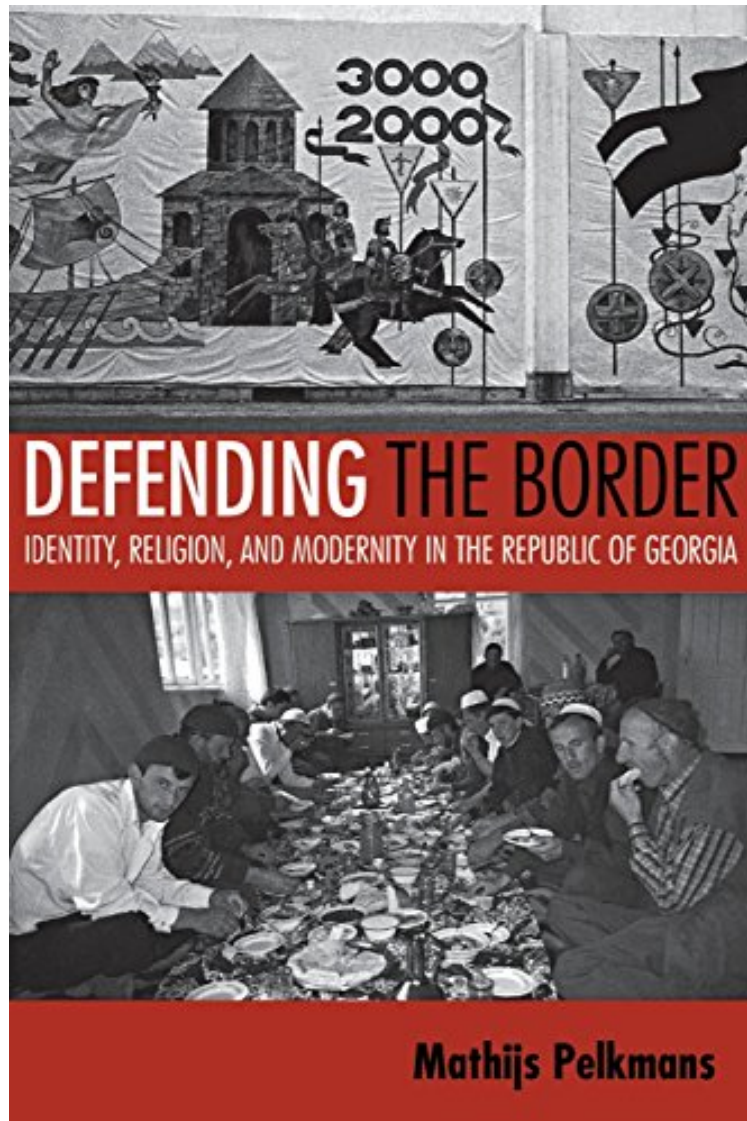


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## Defending the Border: Identity, Religion, and Modernity in the Republic of Georgia (Culture and Society after Socialism)

*Mathijs Pelkmans*

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**Mathijs Pelkmans : Defending the Border: Identity, Religion, and Modernity in the Republic of Georgia (Culture and Society after Socialism)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Defending the Border: Identity, Religion, and Modernity in the Republic of Georgia (Culture and

Society after Socialism):

This book, one of the first in English about everyday life in the Republic of Georgia, describes how people construct identity in a rapidly changing border region. Based on extensive ethnographic research, it illuminates the myriad ways residents of the Caucasus have rethought who they are since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Through an exploration of three towns in the southwest corner of Georgia, all of which are situated close to the Turkish frontier, Mathijs Pelkmans shows how social and cultural boundaries took on greater importance in the years of transition, when such divisions were expected to vanish. By tracing the fears, longings, and disillusionment that border dwellers projected on the Iron Curtain, Pelkmans demonstrates how elements of culture formed along and in response to territorial divisions, and how these elements became crucial in attempts to rethink the border after its physical rigidities dissolved in the 1990s. The new boundary-drawing activities had the effect of grounding and reinforcing Soviet constructions of identity, even though they were part of the process of overcoming and dismissing the past. Ultimately, Pelkmans finds that the opening of the border paradoxically inspired a newfound appreciation for the previously despised Iron Curtain as something that had provided protection and was still worth defending.

"This book's careful, measured, and rich treatments of the everyday dilemmas faced by the residents of Ajaria provide a welcome and important counterpoint to the abstractions of geopolitics and transition economics that predominate in scholarship on Georgia. But it is no mere compilation of stories and narratives, nor is it of interest only to specialists in the Caucasus region. Pelkmans deftly theorizes borders throughout by attending to recent anthropological thinking on cultural objects and display, religious identities and conversions, and market transformations. Near the border, he suggests, culture, identity, religion, and economy refract in curious and analytically significant ways. To study these issues in one borderland, then, is also to grapple with the entire region behind the iron curtain and its postsocialist trajectories. Borders are of intense interest to all of us."-Douglas Rogers, *Slavic*, Winter 2007

Mathijs Pelkmans has written a biography of a border and the surrounding frontier between Georgia and Turkey, which was also for seventy years the divide between the USSR and Soviet socialism on one side and the opposing world of NATO, capitalism, and Islam on the other. Based on his extensive fieldwork in Ajaria (southwestern Georgia), this gifted ethnographer shows how shifting borders-sometimes permeable, other times an insurmountable barrier-shape and reshape identities and cultural understandings. Rich in a sense of place, this is one of the finest evocations of a vital, if damaged, Georgian culture."-Ronald Grigor Suny, Charles Tilly Collegiate Professor of Social and Political History, The University of Michigan

"No global trend can have reality unless observed in empirical micro-situations. In the tiny and exotic Ajaria, Mathijs Pelkmans discovers the fascinating juxtaposition of ever-shifting borders among ethnicities, religions, states, and economic systems. The talk of a flattening globalization perhaps has been premature."-Georgi Derluguian, author of *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-System Biography*

"Defending the Border is an excellent and timely ethnography of an amazingly interesting region of the postsocialist world. Mathijs Pelkmans's ethnographic writing is strong, engaging, and provocative."-Paul Manning, Trent University

From the Back Cover

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About the Author

Mathijs Pelkmans is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is the author of *Fragile Conviction: Changing Ideological Landscapes in Urban Kyrgyzstan* and *Defending the Border: Identity, Religion, and Modernity in the Republic of Georgia*, both from Cornell, and editor of *Conversion after Socialism: Disruptions, Modernisms and Technologies of Faith in the Former Soviet Union* and *Ethnographies of Doubt: Faith and Uncertainty in Contemporary Societies*.