local peasants in which four natives of Najaf Âbâd were killed, they moved farther west to Fereydan (Sepiani 1979: 173). According to Fereydani Georgian oral history, and in agreement with historical facts, Shâh Abbâs wanted these families to settle in Fereydan (in an area in and around Fereydunshahr) in order to protect this region by repelling a potential rebellious advance of the Bakhtiyâri tribes to the then Iranian capital of Esfahân. According to their own popular belief, Fereydani Georgians were the first settlers to inhabit their living area. Their oral history connects them, even after their settlement in Fereydan, with the Safavid political establishment. They served as military personnel in Esfahân, and they were appointed as tax collectors and guardians for providing security in Fereydan, assisted by the central Safavid political establishment. They were also escorted by military gunmen on their journeys to Esfahân (Rahimi 2001: 26).

Fereydani Georgians do not have clear memories about how and when their ancestors converted to Shi'a Islam. The exact date and locus are disputed, but Islamisation is conventionally assumed to have occurred in the early seventeenth century (see Rezvani 2008). It is remarkable that Fereydani Georgian collective memory does not have any myths of Islamisation,[23] as it does myths of arrival, despite attributing the nickname Dâr ol-Momenin (City of the Pious Muslims) to Fereydunshahr.

By connecting the Georgian presence to the political Iranian establishment, Fereydani Georgian oral history links the Fereydani Georgian ethnos to Iran as a national realm. Their claims of being the first settlers in the area and of

being responsible for the security of Fereydan are functional in providing the Fereydani Georgians a legitimate place and raison d'être in the region.

The Battle against the Afghans

Another historical peak experience of the Fereydani Georgians is the battle against the Afghans. This clash reveals a lot about the Fereydani Georgian political and cultural orientation, as well as their active participation in regional events in the early eighteenth century. The battle's narrative is coherent with the Fereydani Georgians having appropriated a Shi'a identity and indicates a strong affinity with Shi'a symbolism.

During the reign of Shâh Soltân-Hossein, the Safavid empire became weakened internally, and the Afghans attacked Iran. After the battle of Golnâbâd in 1722 and upon entering Esfahân, the Afghans moved towards other parts of Iran. According to Fereydani Georgian oral history, Fereydan was not spared. The Afghan assault on Fereydan was spurred principally by its economic productivity, but ethnic rivalry also seems to have played a role. The Safavid governor in Afghanistan was a Georgian called Gorgin Khân (Giorgi XI), who was regarded by the Afghans as an oppressor and harsh ruler. His assassination by Afghans was a turning point in the Afghan-Safavid relationship, which ultimately resulted in the invasion of the Safavid empire by the Afghans.[24]

According to Fereydani Georgian oral history, Afghans robbed and killed villagers, even when they surrendered voluntarily (Rahimi 2001: 27). Approaching Fereydunshahr, the Afghan commander sent a messenger to the town, asking the Georgians to lay down their arms and avoid a war, but they declined. Mehr-Ali Esp'anâni, one of the notables of Fereydunshahr, told the Georgians: 'We should not surrender because, if we do, they will demand tribute annually and time and again, and this will be a precedent for other oppressors to do so. We should fight for our dignity and not act cowardly. We should not let the next generations curse us for not having resisted the oppression and tyranny. We should avenge the blood of the 400 Georgian royal guardians in Esfahân, who fought bravely and were killed by Afghans.'[25] The Georgian crowd replied: 'We will not succumb to tyranny and humiliation. We will fight instead. Dying in freedom is better than having to live under subjugation and humiliation' (Rahimi 2001: 27–28).

There is a corresponding famous Shi'a phrase – spoken by Imâm Hossein, the Shi'a 'Lord of the Martyrs' – *heyhât min az-zilla*, which means 'servility and humiliation, never'. Imâm Hossein fought against the superior army of Yazid, the Arab Sunni caliph, and died as a free martyr in Karbalâ, never recognising Yazid's tyrannical authority. Similarly, in the battle against the Afghans, *âzâdegi* (being free) was chosen over life. Nevertheless, this was not a simple freedom: it also signified standing up to injustice, that is, freely opposing injustice despite its preponderance and dominance. In the Shi'a tradition, the concept of *âzâdegi* is reflected in Imâm Hossein's refusal to recognise Yazid's authority

and in the martyrdom of the battle of Karbalâ (AD 680/AH 61). One can only speculate what would have happened if the Fereydani Georgians were not Shi'a, but the impact of the battle of Karbalâ and of Imâm Hossein's martyrdom on the devout Fereydani Shi'a Muslim psyche is evident and should not be downplayed in the explanation of Fereydani Georgian behaviour.

