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Georgian and Abkhaz Discourses about 1992-1993 Armed Conflict: Narrative Analyzes of Interviews of Eyewitnesses.

Society is a self-producing entity, which creates and recreates itself in frames of existing collective consciousness. Collective frames operate like social matrices and influence importantly the formation of images about the past. In order to recreate itself, a society needs a special point of reference. The production of discourses is a fundamental way to preserve mnemonic communities and transmit means for value systems' formation. Discourses represent a generalized sum representing specific and frame-narratives, which is based on the prior guiding values and those beliefs and ideas the society has about itself. It is noteworthy to mention that society assesses itself, as well as other societies and events according to those beliefs and ideas.

The subject of this study is Georgian and Abkhazian discourses that these two conflict-torn societies have about 1992-1993 years armed conflict. The research is based on an analysis of biographical-narrative interviews given by the witnesses of the war and person directly involved in combat. The analysis of the Georgian and Abkhaz narratives is paramount especially for two reasons: 1) narratives allow for the possibility for reconstruction of the past and 2) narratives shape the collective imaginations about the future and describe the degree of invariability or variability of a societal value system through the time continuum. National narratives represent a fundamental aspect of national identity and provide a group with fundamental ideas about its past and its role and mission in the world.

Narratives highly influence the formation of interpretative and the attitudinal mindset of the individuals. Also, they affect reflective processes, which influence individual cognitive-emotional system and is reflected in the narrations.

The research demonstrates the mainstream, therefore the most influential, central narrative models about 1992-1993 Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Besides, this study underlines the implications of side-narrative models, which are the branches produced on the ground of central narrative templates.

This research examines Georgian and Abkhaz biographical narrative interviews, particularly, the textual representations of these interviews, that is, in interview transcripts. Methodological approach of narrative analysis opens the window of opportunity for identifying and defining what sort of discourses exist in Abkhaz, as well as in Georgian societies about the conflict.

Based on interview analyses, this study demonstrates narrative constructing elements (the four-component structure of narratives), the leading and produced narratives about the 1992-1993 Georgian-Abkhaz armed conflict are reflected in the Georgian and Abkhaz mnemonic communities, which is the representation of chosen trauma in Abkhazian narratives and what is the importance given to the narrations about “victimhood” in the creation of group identity.

Keywords: Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, narrative template, national narrative, chosen trauma, victim narrative, memory, biographical-narrative interview, discourse.

After gaining independence, the creation of free political space in Georgia became possible, which was not directly dependent on directives coming from specific empires or states.

Having at its background heightened by nationalistic discourse, in a chaotic and unstable political environment of 1992-1993, bloody armed contradiction took place resulting in death toll more than thousands of people. After the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, the broken relations and disunification of the societies created an informational gap and increased the possibility of the construction different perceptions about, attitudes towards and evaluations of conflict.

It is interesting to assess, study and compare Georgian and Abkhaz narratives about the conflict. Working towards this direction is valuable, because even though 24 years after the hot phases of the conflict have passed, a common understanding between contradicting parties about the conflict has not been reached and the vital steps towards conflict transformation have not been taken. This at some point demonstrates that the past events have not been well studied, comprehended and evaluated. Therefore, research on Georgian and Abkhaz narratives is paramount for understanding the attitudes that Georgian and Abkhaz societies have towards conflict.

The importance of the research

A study and comparison of Georgian and Abkhaz narratives about 1992-1993 conflict on the ground of analyzing in-depth interviews given by ethnic Georgian and ethnic Abkhaz respondents has not been conducted yet. It might be possible that this fact is conditioned by a limited access to the interviews conducted with ethnic Abkhaz population beyond the line of separation. In line with others, topics like: the discourses of Georgian and Abkhaz societies about the armed conflict of 1992-1993, the representation of ‘victimhood’ in Georgian and Abkhaz narratives, the Georgian-Abkhaz “brotherhood” narrative popular in the Georgian discourse, and also “enemy” perception in Georgian and Abkhaz discourses are not studied with the usage of mentioned interviews.

Along with the historical narrative, information coming from different media means, also the narratives constructed by thought leaders and the shared experience of the actual witnesses of the conflict play enormous role in the creation of discourse about conflict. Making historical sources as the only foundation for understanding this topic

doesn't give us full picture. Memory politics, which exist in the country, as well as the narrative constructed during years, can be observed in the writings depicting Georgian-Abkhaz conflict of 1992-1993. While discussing the above-mentioned conflict, people are omitted, average people, which saw the conflict with their own eyes or participated in it, also these writings do not demonstrate attitudes and feelings of these people towards events developed during 1992-1993. Besides the historic narrative, it is interesting how this narrative influences people and how average people reflect on it. Having in mind this idea, studying popularly disseminated narratives based on the interviews given by persons directly involved in the conflict is necessary. It is important to analyze interviews conducted with the ex-combatants, IDPs, and others, who were directly involved in the conflict in some specific ways.

It is interesting how Abkhaz people evaluate the conflict and what sort of attitudes they have with regard to it. The analysis of Georgian and Abkhaz narratives gives us an opportunity to assess, study and compare Georgian and Abkhaz storytelling with their commonalities and differences.