During the battle, Georgians, who had built strongholds, thwarted the first waves of attacks and inflicted heavy casualties on the Afghans. Since that date, the hill beneath which the Afghans were killed has been called Owghanis Gora or Afghanebis Gora (the Hill of Afghans). The Afghan commander, humiliated by this defeat, mobilised his army for a total war. This time, the battle would have resulted in an Afghan victory, if a 'miracle' had not happened. A knight dressed in white appeared on a white horse, chanted 'Allâh-o akbar' (God is the greatest) and attacked the Afghans (Rahimi 2001: 31). Encouraged by what had happened, the Georgians screamed loudly 'Allâh-o akbar' and attacked the Afghans with all their force. Shocked by what they saw and heard, the Afghans fled, conceding defeat, and never returned to Fereydunshahr.

Although Rahimi tries to give mundane explanations for the appearance of the knight on the white horse, it is clear from the descriptions that the Georgians saw the apparition as a miracle and associated it with the twelfth Shi'a imâm, Mehdi. According to Shi'a traditions, Mehdi is alive but concealed from ordinary people. He will come at the end of times and will establish a reign of justice all over the world. He is associated with the Shi'a belief in *komak-e âsemâni* (also called *madad-e âsemâni*), which refers to heavenly assistance. Many people believe that Mehdi, one of whose titles is Imâm Zamân, or Lord of the Times, assists loyal and devout people at critical moments. Similar miracles are believed to have happened during the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988), when young Iranian men fought against the troops of Saddam Hussein, referred to as 'Saddam Yazid' by Iranians.

Christian Georgians have similar myths, which assure them that Tetri Giorgi (White George) will assist them in times of necessity. The belief in Tetri Giorgi is especially strong in Tianeti and other northern mountainous areas of Georgia, where the ancestors of Fereydani Georgians hypothetically originated (Rezvani 2008). White George, originally a pagan deity of these mountainous areas representing the moon, the supreme god and protector, was later obviously remodelled as a Christian saint of Georgia – Saint George.[26] The Afghan attacks happened at a time when memories of their (not very distant) Christian (or maybe even pagan) past were probably still alive in Fereydani Georgian collective memory.

Thus, the narrative of the knight appears to have (pre-)Christian roots, but it has been consciously adapted, memorised and narrated consistently with Fereydani Georgian Shi'a beliefs. Today, this event is regarded by the locals as the heavenly assisted victory of Shi'a believers over a non-Shi'a enemy. Practising the local Shi'a tradition of burning candles in Shi'a sanctuaries, Fereydani Georgians burn candles in front of the split rock – called Tamziani Cxeni (*cxeni* = horse), or Kowa (Standard Georgian *kwa* = stone) – from where it is believed

that the knight on the white horse appeared.[27] Although less widely referred to, it is still noteworthy to mention the site's relationship with Amoğloba. According to many, Imâm Ali has been present in the mountainous outskirts of Fereydunshahr. The belief that the footprints of Shi'a saints are found in the vicinity of certain important or symbolic places is prevalent in a few other Iranian towns as well. According to many, Tamziani Cxeni is located on a hill beneath a place called Amoğloba, which the locals believe Ali, the first Shi'a imâm, walked across.[28] There is no historical evidence that Imâm Ali ever stayed in this area, nor is it very probable. Moreover, the date from which this attribution of Shi'a symbolism to Amoğloba and Tamziani Cxeni originates is uncertain. Nevertheless, the locational association of the heavenly assistance of Imâm Zamân with his ancestor Imâm Ali is remarkable and adds to the Shi'a nature of this narration. In Iran, heavenly assistance is asked for from Imâm Ali, to whom many spiritual capabilities are attributed. Phrases such as 'Yâ Ali' and 'Yâ Ali madad' (Ali help me) are commonly used by Iranians when they say goodbye at parting or when they begin a difficult job.

Although it is hard to read the people's mind in that time, the positional relationship between Amoğloba and Tamziani Cxeni is still remarkable. Amoğloba, as the place where Imâm Ali walked, is placed above Tamziani Cxeni (Kowa), the starting place of the heavenly assistance by Imâm Zamân, in a seemingly conscious effort to legitimate the latter's heavenly assistance. Most probably it meant that this heavenly assistance came from Imâm Zamân, who 'descends' from Imâm Ali, the symbol of *mardânegi* in the Shi'a Iranian tradition. *Mardânegi* (literally, 'being a man', also called *javânmardi* or *fotovvat*) is about valuing justice above injustice and denouncing the bestial components of greed – thus becoming a purified human being. Closely related to *mardânegi* is the concept of *isâr* or *fadâkâri* (self-sacrifice). In fact, in this Fereydani Georgian narrative, the latter concepts are attached to *komak-e âsemâni*. Accordingly, heavenly assistance comes to those who are righteous and fight to uphold good against evil, who despise tyranny, and who sacrifice themselves for future generations and other people in their area.

The utilisation of Shi'a symbolism in this narrative is logical if one takes into account the political setting of that time. Being a Shi'a empire, Iran was despised not only by Afghans but also by the Ottoman Turks. The Afghans and Ottoman Turks had signed a treaty and in fact had agreed to divide Iran between themselves (Ghadiani 2005: 94–95; Muliani 2001: 178–179). The battle against the Afghans in Fereydan happened, thus, in a context in which the existence of Iran as an independent Shi'a state was under serious threat. The Afghans were later totally defeated by the Safavid general, Nâder Qoli Afshâr, who, after having liberated Iran from the Afghans and Ottoman Turks, was crowned as Nâder Shâh. Pleased with the services of Fereydani Georgians, he exempted them from paying taxes and gave them positions in his army and administration (Rahimi 2001: 32). Therefore, the significance of the battle against the Afghans and its Shi'a symbolism reconfirm the Fereydani Georgian Shi'a identity, while the memory

of the battle and the acknowledgement and special treatment conferred by the Iranian political establishment and authorities reinforce the awareness that the Fereydani Georgians played a crucial and essential role in Iranian history.

The Battle of Tsikhe

The battle of Tsikhe is the historical peak experience of the Iranian Georgians par excellence: its memories still fill the hearts of the locals with sorrow and pride.[29] When talking to Iranian Georgians, it is unlikely that no reference to Tsikhe will be made. This is the peak experience by which they claimed and reaffirmed their share in local Fereydani affairs and in Iranian politics in general, despite the fact that, unlike the battle against the Afghans, this conflict did not result in a military victory. In the weblog Gorjiyân-e Irân dar Târix (Iranian Georgians in the Course of History), it is written: 'The Tsikhe Mountain is the symbol of the Georgian resistance. It is the symbol of Georgian will power in fighting oppression and tyranny and therefore the symbol of Georgian ethnic pride. Tsikhe also reminds us of one of the most tragic but at the same time one of the most heroic pages of the Georgians' history.'[30]

Massacres and severe abuses of human rights by invaders, rulers and contenders to the throne have not been exceptional phenomena in Iranian history. The mighty have regarded the ordinary and powerless as subjects, as producers of surplus and, in the most callous cases, as mere numbers. The petty dreams and simple, humane hopes of the powerless have often been shattered to serve the mighty's grandeur. More often than not, the powerless have succumbed and obeyed their oppressors, embracing a passive death while being forgotten in the darkness of history. The victims of the battle of Tsikhe, however, have not been forgotten. Even up to the present time, they continue to be commemorated and remembered as heroes. An event that would appear to have been only a minor battle of Karim Khân occupies a central place in oral Fereydani Georgian history.

After Nâder Shâh's death in 1747, many contenders claimed the Iranian throne. Karim Khân Zand, the most successful one, became part of an alliance that captured the political power in Iran. Its members agreed upon appointing the young Esmail III, a grandson of the last Safavid king, Shâh Soltân-Hossein, as king, while Ali-Mardân Khân, an important Bakhtiyâri chief, was appointed the regent, because Esmail III was still too young. As part of this agreement, Karim Khân was appointed as the commander-in-chief of the army (Muliani 2001: 232). Karim Khân began to regard Ali-Mardân Khân, whose ascendancy to the Iranian throne was not unimaginable, as a rival. Secure of his military power, Karim Khân decided to attack Ali-Mardân Khân. During a war in the Bakhtiyâri mountains to the south of Fereydan, he defeated Ali-Mardân Khân in 1751. Perry (1979: 30) describes the consequences: 'Karim Khân demonstrated that he intended to be the master of the Bakhtiyâri mountains. Immediately after his victory, tribute was demanded of all the neighboring