Methodology

In frames of this research, in order to study the issue, narrative analysis method is used. Narrative analysis is based on the study of discourse and textual representations of discourse. Narratives, in this context, mean stories, which describe a chain of specific events. Different approaches are used to collect such stories, but, in frames of following research the focus is on the narrative-biographical interviews. More specifically, the research studies textual representation of Georgian and Abkhaz narrative-biographical interviews, that is - interview transcripts.

Based on the analysis of narrative stories, it is possible to observe how people directly involved in the conflict or eye-witnesses of it evaluate the conflict of 1992-1993. What sort of main narratives exist about Georgian-Abkhaz conflict? What is the representation of 'victimhood' narrative in the Georgian and Abkhaz discourses? What it looks like the representation of chosen trauma in Abkhazian narrative template and what is the enemy perception in Georgian and Abkhaz discourses? The narrative analysis method gives a possibility to analyze what kind of commonalities and differences exist in Georgian and Abkhazian discourses about the 1992-1993 conflict.

Results

In order to study discourses existing in Georgian and Abkhazian societies, which both societies have about the 1992-1993 armed conflict, in frames of the research 300 Georgian and Abkhazian narrative-biographical interviews were analyzed. The analysis revealed that the narrative structure contains four main components. These components are as following: fact, emotion/evaluation, re-evaluation and message.

As a result, this study demonstrates Georgian and Abkhazian narrative templates and the specific narratives involved in the narrative templates. Also, the results reveal the representation of the ‘victimhood’ in Georgian, as well as in Abkhazian narrative templates.

Additionally, the analysis of Georgian and Abkhazian interviews demonstrated the narratives, which accompany the main narrative – Georgian and Abkhaz ‘brotherhood’ narrative, also the enemy perception perspectives among Georgian and Abkhaz people.

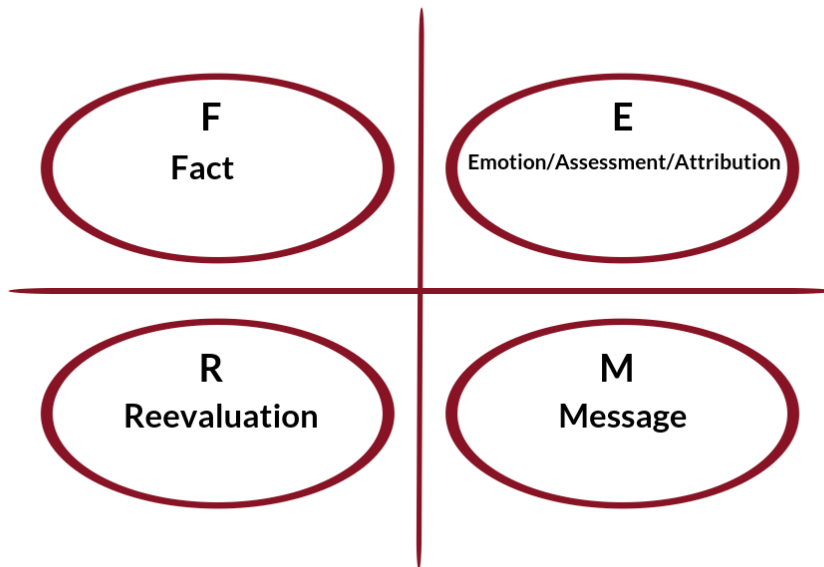
1.1 Four-component structure of the biographical interview

For the research Georgian and Abkhaz narrative (biographical) unpublished interviews are used. As mentioned in the beginning, interviews used in the research were recorded by the non-governmental organization Berghof Foundation’s interviewers and are under the Foundations’ ownership. Interviews were conducted in frames of projects: “History, Memory and Identity” and “History Dialogue for Future Cooperation” from the period of 2013-2016 years. Narrative interviews are recorded with the ethnic Georgian and Abkhaz respondents, who reside on both sides of the River Enguri.

Respondents were people connected to the 1992-1993 Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in some specific way: IDPs, soldiers, members of informal groups, doctors and other witnesses of the war and escalation periods.

These interviews were recorded with the usage of one question “please, tell me your story from the beginning up today”. During the interview, the respondent recalled their own story and constructs the narrative on their own, without interviewer giving him/her direction. Interviewer asks precision question (in case such questions exist) only when the respondent finished his/her storytelling.

It is interesting, that in biographical interviews recorded in this way, a structure can be observed, which is same for almost all interviews. They can be termed as follows: fact,



In most cases, first part of the interview includes factual information about respondent or event, which the respondent describes. In the second part, respondent evaluated facts and events emotionally and attributed some specific facts or events to something or someone, about what or whom the respondent tells in the interview (attribution). In the third part it is observable that events are reassessed; this involves the respondent re-evaluation of the past in a different way, where it is demonstrated how respondent's evaluations and perceptions are changed during a time-span. The fourth part, at some degree, summarizes factual, emotional and re-evaluative parts, and this gives a storyteller the possibility to construct and transmit to the listener a particular message or piece of information.

A Fact is an event, case, story or factual, descriptive information, which the respondent tells as an event that has already occurred. It might be information or data, on which it becomes possible to base the choice to accept or deny some conclusion. The descriptive factual components represented in the narrative interviews give possibility to reconstruct past events. They transmit concrete and detailed information about actors who were involved in the events, names of the territorial entities, quantities, date or other sort of similar specific information. Thus, it is related to the first component of the theory about two levels of narrative analysis template by Wertsch, according to which specific narratives represent surface texts containing concrete information about a particular time, also information about the localities or actors involved in past events (Wertsch, 2012; p175).