settlements.' Disrespecting the privileges gained by Fereydani Georgians during Nâder Shâh's reign, Karim Khân demanded tribute and surplus from both the Georgian and non-Georgian villages of Fereydan. Orojqoli Beyg, the chief of Fereydunshahr, who had supported Ali-Mardân Khân, defied this demand and persuaded, or coerced, the villagers to refuse to pay tribute to Karim Khân. After his victory over Ali-Mardân Khân, Karim Khân advanced on Fereydunshahr, where a tragedy was to take place – the 'heart-scraping event of Tsikhe' and the 'epos of the Iranian Georgians' (Muliani 2001: 231) – a tragedy that was brought on by a ruler who is regarded as one of the more humane sovereigns in Iranian history.

Anticipating that Karim Khân would take punitive action, the whole population of Fereydunshahr and that of the neighbouring villages had moved to Tsikhe Mountain. Having arrived in Fereydunshahr, Karim Khân sent two messengers to Tsikhe, ordering the unconditional surrender of the evacuees. At first, Orojqoli Beyg intended to recognise Karim Khân's authority. When he and some elderly men were leaving to negotiate with Karim Khân, however, his son Rahim, accompanied by many young men, forced them to return. The young men would rather fight the 'arrogant enemy' and die than have to accept humiliation (Rahimi 2001: 36). Like the refusal to accept the Afghans' humiliating offer in that corresponding battle, this is an example of *âzâdegi*.

In addition, a plan was devised to assassinate Karim Khân. The most highly skilled Georgian gunman in Fereydunshahr was chosen to fulfil this mission. Once at Karim Khân's tent, however, he changed his mind, saying, 'I will shoot him easily in the battle tomorrow, but I won't kill him now because it is unfair.' Instead, the gunman targeted the pipe between Karim Khân's lips to prove his ability and to demonstrate his decision not to kill Karim Khân (Rahimi 2001: 37–38). The choice of the Georgians to play a fair game, even against a superior army, is a representation of *mardânegi*. As mentioned earlier, *mardânegi* is a value of Iranian culture associated with Ali, the first Shi'a imâm.

This incident, however, did not leave Karim Khân untouched. As his modern and superior army advanced, the local Georgians were driven to a place on the mountain where there was no water. In the Iranian Shi'a tradition, cutting off water from the public, fighting while being thirsty and dying of thirst are all associated with the battle of Karbalâ, when the superior army of Yazid cut off water to Imâm Hossein's camp in order to make them surrender. The children dying of thirst on Tsikhe resembled the suffering of Ali-Asghar, the infant child of Imâm Hossein and the youngest martyr of Karbalâ. Trapped between Karim Khân's superior army and a ravine, the men decided to fight and die freely in battle, while the women, elderly people and children chose to jump to their deaths rather than live in captivity. Although the story is told in slightly different ways, almost all Fereydani Georgians still speak in an emotional way about this tragedy (see also Muliani 2001: 233–234; Rahimi 2001: 41–43). The large amount of artefacts and human remains that have been found at the foot of the ravine verifies that this human tragedy took place (Rahimi 2001: 45).[31]

In accordance with Imâm Hossein's famous phrase, 'servility and humiliation, never', a free death was chosen above living under humiliation.

A central concept in the Shi'a belief system, *mazlumiyyat* (being oppressed), is also reflected in this narration. A *mazlum* is an innocent, in particular, an innocent oppressed by an unjust superior. In the battle of Tsikhe, similar to the battle of Karbalâ, innocent children died of thirst, and innocent women, children and elderly who were not directly involved in the fighting were forced to suffer and ultimately to die in order to be free. Orojqoli Beyg is regarded as an innocent, too. He had, after all, decided to accept Karim Khân's authority in order to avoid bloodshed. Reputedly, after Orojqoli Beyg was executed by a cannon shot, his right hand (and arm) fell down to Karim Khân's feet. Karim Khân noticed a Qur'an in a small box, tied to the arm, and shakingly repented his deed (Rahimi 2001: 42). It is notable that in Persian and Georgian, respectively, *dast* and *xeli* mean both 'arm' and 'hand'. This representation also has parallels with the events in the battle of Karbalâ: the hands of Abulfazl, Imâm Hossein's brother, were cut off in the battle of Karbalâ. Moreover, the right hand has an Iranian symbolic meaning. The 'right hand' of a king is a person whom the king trusts and to whom he delegates important decisions.