It is noteworthy that the information given by the storyteller might be unrelated to the truth, but the storyteller represents it as a fact. Notwithstanding this, specific narratives similar to them play important role in creation of general narrative scheme and template construction. The mentioned narrative schemes relate to the second level of narrative analysis by Wertsch, which, unlike the specific narratives, represents generalized, schematic structure of the narrative and doesn't include specific information.

Emotion/Evaluation is an attitudinal feeling a respondent has towards an event. The evaluation consisting of an attitude, which, as a rule, demonstrates the emotional attitude the storyteller, has towards an event, fact or case. It also informs how this event was emotionally perceptible for the storyteller. Emotional-evaluative component might also include attribution. To be more precise, it might include evaluative attitudes of the respondent towards whom or what the respondent attributes this event. With the specific narrative, which is transmitted with an emotional heaviness, a storyteller constructs a general attitude towards wider chain of events and creates an important ground for reconsidering of the past.

Re-evaluation is an assessment, which is distanced from facts or events in time continuum, which invites us to see event or fact from a new perspective. Re-evaluation considers changing of an existing mind of view after some time since the action or event had passed. Re-evaluation can be done by an actor involved in an event or a person who observed an event. As an example, soldier from Tbilisi who participated in armed activities during 1992-1993, 24 years after conflict assesses his own activities as mistake, while during the hot phases of a conflict he thought about the same activities as being heroic. In the re-evaluative part of the story, mostly regretful phrases and passages are on face. Re-evaluative part is at some degree preparatory part for construction of the message part.

Message is an information containing part of the story, which the respondent sends to the recipient, as a main idea of episode, (interview, story, event) some sort of lesson, a conclusion of his/her own narrative, which the respondent constructs in a manner of advice or appeal. The message is in most cases directed to and thought to be for the other side. For instance, the recipient of a message by an ethnic Abkhazian is mostly Georgian, with whom he/she doesn't have any communication or relationship, and a recipient of a Georgian message is often Abkhazian. It is noteworthy, that the message might be either a separate episode, or it might be deduced from the whole narrative. It can be that the whole storytelling (factual, emotional/evaluative and re-evaluative parts) serves conclusive message, which might be constructed in a few sentences. Mostly, respondents use all the facts, emotions, evaluations and re-evaluations repre-

sented in the interview, in order to construct logical conclusive message, a message that summarizes everything what was spoken before.

Thus, if a researcher is interested in specific (concrete) narratives, (dates, localities, actors, facts), which play significant roles in constructing general narrative schemes and templates, he/she shall study first component of biographical interviews, which can be called factual component of an interview. With the help of this component it becomes known when an event ended, who were participants of it, where an event took place and etc. It also gives a possibility to understand, which past events are more important for the respondents (for example, for ethnic Georgians and Abkhazians).

If a researcher is interested in narrative templates and schematic plots, then the second component of an interview might be helpful. This component minimally contains specific information and mostly reveals general evaluative template. In a second or emotional-evaluative component of a biographical interview general-evaluative information is involved, which represents narrative “cookie-cutter plots or storylines”, on which a specific narrative template is built (Wertsch, 2012, p175). The emotional-evaluative component of a biographical narrative interview depicts general schemes of a narrative, which becomes a fundament for other narratives’ production, for example, the construction of a ‘victimhood’ narrative.

If a researcher is interested in how a respondents’ set of mind, attitudes, and evaluations towards past events has changed, and also, which general narrative was substituted with a new scheme of narrative, then he/she has to study re-evaluation component. At some degree, studying only, which leading narratives existed at a time when event took place and, with which they were substituted after some certain time passed; that is till the moment of recording an interview. For example, the popular heroic narrative of 1992-1993 and the leading reasoning behind human activities, was at an important level substituted with a narrative oriented towards peace and cooperation, 24 years after the conflict.

When a researcher is interested in understanding what is the main message of the respondent, what kind of lesson the respondent learned based on observation at his/her own story and what he/she wants to share and transmit to the recipient, then a researcher has to study message part of the interview. In this part of a story, the perspective of future is represented. It depicts how a respondent sees the way out of a specific situation or a solution of a problem. With studying this component, it becomes possible to define those general narrative templates and plots, which the respondent wants to disseminate for the future.

Georgian and Abkhaz Narrative Templates – Commonalities and Differences

According to Jan Assmann (2006),

...national narratives give rise to a particular way of relating to the past that is distinct from ‘cultural memory’. Specifically, a national narrative ‘is one particular “cultural text”, a coherent ordering of events along a strict narrative line serving as an intellectual and emotional backbone of national identity. From this perspective, national narratives are important because they provide groups with core ideas about their past and their role in the world (Wertsch, James V., Deep Memory and Narrative Templates: Conservative Forces in Collective Memory, p.174).

It is interesting how narratives are created and then, how they become internalized by group members.

National narratives might be analyzed at more than one level, and in this regard... ...a distinction can be drawn between ‘specific narratives’ and ‘narrative templates’. Concrete narratives are surface texts that include concrete information about the particular times, places and actors. In contrast, narrative templates are generalized schematic structures that do not include such concrete information. They are cookie cutter plots or storylines that can be used to generate multiple specific narratives. As such, they function in the role of underlying codes, suggested by DNA metaphors. The notion of a template suggests that this sort of storyline is used repeatedly by a mnemonic community to interpret multiple specific events by fitting them into a schematic plot line (ibid., p175).

If we base our work on the model suggested by Wertsch and compare Abkhaz and Georgian narratives, it turns out that Georgian and Abkhazian narrative templates are identical; they differ only in concrete (specific) narratives. As Jan Assmann (2016) writes, a national narrative tells us who “we” are by telling the story of “our” development, our past and our becoming (p.19). Georgian and Abkhazian stories about “who we are” are very much similar with regard to the main structure of the narrative. It is

cookie cutter plots, fundamental narrative plots that make Georgian and Abkhazian narrative templates similar, though concrete (specific) narratives make the difference. It is interesting, that the members of mnemonic communities assume, that their national narrative template is uniquely fitted to them and is useless for other groups. More than that, narrative template offers their only true story, which cannot be rivaled by other narrative templates. In itself, such assumptions separate one mnemonic community from the other even when they share the same generalized scheme of the plot, that is – the narrative template.

In such a way, Abkhazian mnemonic community creates its unique, true historic narrative, and contradicts it with its specific narratives against the national narrative of Georgian mnemonic community, notwithstanding the fact that both Georgian and Abkhazian national narrative fundamentals itself on the same plot reasoning.

Let's discuss Georgian and Abkhazian national narrative templates. According to the Georgian narrative template, as it is noted by James Wertsch and Nutsa Batiashvili in their article "Mnemonic Communities and Conflict, Georgian National Narrative Template", Georgia is one of the ancient nations in the world, with a rich history and culture. It is noteworthy that Abkhazians also have a pretension on antiquity, as well as on a rich history and culture. This is especially well observable in documentary movies about Abkhazia, where Abkhazians attempt to demonstrate what is Abkhazia and what is their history. In such movies, while telling about Abkhazian history, Georgia is represented as one of the neighboring countries that border Abkhazia, while the recalling of the past begins from times of the Abasgoi and the Apsilae tribes. Importance is given to the uniqueness and very little attention is given to the information about co-habitation with Georgia. An important component of Georgian narrative is defense against foreign enemies, preservation of cultural values (especially language and religion) with the help of disobedience towards foreign governments and self-renunciation. In the Abkhazian narrative, enormous importance is given to the same component – fighting against enemy and preservation of cultural self-uniqueness (especially language and tradition).

In the Georgian national narrative template, the reigns of Queen Tamar and David the Builder are represented as historical landmarks, which are defined as a historic period of stability and normalization. Accordingly, the modern Georgian national narrative is directed towards the Golden Age of Georgian history, notwithstanding the fact that the mentioned period (conventionally, normalization period), did not last for a long period of time.

Notwithstanding geopolitical transformations and frequently forceful change of territorial borders, Georgian, as well as Abkhazian history is a fight for preservation the uniqueness. That is why, both narrative template uses such factual substantiations from the past, and revitalizes those periods of the past, which strengthen the mentioned narrative structure. Consequently, Georgia under David the Builder and Georgia of Queen Tamar is a symbol of unification as well as territorial unity. This period is a fundamental element of the Georgian narrative, while Abkhazia's independence from Georgia represents the key element of Abkhazian narrative template.

In the Abkhazian national narrative template, as well as in the Georgian narrative, attention is given to the normalization period, notwithstanding the fact that length of such periods are significantly shorter in contrast to the periods of Abkhazia and Georgia being conquered with their territorial entities having within other states' borders. Georgian history, as well as Abkhazian history, focuses on the periods from of past when the populations were living under stability and normalization. For the Georgian historic template this period is the Golden Age, while for Abkhazians it is living as an independent entity from Georgia.

According to Georgian, as well as Abkhazian narrative templates, all other are periods of battles for identity preservation and maintenance. In both, Georgian as well as Abkhazian perceptions, an alternative reality is created, which represents the maintenance of identity and self-uniqueness, notwithstanding the fact, in which the state's ownership is located in the territory at a particular moment of time.

Andrea Zemskov-Zuege writes in her article that Georgian and Abkhazian history creates some sort of zipper template, according to which ethnic Abkhaz and Georgian respondents recall different historical periods while speaking about their past (Zemskov-Zuege, 2015, p.23). This trend is observable in Georgian and Abkhazian narrative (biographical) interviews. Besides the fact that Georgian respondents pay attention to the part from their past when Abkhazia was a constituent part of the Georgian state while Abkhazian perspective on history emphasizes a period from the history of Abkhazia when it was an independent entity. Georgian respondents also recall stories about neighborly relations with Abkhazians, at the same time when Abkhaz respondents focus on the problems they had to encounter while living with Georgians (limitations on Abkhazian language, the closure of Abkhazian schools, discrimination in job places on the ethnic grounds, discriminative speeches). According to Zuege, a whole picture about the past can only be created when both sides of the zipper supplement each other, in any other case, Georgian and Abkhazian narratives exist independently from each other and, therefore, create an alternative pictures about the past (p.23).