The notion of political loyalty accompanied by death has a precedent in seventeenth-century Iranian history, not so distant from the battle of Tsikhe. Emâmqoli Khân Undiladze, the Georgian Safavid chief of armed forces, agreed to be beheaded because it was Shâh Safi's order. When the executioners came and showed him the heads of his murdered sons, Emâmqoli Khân asked for time to finish his prayer. After his prayer, he said that he would obey whatever the Shâh had ordered (Muliani 2001: 268). Similarly, the Fereydani Georgian narrative of Orojqoli Beyg's execution presents the idea that even after his death, a Georgian showed loyalty by offering himself as a 'right hand' to the by now de facto Iranian king. It is believed that Karim Khân did not know that the Fereydani Georgians were Muslims, assuming instead that they were Christians. He repented his deed only after he saw a Qur'an on Orojqoli Beyg's arm. This history also shows that the desire of Fereydani Georgians to be regarded as truly devout Shi'a Muslims has been instrumental in their very existence as a Shi'a Muslim, Georgian-speaking ethnos in central Iran. After his repentance, Karim Khân ordered public amnesty for the Fereydani Georgians. Praising their courage, he also appointed many Fereydani Georgians to high positions in his government. Paradoxically, Rahim, Orojqoli Beyg's son, who had helped to escalate the conflict and resulting tragedy, was given government positions in Esfahân (Rahimi: 43–44). Thus, the Fereydani Georgians' resistance was not in vain, and the refusal to submit to humiliation and servility was rewarded in this instance as well. Similar to the Shi'a perception of the battle of Karbalâ, the moral victory was awarded to those who had resisted arrogance and tyranny.

The Fereydani Georgian resistance to Karim Khân should not be regarded as disloyalty to the Iranian political establishment, because in the perception

of Fereydani Georgians (and probably all Fereydanis) at that time, Ali-Mardân Khân was viewed as the legitimate ruler and most probably the king of Iran. There is still a famous Lori[32] song about Ali-Mardân Khân, titled 'Shir Ali-Mardân' (Ali-Mardân, the Lion), which might be evidence of the relative popularity of Ali-Mardân Khân in central-western Iran during that period.[33] Karim Khân was from the Zand tribe, a Lori (or a Laki) tribe from near Malâyer (in the contemporary Hamadân province). Due to their disloyalty to Nâder Shâh and the harassment of villagers in that area, Zand tribesmen were deported to Khorâsân (Xorâsân). After Nâder Shâh's death, they returned, and soon Karim Khân established himself as the Zand leader (Moghaddam 1999: 104–105). He conquered many villages in the region and attacked and pillaged the town of Tuyserkân. Mehr-Ali Khân Takallu, the governor of Hamadân, then fought Karim Khân many times with the assistance of Hassan-Ali Khân, the governor of Iranian Kurdistan (ibid.: 107–108). In the end, Karim Khân was able to defeat the Takallu troops after he had massacred 2,000 Takallu soldiers and their families in Velâshgerd (Velâšgerd) near Hamadân (ibid.: 110). Moreover, it seems that Karim Khân's cruelty in western Iran was not restricted to the aforementioned cases. People of Sirâvi, somewhere in the Zagros mountains, in Lorestân or Khuzestân (Xuzestân), were also massacred by Karim Khân (Panahi Semnani 1994: 39).

It is remarkable that, after his ascendancy to the Iranian throne, Karim Khân chose Shirâz (Širâz) as his capital instead of Esfahân, the Safavid imperial capital and a stronghold of Ali-Mardân Khân, or of Mashhad (Mašhad), Nâder Shâh's stronghold. The decision to choose a new capital located in a less central and strategic place indicates Karim Khân's lack of legitimacy and his unpopularity in the major Iranian political centre of that time. Karim Khân had never conquered Khorâsân, and this inability to assert his authority in such an important Iranian region was another sign of his lack of political legitimacy. It is also noteworthy that he never crowned himself as a *šâh (shâh* = king), calling himself instead a *vakil* (deputy). All of these facts can be seen as evidence to discredit the depiction of Karim Khân as a humane and kind-hearted king. Nevertheless, he did not need aggressive methods any longer and could reign as a gentle ruler after he had established his power to the extent possible.

The representation and narration of the battle of Tsikhe, therefore, has elements intended to counter any possible accusations of disloyalty towards a 'good' and 'benevolent' ruler. Fereydani Georgians are portrayed as an ultimately loyal people, who fight for the legitimate Iranian ruler of the moment; even after death, they prove dutiful in all possible ways. The narrative also depicts the Fereydani Georgians as a people who were respected by the king for their courage in combat. In this sense, the battle is no longer a sign of rebellion and disloyalty but rather an attempt to prove Fereydani Georgian competence and righteousness to the king. The account of the battle of Tsikhe, which touches upon Shi'a symbolism, also strengthens Fereydani Georgian self-representation and self-identity as true Shi'a Muslims, who were able to fight a

battle similar to Karbalâ. This chronicle also depicts Fereydani Georgians as the key decision makers in Fereydan and therefore affords them a legitimate political space to share with other ethnic groups who could potentially claim deeper roots in the region. While during their battle against the Afghans the Fereydani Georgians acted consistently with their self-identification as loyal Iranian Shi'a Muslim Georgians, in the battle of Tsikhe they defended their acquired political rights and privileges and secured their 'place' in Iranian politics. In fact, in the latter battle they claimed (not in vain) that their self-identification should be recognised by others as an integral part of the reality 'on the ground'.

Conclusion

More than a sampling of different markers such as religion and language, ethnic identity also implies identification. Of course, this identification can be established with a people, but it can also be established with a territory. As ethnic identity is not static and is formed and re-formed during history, it is logical that historical memories – and the way that people remember, narrate and represent them – contribute to its formation.

Ethnic identity, especially in multi-ethnic countries like Iran, is a layered concept. It contains an ethnic layer, which is (co-)defined by cultural markers, but it also contains territorial layers on the local and (civic) national levels.[34] In this specific case, the Fereydani Georgian ethnic identity consists of three concrete and interconnected layers: *Kartveloba* (Georgianness), *Phreidneloba* (Fereydaniness) and *Iraneloba* (Iranianness). This interconnectedness, and hence the coherence and cohesion between their self-identification and the way that they represent it (as historically displaced peoples), is not very self-explanatory or evident. The Fereydani Georgians need to build themselves a coherent whole out of it that is consistent with their self-identification.

This mechanism is clearly apparent in the case of Fereydani Georgians, a people whose roots lie outside the region and country that they inhabit today. While their modern-day representation of ethnic identity links *Iraneloba* with *Kartveloba*, their narratives of historical peak experiences link *Kartveloba* with *Iraneloba* and *Phreidneloba* with *Iraneloba*, while taking the connection between *Kartveloba* and *Phreidneloba* for granted. In doing this, they reaffirm the Georgian position in Fereydan. The utilisation of Shi'a symbolism in the representation of their history serves as a logical strategy in order to give Fereydani Georgians, as regarded by themselves (*Kartveloba*), a legitimate place in their locality (*Phreidneloba*) and within Iran (*Iraneloba*) as a whole. In fact, despite their more recent arrival, the Fereydani Georgians' narration of their historical peak experiences, in a manner that is emically coherent and consistent with their contemporarily defined and self-perceived identity, makes their claims of regional belonging as solid as, or even more solid than, those of their neighbours.

There are evidences and indications that the events discussed as Fereydani Georgian historical peak experiences have actually taken place. However, it is their selective memorisation and the way they are narrated that makes them coherent and consistent with contemporary Fereydani Georgian self-identification. The utilisation of Shi'a symbols in the narration of their local history gives the Fereydani Georgians a stronger position in a region in which they co-exist with other Shi'a peoples whose roots lie deeper in the history of this region. Given the fact that Shi'a Islam has been the state religion in Iran since the Safavid era onwards, this utilisation not only gives the Fereydani Georgians a raison dêtre in local and national Iranian history, but also makes their identity consistent and congruent with the active role that Iranian Georgians in general, and Fereydani Georgians in this specific case, have played in Iranian history.