Georgian and Abkhaz ‘victimhood’ narrative templates

Victimhood narratives are clearly seen in Georgian, as well as in Abkhazian interviews. Abkhazians perceive themselves as the victims of Georgian aggression, while Georgians – of a Russian provocative tactical device. Ethnic Abkhazian respondents pay attention to the attacks from the Georgian side, on their brutality and aggression, while for Georgian respondents it is natural to speak about brotherhood and reconstruct narratives about good neighborly relations with Abkhazians, which suddenly were substituted with confrontation. According to the general Georgian narrative template, the Abkhazian war was planned by Russia long time before. In this context, most often, respondents recall the mines put by Russia, which had to be activated after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in Abkhazia, as well as in Nagorny Karabakh and South Ossetia.

It is interesting, that in Georgian interviews, the land mines Russia had planted were named as the reason why conflict escalated - an idea that emphasizes the preliminary calculated plan by Russia about conflict escalations in different territories of Caucasus after the collapse of the Soviet regime. Therefore, Georgian respondents perceive themselves as victims of a previously planned Russian provocation. Ethnic Abkhazian respondents emphasize in their narratives the aggression and particular brutality from Georgians, especially from Tbilisi side, whose victim became an undefended and small Abkhaz society.

According to the Georgian narrative template, Georgians became victims of spurring and Russian provocation. From this template it is Russia who has to carry the responsibility and Georgia is seen as a passive victim. According to the Georgian narrative, the armed contradiction of 1992-1993 was not a Georgian-Abkhaz war; it was Russian-Georgian war, where Georgia was defeated. Therefore, the victim is Georgia. As the result of this conflict, Georgia lost territories and thousands of people became homeless.

Much like the Georgian template, the Abkhazian side also thinks about itself as being a victim, but in this case – a victim of Georgian aggression. According to Abkhazian narrative, Georgians desired to become masters on Abkhazians, therefore Georgians always oppressed and limited them. According to the same template, Georgian attacks and aggression resulted in an enormous death toll in small Abkhazia. According to Daniel Bar Tal’s ‘conflict supporting narratives’ theory, the above-mentioned narratives helps the members of the society to adapt to the hardships of conflict. They justify violence and destructive actions, which members of their own group had done.

Just with such narratives the society's preparation towards future hardships is done and formation of positive collective and individual identity becomes possible. The narratives alike help the society to represent itself as a victim. Daniel Bar Tal also notes that, when the window of opportunity for the constructive solution of the conflict opens, such narratives become the barrier, which hinders the peaceful conflict transformation (Bar-Tal, 2014). Thus, conflict-supporting narratives, which help society to represent itself as a victim, at some degree unite the same society and form a positive collective identity. Because of this, political leaders often encourage and support the reconstruction of similar narratives in Georgian, as well as in Abkhazian mnemonic communities.

Another positive aspect of the similar narratives is in its helpful nature – it helps society in its resistance and adaptation to the losses of conflict; though, it shall be noted that by producing similar narratives, mnemonic communities are driven to the dead-locks with regard to the regulation of conflicts between different societies. With the strengthening the victimhood narrative in Georgian and Abkhaz mnemonic communities, the narratives contradict each other and it becomes impossible to find out points of intersection between two alternate realities.

Thus, in Georgian as well as in Abkhazian interviews the stories are observable, according to which Georgian and Abkhazian mnemonic communities are represented as victims. Therefore, both – Georgian as well as Abkhazian mnemonic communities create victimhood narrative template, which is similar to each other according to their structure (big oppresses small); however, they are different according to the specific narratives (in one case oppressor is Russia, in another case – Georgia).

Memory of the Chosen Trauma and Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma in Abkhazian Narrative

Psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan studied the group identity phenomenon. He describes how identity is formed in individuals, feeling of belongingness with a larger group, like nationality. A sense of belonging with a bigger group is a fundamental part of an identity, which begins its formation from childhood. When a large group has difficulties overcoming trauma, hardships might evolve. The process of mourning and grieving is consisted of several stages, including denial and anger, which continues from two to four years, while mourning, which continues up to a decade, might transform traumatic experience and memory into 'chosen trauma'.

'Chosen trauma' is a shared mental representation of a historic phenomenon that oc-

curred in larger group, when the group experienced catastrophic losses, humiliation, and feeling of helplessness at the enemy's hands. When trauma healing is not reached, the 'chosen trauma' is transmitted to the offspring with the help of narratives and rituals. This is called transgenerational transmission of trauma. When an identity of a larger group is at stake, strong collective fears and dismay might be produced (Volkan, 1998).

In Abkhazian interviews the representation of a chosen trauma is revealed as well as the role of this trauma in construction of large group identity. While producing Abkhazian national trauma, except for Mohajir trauma, a large place is taken by the traumas and losses resulted from Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. This conflict is perceived in the Abkhazian mnemonic community as an attempt of genocide from the Georgian side against Abkhazians.