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Notes

1. This article draws partly on the paper 'The Shi'ite Georgians of Iran' presented at the conference 'Iran and the Caucasus: Unity and Diversity' on 6 June 2008, Yerevan, Armenia, and partly on 'The Islamization and Ethnogenesis of the Fereydani Georgians' presented at the ASN 2007 World Convention, 12–14 April 2007, New York, Columbia University.
2. The common geographic and ethnic names are spelled in a way that approaches the English pronunciation and spelling, while local spellings and pronunciations are given in parentheses. The names of persons are given only in a way that approaches the English pronunciation and spelling, while the names of concepts and foreign words in phrases are given only in the local pronunciation and spelling.
3. This was also my own observation during fieldwork in Fereydan. The sedentary Shi'a ethnic groups practise their Shi'a religious traditions and rules to more or less the same degree. Only tribal Bakhtiyâris are somewhat more liberal with regard to pre-Islamic traditions.
4. Quoted from an article titled 'Qowmi Gomnâm ba Târixi Deraxšân' (An Unknown Ethnic Group with a Bright History), included as an appendix in Muliani (2001).
5. For a more elaborate discussion on the place of the Georgian Orthodox Church in Georgian history, see Suny (1988).

6. Hanson's (1989) understanding of invention is very different from that of Hobsbawm (1983), for whom 'invented' means, more or less, something that is not old and genuine. For Hanson, invention is not fabrication but rather a strategic reinterpretation.
7. The genealogy of Amin ol-Soltân is discussed by Farhad Rostami in an article, 'Ali-Asghar Khân Atâbak-e A'zam Amin ol-Soltân', on the web site of the Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies (IICHS), http://www.iichs.org/index.asp?id=526&doc_cat=1 (accessed 10 March 2009).
8. Although details are lacking, Bahrâm Âryânâ has reputedly written a manuscript titled 'Mâdar-Bozorg-e man Malake-ye Gorjestân' (My Grandmother, the Georgian Queen).
9. In the weblog 'Gorjiyân-e Irân dar Târix' (Iranian Georgians in History), Emâmqoli Khân Undiladze is referred to as 'the eternally proud Iranian commander'. See http://www.kartvelebi.blogsky.com.
10. See 'The National Day of Persian Gulf', dated 16 July 2005, on the web site of the Iranian Cultural Heritage News Agency, http://www.chnpress.com/news/?section=1&id=1025 (accessed 6 March 2009).
11. During my stay in Fereydan in 2000, I witnessed a visit to the graves of martyrs in Dârân by a Georgian native of Fereydunshahr who lived in Dârân and worked in the Fereydan governorate there. Respecting the martyrs, whether or not one is related to them, is very important to the Fereydani Georgians.
12. During my visit to Fereydunshahr in 2003, my guide showed me the graves of martyrs – in a rather large cemetery for a town of Fereydunshahr's size – and said, 'Well, we did not sacrifice so many martyrs in the war, but they fought bravely.'
13. 'The land of rivers and hot water springs of Tbilisi' is used by Fereydani Georgians as a metaphor for Georgia. Although the description of Georgia as such makes sense, Fereydani Georgian memory does not refer to any parts of Georgia as the original homeland.
14. 'Sacred defence' is the Iranian designation for the Iran-Iraq War.
15. The Persian text is available from Gorjiyân-e Irân dar Târix (Iranian Georgians in History), 'Qowm-e Gorji' (The Georgian Ethnic Group), http://www.kartvelebi.blogsky.com/?PostID=120 (accessed 12 December 2007, my translation).
16. For the Georgian text, see 'P'irveli Kartvelebi Phereidanši, Zurab Šarašenidzis "Phereidneli Gurjebis" Mixedvit' (The First Georgians in Fereydan from Zurab Sharashenidze's Fereydani Georgians' Point of View), http://fereidani.ge/03_pirveli/03_pirveli.html (accessed 12 December 2007). For the Persian text, see http://fereidani.ge/03_pirveli/03_pir_spar.html (accessed 12 December 2007). The original source is Sharashenidze (1979).
17. Tsikhe (Cixe) is a Georgian word that means 'fortress'. Indeed, above the mountain remnants of a fortress are visible. The name of the mountain in Persian is Sixe.
18. The report of this exhibition is available at the web site of the Iranian Cultural Heritage News Agency, 'Bâzâryâbi va Âmuzeš, Mehvarhâ-ye Asli-ye Nemâyešgâh-e Esfahân' (Marketing and Education, the Central Axes of the Esfahân's Exhibition), http://www.chn.ir/news/?Section=1&id=12497 (accessed 10 May 2006). The English-language version of the Cultural Heritage News Agency can be accessed at http://www.chnpress.com/.
19. Šâhnâme (Shâhnâmeh) deals with the Old- or Proto-Iranian mythology and history, which were collected and written in the tenth century by the famous poet Ferdowsi. There are many printed versions, and a web site (http://www.shahnameh.com) features English translations.
20. Most of what has been said above – and more – is expressed in a poem titled 'Fereydunshahr' by the Fereydani Georgian Ramazan Ioseliani (2003).
21. *Kartveloba*, *Phreidneloba* and *Iraneloba* are neologisms that I have introduced.
22. The relative small size of this population makes the combination of fieldwork and other methods desirable. In this concrete case it means that, due to the small size of the Fereydani Georgian population and their familiarity with each other, the researcher is able to check the extent of agreement on the (representation of) oral history among them (see Rezvani 2009).