As narrative interviews demonstrate, not forgetting the above-mentioned traumas and their transgenerational transmission is understood as the sign of patriotism. In interviews given by Abkhaz respondents, directly or indirectly, representation of their 'chosen trauma' is demonstrated. As Volkan writes, this 'chosen trauma' is transmitted through the generations with the help of narratives and rituals. From the Abkhazian narrative interviews it is seen that the generation, which went through the war, humiliation, and losses, was not able to heal from the traumatic experience, therefore they attempt to transmit it to future generations through narratives and rituals. Unlike the Abkhazian mnemonic community, the 1992-1993 Georgian-Abkhaz conflict hasn't become a national trauma for Georgians. It has an image of a specific narrative, which frequently is observable in stories told by IDPs from Abkhazia and soldiers.

The Georgian-Abkhazian 'Brotherhood' Narrative

As Jan Assmann notes, 'history turns into myth as soon as it is remembered, narrated, and used' (Assmann, 2005, p. 14). According to this idea, it can be said, that the fact, which occurred in the past, is influenced by an individual's contemporariness and is changed, while being remembered and narrated at a concrete moment of time. Jan Assman also writes, that the history 'is, woven into the fabric of the present', idea considering that human beings while distancing themselves from the past, are prone to change meanings of already occurred facts, evaluate them through the prism of contemporariness and filter them according to meanings.

While comparing Georgian and Abkhaz narratives, it is clearly seen that the witnesses of armed conflict of 1992-1993 and those people directly involved, while remembering historic events, base their narration not only on the experiences received during the conflict, but also on the pre-escalation and post-conflict experiences. The narratives disseminated among societies create mental templates, which affect the perception of historic facts and while reconsideration of the past, influence event analysis. Notwithstanding the fact that the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict was a real experience for conflicting parties, its perception and reevaluation is characterized with different features between the Georgian and Abkhazian sides.

An information vacuum and the full separation of the societies after conflict encouraged the development of different perceptions. However, the imaginary system disseminated in Georgian and Abkhazian societies is framed with different historic narratives and different foundations for the analysis of historic narrative templates.

The ‘brotherhood’ narrative originates from a scientifically-strengthened thesis, according to which Abkhazian territory is an inseparable part of Georgia and Abkhazians are descendents of Georgian peoples. The brotherhood narrative, which at some degree among Georgian society is used to represent a positive attitude and closeness towards Abkhazians, simultaneously rejects an Abkhaz identity independent from Georgian identity. The brotherhood narrative, as a cultural text, is involved in the national narrative, which is one of the most important representations of group identity and at a fundamental level creates the phenomenon of unity of particular group of individuals and of ‘mnemonic community’. According to James Wertsch, similar narrative templates ‘function in the role of underlying codes’, while the meaning of the template, in itself, conditions the fact that stories of this type are used repeatedly by the society for interpreting numerous specific events (Wertsch, 2012, p175). It is interesting that consideration of the time factor gives an opportunity to create much deeper and significant forms of interpretation. This opportunity becomes possible only due to the reflection an individual does on an experience he/she gathered during a time.

According to Bartlett, a narrator may not even consider that a narrative provides him/her with a framework within, which he/she shapes, formulates and tells a story. The changes taking place in general, generalized narratives, which exist in the society, influence the contemporary attitudes respondent has towards past events. A reconsideration of past events collectively changes the direction of reasoning inside the collective frame and becomes internalized in a particular individual at some degree. Respondent closely connects own activities and attitudes, which are disseminated among the society and his/her narrative repeats details from the collective narrative. (Batiashvili, 2012, p.191).

The brotherhood narrative, as it was noted, is based on the national-cultural narrative and represents part of it. According to Jan Assmann ‘ethnocentric particularity stems from forces that characterize most national narratives’ and at a cognitive level they are ethnocentric. ‘It is a kind of cognitive ethnocentrism that stands in the way of understanding the power and legitimacy of other national narratives. In extreme cases, the result may be what Thomas de Waal has termed ‘sealed narratives’²¹ such as those behind the frozen conflict between Azeris and Armenians in Nagorny Karabakh (Wertsch, 2012, p. 181). The same can be told about the narratives existing beyond Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. This fact creates one of the most important discouraging factors hindering reconciliation and understanding between conflict-torn societies.

Russia from the Georgian and Abkhazian Perspective – enemy or defender?

Memory is a complex and multilayered construct. From the one side, it is based on factual knowledge and represents a consisting part of a cognitive system, on the other side it is permanently changing and heterogeneous. Material residing in the memory, as usual, is very fragile and is influenced by collective, as well as individual mental system. According to what sort of experience made grounds for further gathering of knowledge, memory changes meanings of past events and transforms them.

This fact conditions that people’s attitude towards memory is a selective in nature. It is noteworthy, that history is characterized by interruptions. Large scale losses, emotional and material hardships, deaths of close people or generally, facing different sorts of threats, affects human perception and history becomes chain of interlocking factual and emotional processes. Apart from history’s political template, individual stories like these are, have their own existence.

Besides having a wide political content, the Georgian and Abkhazian confrontation had the face of private tragedy, which is fundamentally connected to the cognitive and emotional existence of specific individuals. Therefore, for evaluation/re-evaluation of historic facts and also for filling the informational gaps, it is noteworthy to study those attitudes and thoughts, which reveals whom members of Georgian and Abkhazian mnemonic communities perceive as enemies and defenders. At some degree, the fact who stands beyond enemy and defender’s image solves the matrix of Georgian and Abkhazian perception towards the conflict.

An analysis of Abkhazian and Georgian biographical narratives demonstrates that perceptions of enemy images in Abkhazian and Georgian discourses are different, and according to this it becomes possible to summarize that the main reason why the war started is different for both societies.

In the interviews given by Abkhaz respondents the enemy perception is sharply drawn, it is clearly seen what sort of face it has, while in Georgian interviews the enemy is not named. In Abkhazian stories, respondents say: “when Georgians attacked us”, “when Georgian forcibly entered Sukhumi”, “when Georgians burned my house”, while in Georgian interviews the naming of the enemy is omitted and respondents avoid naming the enemy. As an example, a Georgian soldier who fought in the vicinities of Tamishi, says that “he was fighting against enemy”, “on the second side there was an enemy” and uses words ‘opposite side’. In most interviews respondents do not say that Georgians were fighting against Abkhazians. According to the Georgian narrative template, the Abkhaz people are friends and brothers. Therefore, the Abkhaz cannot be an enemy. This dissonance is clearly observable in soldier interviews. On the one side, Abkhazians are our brothers, and on the second side, we fight against them. The Abkhaz person doesn’t have the label of the enemy attached to them and if the Abkhaz person is not an enemy, it is logical not to fight against them. It might be that in order to neutralize this dissonance, Georgian respondents use the word ‘opponent’ and avoid calling Abkhazians as enemies.

Conclusion

Society is a self-producing entity, which creates and recreates itself in frames of existing collective consciousness. The members of a society internalize characteristics of collective consciousness templates and are changed according to the features of social group. To maintain and renew itself within a time continuum, a society permanently needs to have some landmark of a value system. The production of discourses is a fundamental way how to form the landmarks of a value system, how to maintain it and how to transmit it. Discourses present a generalized summation representing specific and frame-narratives, which is based on the main features of the society. It is noteworthy to mention that a society assesses itself, as well as other societies and events according to those beliefs and ideas.

The creation of individual narratives is connected to the main, fundamental narratives and shows the belongingness of an individual to a social group. Individuals are social creatures and, therefore, reflect collective cognitive systems of society; However, the majority of the population doesn’t comprehend how closely they are related to the imaginary whole.

The main value system and imaginary system influences how society perceives itself,

also it affects systems of perception and attitude, which the imaginary society has towards other social groups or events. This is why it is of paramount importance, that simultaneously with studying generalized imaginations and narratives, individual narratives be studied and analyzed too.

In frames of the research, studying of biographical-narrative interviews given by ethnic Abkhaz and ethnic Georgian respondents demonstrate the close relationship between generalized narrative constructs and individual narratives. The existence of different perspectives about 1992-1993 Georgian-Abkhaz conflicts in Georgian and Abkhaz societies showed how difficult it is to evaluate, reassess and reconsider the events, especially when highly separated societies reside in informational vacuums and, as a result, have a limited possibility to share ideas. They have difficulty in reconstructing the past together. It is important to study Georgian and Abkhaz narratives, as they give us the possibility of reconstructing the past and also, open the window of opportunity to reduce collective imaginations about the future while also depicting the invariability and variability of social value systems.

Based on the interview analysis, a four-component structure of narratives was revealed, consisting of the following elements: Factual, emotional/evaluative, re-evaluative and message components. Besides the mentioned structure, interview analysis showed that these components are repeated in the stories in this sequence.

This research demonstrates what leading and accompanying narratives exist in Georgian and Abkhazian narrative templates about 1992-1993 Georgian-Abkhaz conflict among Georgian and Abkhaz mnemonic communities what is the representation of 'chosen trauma' in Abkhaz narratives and what meaning the production of the 'victimhood' narrative has for the group identity formation.

Thus, Georgian and Abkhaz narrative templates are identical, having only differences in concrete (specific) narratives. Abkhazian and Georgian stories about "who we are" are much alike with regard to the main structure of narrative. Just in cookie cutter plots, fundamental narrative plots are Georgian and Abkhazian narrative templates similar, while in concrete (specific) narratives - different. Members of imaginary societies claim that their national narrative templates are exclusively fitted to them and are not disseminated to other groups. Furthermore, narrative templates offer the only truth about their history, which cannot be rivaled by any other narrative template. In itself, such assumptions make one imaginary society separated from the other, even when these two societies share the same generalized scheme of the plot, that is, the narrative template.

Thus, the Abkhaz imaginary community constructs its unique, true historic narrative, which is in contrast with its specific narratives with the national narrative of Georgian imaginary community, notwithstanding the fact that both, Georgian and Abkhaz national narratives are founded on the same plot logic. One of the most important components of Georgian narrative is defending itself against foreign enemy, preservation of cultural values (especially language and religion) while being permanently in contradiction with foreign governments and self-sacrifice. In the Abkhaz narrative the same components have high importance – fighting against the enemy and preserving self-uniqueness (especially in language and traditions).