23. It is also remarkable that, in conversations with Fereydani Georgians, the religious designation 'Christian' and the ethnic designation 'Armenian' are often confused.
24. For a detailed discussion of the Afghan-Safavid relationship and history, see Bastani Parizi (1983) and Lockhart (1958).
25. These 400 Georgians were Shâh Soltân-Hossein's special guardians. Reportedly, they fought bravely against the Afghans until they were all killed.
26. See Gabeskiria (2001), in particular, the chapter on the flag of Georgia, http://www.nplg.gov.ge/ic/library_e/gabeskiria/12.htm (accessed 8 September 2008).
27. Rahimi (2001: 31) calls this split rock in Persian Asb-e Tanzi (*asb* = horse) (*tanzi* has no clear meaning in Persian; regarding its ending with an *i*, it is probably a corrupted form of a Georgian word). The Georgian name Tamziani Cxeni (also spelled as Tamziani Tskheni) was told to me by the local elderly Georgians. According to one old gentleman, *tamziani* is related to *mze*, which means 'sun' in Georgian. This is likely because its combination with *ta* (*mta* in Standard Georgian) makes a meaningful whole, which can be roughly translated as the 'horse from the mountain of sun'.
28. This was told to me by the same old gentleman who also told me the Georgian name of the aforementioned rock. He had a profound knowledge about the history and geography of Fereydan, and other people there agreed with him. His explanation makes sense, as the meanings of Tamziani Cxeni (horse from the mountain of sun) and Amoğloba (derived from Standard Georgian *mağla* = high) are related: the mountain of sun is logically high. Many people doubt the veracity of this claim, but, as discussed in this article, this does not lessen its symbolic importance.
29. Rahimi (2001: 9), relying heavily on the oral tradition, speaks about Gholam-Ali Ioseliani, a man of 90 years, who still cried when he talked about the battle of Tsikhe.
30. Gorjiyân-e Irân dar Târix, 'Safhe-i az Târix-e Ğamangiz va dar eyn-e hâl Delavarâne-ye Gorjiyân-e Irân', http://www.kartvelebi.blogsky.com/1384/08 (posted in 2005, my translation).
31. During my visit to Fereydunshahr in the summer of 2003, I met people who had seen human remains and objects in a site beneath Tsikhe Mountain, or who were told about their existence by other people.
32. 'Lor' as an ethnonym is an umbrella term which refers to many groups in western Iran. The Bakhtiyâri tribes were, and to a lesser extent still are, called the 'Greater Lor'.
33. This song may, however, refer to another Ali-Mardân Khân, the governor of Lorestân, who had fought against the Afghans at the battle of Golnâbâd (see Lockhart 1958: 130–143). Nevertheless, it is more likely that the popular song is about Ali-Mardân Khân, Karim Khân's rival. As the battle of Golnâbâd took place relatively far away from Lorestân, it affected people in central-western Iran less than the local events logically did. Also the song's lyrics resemble Bakhtiyâri dialects more than most Lori dialects of Lorestân.
34. The fact that in Iran during introductions a common question is 'Where are you from?' shows the importance of the notion of locality. It is not uncommon to hear people ask about the language or dialect that is spoken, but only seldom does anyone ask about ethnicity. This is a question that is not appreciated by everyone.

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