In the Abkhaz national narrative template, as well as in Georgian narrative the attention is paid to the normalization period, notwithstanding the fact that such periods were substantially shorter during the history than periods when they were conquered or annexed by other states. Georgian, as well as Abkhazian history is focused on the parts from their past when they lived in their normalization periods, for the Georgian historic template this period is the Golden Age, while for the Abkhaz this period is living independently from Georgia. All of the other periods according to Georgian as well as Abkhazian narrative template covers times of fights for the preservation and maintenance of an identity. In both, Georgian and Abkhazian perception an alternative template to the reality is created, which focuses on identity preservation and maintenance, notwithstanding the fact within which the state's borders and territory is formed by a particular moment of time. The victimhood narrative is clearly seen in Georgian, as well as Abkhazian narratives. Abkhazians perceive of themselves as victims of Georgian aggression, while Georgians think of themselves as victims of Russian provocative plans. Ethnically Abkhaz respondents pay attention to the attacks, brutalities and aggression coming from the Georgian side, while for the Georgian respondents good neighborly relations with Abkhazians and reconstruction of the 'brotherhood' narrative is naturalized, which suddenly was changed with the confrontation. According to the Georgian narrative template, the war in Abkhazia was preliminary planned by Russia.

It is interesting that in Georgian interviews, the reason for the escalation of conflict is seen as mines that Russia had planted before -- a reason, which implies a pre-planned provocation developed by Russia in order to escalate conflicts in different parts of Caucasus region shortly after the dissolution of Soviet Union. Therefore, Georgian respondents see themselves as victims who were entrapped by a planned Russian provocation. In their narratives, ethnic Abkhaz respondents emphasize the aggression and brutalities coming from Georgians, especially from Tbilisi, which victimized the defenseless and small Abkhaz nation.

According to the Georgian narrative of the 1992-1993 armed conflict, it was not a war between Georgia and Abkhazia; on the contrary, it was Russian-Georgian war, where Georgia was defeated, thus it is Georgia who is the victim. Due to this conflict, Georgia lost territories and thousands of people became homeless.

Much like the Georgian narrative of victimhood, the Abkhaz side also perceives itself as a victim, but in this case – as a victim of Georgian aggression. According to the Abkhaz narrative Georgians desired to master their rule of Abkhazians and because of this Georgians oppressed them. According to the same model, in itself small Abkhazia faced a huge death toll because of the Georgian attacks and aggression. In Abkhaz biographical interviews the representation of ‘chosen trauma’ is observable along with the importance ‘chosen trauma’ has in construction larger group identity. Except for the Muhajir trauma, a significant importance is given to the traumas and losses, which resulted due to the 1992-1993 Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. This conflict is perceived by the Abkhazian imaginary community as an attempt at genocide against the Abkhaz nation committed by Georgian side. As it is seen from the narrative biographical interviews, the preservation and transmission of the above-mentioned traumas to the future generations is equated with the patriotism.

In interviews with Abkhaz respondents, directly or indirectly, the representation of ‘chosen trauma’ is observable everywhere. As Vamik Volkan explains, this ‘chosen trauma’ is transmitted to the generations through narratives and rituals. Unlike Abkhazian imaginary community, the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict of 1992-1993 didn’t become a national trauma for Georgians. It is only a sort of specific narrative, which mostly is observable in the stories recalled by IDPs from Abkhazia and soldiers.

Thus, an informational vacuum and the separation between the societies during the post-conflict period encouraged the development of different perceptions. However, the imagination system disseminated among Georgian and Abkhazian societies are shaped with similar historic narratives and bases construction of events and its analysis on mentioned historical templates.

Analysis of interviews given by Georgian respondents shows that in the Georgian historic template the idea about Georgian-Abkhaz conflict developed, according to which Georgians and Abkhazians are “brothers”. The brotherhood narrative, which to some degree is used in Georgian society to depict a positive attitude towards and the closeness of Georgians with Abkhaz people, simultaneously rejects existence of Abkhaz identity independently from the Georgian one. The ‘brotherhood’ narrative as a cultural text is involved in the national narrative, being the most important rep-

resentation of group identity and creates at a fundamental level phenomenon of the unity of a concrete group and “imaginary community.” The brotherhood narrative, as was mentioned, is based on a national-cultural narrative and is a consisting part of it. According to Jan Assmann, ethnocentric particularity characterizes most national narratives. Cognitive ethnocentrism is the main hindrance that discourages understanding of the fact that other national narratives also have power and legitimacy. Thomas de Waal mentions that ethnocentric nationalistic narratives are ‘sealed narratives’, such as those behind the frozen conflicts in Caucasus.

The same can be said about narratives that exist beyond the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, which create one of the strongest hindrances towards reconciliation and understanding between conflict-torn societies. An analysis of Abkhazian and Georgian narrative biographical interviews demonstrate that the perception of the enemy in Abkhazian and Georgian discourses is different. From the narrative analysis of the interviews it is observable that for the Abkhaz people the expectation of war always exists, and it is seen on emotional, as well as at physical levels that the perception of threat is still active even after the end of an armed conflict.

As the result of the memory of chosen trauma, the expectation of threat is transmitted through generations. This fact reveals the reason why Russia is still perceived by Abkhaz society as a defender. It can also explain how the desire of the Abkhaz mnemonic community to maintain the Russian Federation’s army on the Abkhazian territory. On the contrary, according to the Georgian narrative, Russia is identified not only as the enemy of Georgia, but also as the enemy for the whole region as it is in Russia’s interest to provoke and escalate conflicts in the Caucasus.

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